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Dereliction, decay, and the problem of de-industrialization in Britain, c. 1968-77

Andrews, A.

Abstract

De-industrialization and the rise of the service sector have formed the basis of recent attempts to develop a new metanarrative of economic change in twentieth-century Britain. Their effects have been taken as writ through labour market statistics or aggregate measures of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). However, by focussing on particular microeconomic spaces, a different story emerges. Using the inner areas of Liverpool as a case study, this article shows how the city's social and economic problems were underwritten by the decline of the service sector, located around the port. By reading the effects of social and economic change through accounts of the physical environment, it demonstrates how urban decay and dereliction provided material resonance to Liverpool's economic decline. The city's landscape of urban decay and dereliction encompassed the infrastructure of everyday life—housing, roads, and even trees—as well as that of economic activity, including the docks and warehouses. Taken together, this article shows how this landscape of urban decay and dereliction came to be constituted as an agent within Liverpool's continued economic decline in the 1970s rather than simply being a reflection of it.

In June 1964, the architectural critic and journalist Ian Nairn noted that Liverpool 'doesn't feel like anywhere else in Lancashire: comparisons always end up overseas—Dublin, or Boston, or Hamburg'.¹ Nairn's Liverpool was confident and assertive. 'Everyone knows about the Mersey Beat', he wrote, 'but this could not have been so successful if it had not been a symptom, drawing its vitality from some common resurgence'.² In terms of the physical environment, this 'common resurgence' was best demonstrated through Graeme Shankland's 1965 plan for the redevelopment of the city centre.³ By the end of the 1960s, however, this moment seems to have passed. From 1968, Liverpool hosted a series of government-sponsored area-based studies and policy initiatives which built on the legacy of the 'rediscovery of poverty' to identify areas of urban deprivation.⁴ The state of the physical environment was crucial in this. In December 1974 *The Times* published two articles declaring that 'Hamburgers would not accept the standards of living in Liverpool'.⁵ The comparison between Hamburg and Liverpool was intended to highlight the

¹ A. Jones and C. Matthews, *Cities of the North: Jones the Planner* (Nottingham, 2016), 208.

² *Ibid.*, 207.

³ O. Saumarez Smith, 'Graeme Shankland: a sixties architect-planner and the political culture of the British left', *Architectural History* 57 (2014), 393-422.

⁴ R. Lowe, 'The rediscovery of poverty and the creation of the Child Poverty Action Group, 1962-68', *Contemporary Record* 9 (1995), 602-11; S. Todd, 'Family welfare and social work in post-war England, c. 1948-c.1970', *English Historical Review* CXXIX (2014), 384-7; P. Shapely, *Deprivation, State Interventions and Urban Communities in Britain, 1968-79* (London, 2017).

⁵ V. Brittain, 'Why Hamburgers would not accept the standards of living in Liverpool', *The Times* (11 December 1974), 16.

difficulties which each city faced, encapsulated in the repeated use of the term ‘ungovernable’. Nevertheless, it was apparent throughout the articles that Liverpool’s problems were worse:

Hamburg does have slums... But on its arid sprawling acres of new housing, day-to-day life for the average citizen is not soured by squalor as it is in Liverpool. There are no broken windows, no shattered pavements, no rubbish in the streets, no empty acres lying desolate in the middle of the city, no ponds filled with rubbish in the parks, no broken escalators and lavatories in new shopping precincts, no three-year-old housing developments needing major repairs, no 22,000 people on the housing list.⁶

Through the physical environment, the article’s author portrayed an image of Liverpool as a locus of urban decay, afflicting the everyday lives of the city’s residents. While this link between the social and physical environment had long been prevalent, especially in the commentaries of Victorian philanthropists, the case of Liverpool in the 1970s points to two important departures.⁷ Firstly, Liverpool’s decaying physical environment was linked to urban decline rather than the effects of rapid growth. Secondly, and in contrast to other British cities—Manchester and Sheffield being exemplary—this decline in Liverpool was driven by the contraction of the service sector, located around the port, rather than the industrial sector.⁸ In spite of this, and somewhat paradoxically, Liverpool became something of an archetype of the de-industrializing city in Britain whilst also pointing to problems in contemporary and historical understandings of economic change.

The case of Liverpool therefore has a complicated relationship with recent historiographical metanarratives of economic change in twentieth-century Britain. In refuting long-prevalent narratives of national economic decline, recent accounts of Britain’s post-war economy have focused on the twin processes of de-industrialization and service sector growth.⁹ As Jim Tomlinson has argued, the loss of employment in the industrial sector—that is, manufacturing, construction, and mining—‘has been a major force shaping post-war Britain’.¹⁰ In addition to contributing to long-standing concerns over Britain’s balance of payments, this

⁶ Ibid. It is not certain how clear an image the author of the article had of Hamburg itself; Brittain had previously published articles in *The Times* on a number of inner-city areas in Britain, but the piece comparing life in Liverpool and Hamburg appears to have been written immediately after her time in South Vietnam reporting on the Vietnam War.

⁷ Cf. J. Donald, *Imagining the Modern City* (Minneapolis, MN, 1999); and G. Stedman Jones, *Outcast London: a Study in the Relationship between Classes in Victorian Society* (London, 4th edition, 2013).

⁸ I. Taylor, K. Evans and P. Fraser, *A Tale of Two Cities: Global Change, Local Feeling and Everyday Life in the North of England; a Study in Manchester and Sheffield* (London, 1996).

⁹ S. Broadberry, ‘The rise of the service sector’, in R. Floud, J. Humphries and P. Johnson (eds), *The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain, Vol. II: 1870 to the Present* (Cambridge, 2014), 330-61; and J. Tomlinson, ‘De-industrialization not decline: a new meta-narrative for post-war British history’, *Twentieth Century British History* 27 (2016), 76-99.

¹⁰ Ibid., 84.

reshaping was linked to economic welfare through rising levels of unemployment.¹¹ But de-industrialization in Britain did not simply involve economic and employment loss; women's employment increased as the service sector, on the whole, boomed.¹² The distinction between the industrial and service sectors was made by both contemporary policy-makers and historians through the Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) system, introduced in 1948 and updated periodically thereafter.¹³ However, these economic histories have focused on national trends reflected in labour market statistics and other economic indicators, including Gross Domestic Product. By concentrating on microeconomic urban spaces, a different picture emerges through which we can see how particular areas did not see a straight forward process of de-industrialization.

This might lead us to question the validity of 'de-industrialization' as a metanarrative for economic change in late-twentieth-century Britain in favour of a more nebulous decline in manual employment, equally linked to social and economic welfare. Within this understanding, Liverpool is a critical case study, especially as the city's economic problems were long-standing.¹⁴ The level of unemployment in Liverpool had been markedly high since the interwar period, as the port began to slowly lose its leading position within British maritime trade from the 1930s.¹⁵ Much of the employment which was lost as a result was 'strongly manual, labour intensive' male work, and as such bore striking similarity, in labour market terms, to that of construction workers and coal miners in the industrial sector.¹⁶ Within this vein, dock workers can be categorized as being employed in 'manual services', a term used by the Liverpool inner area consultants in 1977 to denote the quasi-industrial status of the workforce.¹⁷ Based on the industrial classification of members of the Liverpool chamber of commerce in the second half of the twentieth century (see

¹¹ For example, see A. Cairncross, 'What is de-industrialisation?' in F. Blackaby (ed.), *Deindustrialisation* (London, 1978), 5-17; and Tomlinson, 'De-industrialization not decline', 84-5.

¹² On these trends, see S. Connolly and M. Gregory, 'Women and work since 1970', in N. Crafts, I. Gazeley and A. Newell (eds), *Work and Pay in Twentieth Century Britain* (Oxford, 2007), 142-77; and S. Broadberry, 'The rise of the service sector', in R. Floud, J. Humphries and P. Johnson (eds), *The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain, Vol. II: 1870 to the Present* (Cambridge, 2014), 330-61.

¹³ For example, see Central Statistical Office, *Standard industrial classification* (London, 1968), 34 on the classification of the 'loading and unloading of vessels' as a service within the transport and communication order alongside omnibus crews and post office workers.

¹⁴ N. J. Cunningham, 'The pattern of Merseyside employment 1949-66' in R. Lawton and C. Cunningham (eds), *Merseyside: social and economic studies* (London, 1970), 149-201; and T. Cornfoot, 'The economy of Merseyside, 1945-1982: quickening decline or post-industrial change?' in W. Gould and A. Hodgkiss (eds), *The resources of Merseyside* (Liverpool, 1982), 14-26.

¹⁵ C. Wildman, *Urban redevelopment and modernity in Liverpool and Manchester, 1918-1939* (London, 2016), 1.

¹⁶ See J. Phillips, 'Class and industrial relations in Britain: the "long" mid-century and the case of port transport, c. 1920-70', *Twentieth Century British History* 16 (2005), pp. 55-6.

¹⁷ H. Wilson and L. Womersley, *Economic development of the inner area: report by the consultants*, IAS/Li/21 (London, 1977), 79.

table 1), it was really only from the late 1970s that the effects of the decline of the service sector were compounded by large-scale de-industrialization in Liverpool.

[Insert table 1 here]

In addition to changes in the labour market, and its implications for economic welfare, de-industrialization also led to environmental ‘ruination’.¹⁸ Understanding the physical environment is vital in understanding social and economic change, not least because in many British cities, the redevelopment of inner urban areas led to the ‘destruction’ of businesses and employment after the Second World War.¹⁹ The impact of this destruction extended far beyond the former sites of industrial employment. As Kieran Connell has shown, photographs of the Balsall Heath area of Birmingham in the late 1960s captured ‘the ambiguities and contradictions of navigating a rapidly-changing inner-city area’.²⁰ In the case of Balsall Heath, these changes included ‘New Commonwealth’ immigration, anti-immigrant hostility, and urban clearance. Widespread concerns surrounding the effects of economic change were also reflected in the built environment, perhaps the best-known example of this being Margaret Thatcher’s walk through the ‘wilderness’ of a derelict former chemical works in Teesside in September 1987. As Jörg Arnold has shown, the evocative imagery of the walk in the wilderness was used by political opponents to satirize and criticize the effects of her government’s economic policies.²¹

In these accounts, the built environment was central to people’s experience of social and economic change, but the walk in the wilderness is also illustrative of the important role of nature in identifying derelict sites. As Matthew Gandy has demonstrated in his study of nineteenth- and twentieth-century New York City, the built environment cannot be separated from urban nature.²² In Liverpool, the physical environment—the human-made (built) and natural (unbuilt) environments—lent material resonance to the city’s economic decline from the late 1960s. But the physical environment was neither simply a passive backdrop or a metaphor for urban change; rather the physical environment was both a medium through which social and economic change were understood and was constituted as an active agent in the city’s continued decline. As such this article investigates the relationship between the ‘real’, physical environment, and the

¹⁸ S. High, L. MacKinnon and A. Perchard (eds), *The Deindustrialized World: Confronting Ruination in Postindustrial Places* (Vancouver, 2017), 8.

¹⁹ A. Kefford, ‘Disruption, destruction and the creation of “the inner cities”: the impact of urban renewal on industry, 1945-1980’, *Urban History* 44 (2016), 492-515.

²⁰ K. Connell, ‘Race, prostitution and the New Left: the postwar inner city through Janet Mendelson’s “social eye”’, *History Workshop Journal* 83 (2017), 334.

²¹ J. Arnold, “De-industrialization”: a research project on the societal history of economic change in Britain (1970-90), *German Historical Institute London Bulletin* 34 (2012), 34-6.

²² M. Gandy, *Concrete and Clay: Reworking Nature in New York City* (Cambridge, MA, 2003).

‘imagined’, or contemporaries’ understanding of that physical environment.²³ In so doing, it reconstructs an ‘assemblage’ or network of people, practices, and objects to investigate how these were linked to particular phenomena, for example urban deprivation or prostitution, as well as larger economic forces.²⁴ With contemporaries viewing urban decay and dereliction as both a symptom of urban decline and a barrier to regeneration, the physical environment became an active agent within Liverpool’s urban crisis.²⁵ The process of urban decline was therefore not simply conceived as a downward trajectory, but a vicious circle.

In order to explore these interlinking processes of social, economic, and physical change, this article first follows the footsteps of a group of charity workers encountering inner Liverpool, the area immediately surrounding the city centre, for the first time in the summer of 1969. Through their account of the diverse assortment of urban life that became the epicentre of Liverpool’s ‘inner city’, it is possible to see how the physical environment gave material resonance to the effects of the decline of the port-based service economy at street level. By reading the effects of economic decline through the physical environment, we can gain new insights into everyday life in inner urban areas in the later twentieth century. The city’s decaying landscape, however, was also a medium through which the ‘rediscovery of poverty’ in the 1960s led to a new definition of ‘multiple deprivation’. Recent works on poverty in mid-to-late twentieth century Britain have understandably focused on material conditions within households. However, the spaces between people’s homes—whether these contained vacant plots of land, crumbling infrastructure, or bore physical markers of crime and other social ‘problems’—were also vital in shaping their everyday lives. This also provides vital insight into the development of the ‘inner city’ as a policy problem more generally. The second part focuses on the docks themselves. As Liverpool’s maritime infrastructure fell out of use, it became increasingly derelict. While certain buildings remained in use, the docks began to be reclaimed by the natural current flows of the River Mersey. The spread of dereliction at this time came to be identified as a significant issue by local and central government, and voluntary and commercial organizations. As such, the final section focuses on the definition of derelict land as it was understood by these agencies. Through these discussions, it is possible to see how the physical environment of Liverpool came to be seen as more than a symbol of urban deprivation or economic decline. In understanding the urban fabric as an agent within a vicious circle of decline, we can begin to understand how seemingly disparate processes of urban change were linked, both in contemporary conceptions of the city and in lived experience.

²³ Ibid., 7.

²⁴ B. Latour, *Reassembling the Social: an Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford, 2007), 1-17; 247-9.

²⁵ Ibid.; and B. de Munck, ‘Reassembling actor-network theory and urban history’, *Urban History* 44 (2017), 111-22.

Urban Decay, 1968-72

In response to the 'rediscovery of poverty' in the mid-1960s—and, from 1968, in reaction to Enoch Powell's 'Rivers of Blood' speech in April of that year—successive Labour and Conservative governments established a series of area-based social policy initiatives and sociological studies.²⁶ Nearly all of these initiatives included Liverpool as a case study, cementing the city's position as a locus of social investigation.²⁷ The prevalence and persistence of urban deprivation in Liverpool was a crucial factor in determining the location of these initiatives within the city, but the city's long-term economic troubles were also fundamental. By 1968, the city's unemployment rate stood at around 3.9 per cent, compared to a national rate of 2.5 per cent. In 1972, unemployment in Liverpool reached 8.2 per cent; this rate continued to rise, eventually peaking at around 21 per cent in 1986.²⁸ These rates of unemployment were consistently up to twice the national average. This disparity between national and local rates of unemployment had long been a hallmark of the 'regional problem' which had emerged in the interwar period.²⁹ What marked out the period from the late 1960s, however, was the increasing severity of unemployment within Liverpool as some areas of the city saw rates of unemployment well above 40 per cent.³⁰ Unemployment was particularly marked in areas adjacent to the docks, as the number of registered dock workers fell in the decades after 1945 (see table 2). The decline of dock work in Liverpool points to a problem with metanarratives of de-industrialization in Britain as this labour formed part of the service sector. But the trend also had important implications for economic and social welfare which were evident in the physical environment.

[Insert table 2 here]

The decline in manual service sector employment in areas surrounding the docks was particularly acute because, as one study of the city noted: 'new opportunities were not only in

²⁶ Shapely, *Deprivation, State Interventions and Urban Communities*. This occurred alongside an increasing focus on 'space' as a category of analysis within academic studies more generally; see M. Foucault, 'Of other spaces', *Dialectics* 16 (1986), 22, as cited in S. Gunn, 'The spatial turn: changing histories of space and place', in S. Gunn and R. Morris (eds), *Identities in Space: Contested Terrains in the Western City since 1850* (Aldershot, 2001), 1-14.

²⁷ C. Couch, *City of change and challenge: urban planning and regeneration in Liverpool* (Aldershot, 2003), 3-4. Also see S. Todd, 'Affluence, Class and Crown Street: Reinvestigating the Post-War Working Class', *Contemporary British History* 22 (2008), pp. 501-18.

²⁸ Figures taken from *Employment and Productivity Gazette* 76 (1968), *Department of Employment Gazette* 80 (1972); and *Employment Gazette* 94 (1986).

²⁹ P. Scott, *Triumph of the South: A Regional Economic History of Early Twentieth Century Britain* (Aldershot, 2007).

³⁰ In some parts of the city, and among some demographic groups – particularly the city's black communities – unemployment reached a rate of 46 per cent in the early 1980s; see D. Worlock and D. Sheppard, *Better Together: Christian Partnership in a Hurt City* (London, 1989), 146.

jobs for which [former dock workers] were not skilled, but the jobs were remote from their home'.³¹ In June 1969, the homelessness charity Shelter set up the Shelter Neighbourhood Action Project (SNAP) in one such area—Granby, located near the city's south docks. SNAP described an 'urban crisis' in Liverpool's inner city stemming from the collapse of urban economies and a 'twilight trap' which reduced social and physical mobility.³² The charity workers spent three years in Granby, managing the improvement of local housing through a General Improvement Area set up under the Housing Act 1969. SNAP also established a project office, the Granby Centre, in which project workers met with local residents to discuss housing and other issues. On their first night in the city, the project workers walked along Princes Avenue, Granby Street, and Upper Parliament Street in Liverpool 8 (see figure 1), an account of which was published in SNAP's final report in September 1972.³³ SNAP's focus on housing conditions within an area typified by 'multiple deprivation', joblessness, and a concentrated black and Chinese population provides an important account of the physical and social fabric in one area of inner Liverpool but similar problems were evidenced in other parts of the city.³⁴ The concept of multiple deprivation emerged from post-war sociological studies in the United States, but gained increasing traction in Britain following the introduction of the urban programme in 1968.³⁵ In this conception, the urban poor were not just materially impoverished, but suffered additional hardships including unemployment, precarious employment, a poor environment, a lack of access to government services, and a lack of political agency brought about by effective and affective distance from the machinery of urban governance.³⁶

[Figure 1 here]

³¹ H. Wilson and L. Womersley, *Project Report by the Consultants*, IAS/Li/1 (London, 1974), 15.

³² Shelter Neighbourhood Action Project Committee, *Another chance for cities: SNAP 69/72* (London, 1972), 11-15.

³³ SNAP, *Another chance for cities*, 53-5.

³⁴ See *Tenth report with evidence taken before the Environment and Home Office Sub-Committee in Session 1972-73, Appendices and Index: Volume II - Evidence (1972-73: House Improvement Grants)*, HC 349-ii (London, 1973), 265; and Home Affairs Select Committee, *Racial disadvantage: minutes of Evidence (Liverpool) 14 October 1980*, HC 610-x (London, 1980), 560. Also see P. Topping and G. Smith, *Government Against Poverty? Liverpool Community Development Project, 1970-75* (Oxford, 1977) for an account of similar changes in Vauxhall, located to the north of Liverpool city centre.

³⁵ The term 'multiple deprivation', while then ill-defined, appeared in a 1968 Joint Circular from the Home Office (225/68), Department of Education and Science (19/68), Ministry of Health (35/68), *Urban Programme* (London, 1968), 1. Also see G. Norris, 'Defining urban deprivation', in C. Jones (ed.), *Urban deprivation and the inner city* (London, 1979), 17-31; and A. Andrews, 'Multiple deprivation, the inner city, and the fracturing of the welfare state: Glasgow, 1968-78', *Twentieth Century British History* (forthcoming, 2017).

³⁶ It was, for example, argued that 'THE "URBAN CRISIS" IS NOT REALLY A CRISIS OF THE MUNICIPALITY, BUT RATHER A CRISIS OF TECHNOLOGY and the public often feel they are governed by technocrats and the administrators who deploy the professionals' (emphasis in original); see SNAP, *Another chance for cities*, 35. This sense of physical and figurative distance between the governors and the governed – 'them and us' – was also articulated in the final report of the Liverpool IAS; see H. Wilson and L. Womersley, *Change or decay: final report of the Liverpool Inner Area Study* (London, 1977), 167-8.

As unemployment rose in Liverpool, the city exhibited a continuous process of depopulation which planners were unable to stem.³⁷ By 1971, the city had already lost 28.7 per cent of its population from the peak in 1931.³⁸ These twin processes of decline were reflected in the physical environment through urban decay: 'despoiled and abandoned land', failing infrastructure, and poor or derelict housing as well as vandalism, littering, and fly-tipping.³⁹ Through the close reading of the account of the walk along the boundaries of the SNAP project area, it is possible to see how the problems of a particular declining urban area were conceived. But the account also complicates our understanding of the urban crisis, showing these areas to be spaces of hope as much as they were spaces of distress. The SNAP workers described walking along Princes Avenue as 'still a very stimulating experience even if many large houses facing the Avenue are now derelict and windowless'.⁴⁰ Granby therefore exhibited a curious mix of dereliction, deprivation, and respectability. 'Behind the imposing façade of the boulevard', the streets were described as 'bearing all the marks of blight, poverty and despair'.⁴¹ As the account continued:

Roads are patched, and patched again, until recklessly uneven. But even among the smallest houses, especially among the smallest houses, there are polished knockers and often bright front doors painted in a variety of colours, more exciting and more successful than anything dreamed of by architects and planners.⁴²

In the streets off Princes Avenue, however, there were signs of greater problems:

some houses become boarded up and sometimes two or three are missing and the spaces filled with rubble. Eventually a whole terrace has disappeared. Everywhere there is litter; it blows along the pavements and sometimes seems to fill the air.⁴³

³⁷ The aim of maintaining a significant proportion of the city's population had been set out in City and County Borough of Liverpool, *Development Plan: Summary of Proposals (Written Statement)* (Liverpool, 1952), 7.

³⁸ General Register Office, *Census county reports: Lancashire* (London, 1911-1961); Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, *Census county report: Lancashire* (London, 1971); Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, *Census county reports: Merseyside* (London, 1981-1991).

³⁹ B. Robson, *Those inner cities: reconciling the social and economic aims of urban policy* (Oxford, 1988), 35-7.

⁴⁰ SNAP, *Another chance for cities*, 53.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

The air was also filled with a 'stink' between the rows of houses, a result of accumulated rubbish and blocked drains.⁴⁴ Residents' multi-sensory experience of urban decay were therefore seen to compound the effects of economic decline on their social welfare.

Urban decay also affected the natural environment of the city, as funding was no longer available for cultivation. The 'great tree-lined boulevard of Princes Avenue' remained a poignant symbol of the area's past role as the home of Liverpool's wealthy merchant class. Behind the boulevard, however, these trees contributed to the decay of Granby's physical environment; 'unfortunately for the smaller streets, forest trees which have become too large, pushing up pavements, filling gutters and, in the summer, cutting out the remaining sunlight'.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, trees also pointed to social stability within the inner city. In a leaflet précising the work undertaken by SNAP, a photograph taken by Nick Hedges of a woman washing her pavement outside her home was used to highlight the continued resilience of the area. The photograph, which also appeared in SNAP's final report,⁴⁶ was captioned:

A SNAP Resident does not stop at her front door. The economic base of the inner city has been eroded but hope remains. Of the scores of trees planted in SNAP, only two have been vandalised. Can the same be said of the "New Jerusalem" of the architects and planners?⁴⁷

The fact that 'only' two trees had been vandalized were used by SNAP to convey the sense that Granby, in spite of its problems, remained a viable centre of urban life.

The streets of Liverpool 8 bore the physical markers of a panoply of social problems which exacerbated the effects of economic decline on residents' welfare. Towards the end of Princes Avenue, the group turned left, up Granby Street. Bisecting Granby ward, the SNAP committee described a 'new type of cosmopolitan brilliance', typified most pointedly by the availability of exotic vegetables in the shops.⁴⁸ These shops, however, 'wear heavy protective metal grilles at night which are rarely taken down during the day' as a material sign of the crime encountered within the area.⁴⁹ In Granby, this also included 'setting fire to derelict buildings [which] is a sport for bored children'.⁵⁰ Prostitution, drunkenness, and domestic violence were all problems

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 53.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 55.

⁴⁷ SNAP, *The new Granby Centre & SNAP Liverpool: Shelter Neighbourhood Action Project July 1969-June 1972* (London, 1972), 34.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 53.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 53 and 55.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 55. This had many similarities to the findings of John Barron Mays' 1950s sociological study of juvenile delinquency in Liverpool which advocated a move away from purely psychological explanations of behaviour to focus on 'the social setting in which the delinquency occurs and of the way in which environmental and personal factors interact'; see J. B. Mays, *Growing Up in the City: A Study of Juvenile Delinquency in an Urban Neighbourhood* (Liverpool, 1964), 9.

encountered by local police.⁵¹ It was the condition of the housing, however, which most caught the charity workers' attention:

To the north of Granby Street large houses become increasingly derelict, and to the east also, properties have clearly gone beyond the point of any repair. One reaches the condemned areas where the worst off families are housed in avenues with noble names: "Upper Parliament Street".⁵²

On Upper Parliament Street, 'people are just "holding on"'. Once more, this was evidenced through the physical environment, with the SNAP workers describing

net curtains pulled together with safety pins, children hanging around the steps or playing in the rubble. Some houses are without water and sanitation and, as night falls, a single electric bulb can light up many scenes of miserably furnished bedsits.⁵³

From these descriptions, it is apparent that the physical environment encountered by the SNAP workers was showing signs of significant physical and social decay. This social decay was reflected in moral concerns with prostitution and crime, as much as it was in concern over the poor living conditions experienced by the area's residents.⁵⁴ This evocative account of Liverpool 8 therefore shows us how agencies charged with intervening in particular neighbourhoods understood the lived experiences of local residents through the physical environment.

Nevertheless, while the built environment underwrote SNAP's understanding of social change in Granby from 1969 to 1972, there were other agents, including non-human animals, which highlighted the decay of the area.⁵⁵ Dogs were used to 'defy intruders, scraping and barking behind rotten back doors'.⁵⁶ SNAP's headquarters was to be based in a derelict police station in Granby. When the workers arrived in 1969, a 'wild' dog had been shut in the building by a contractor, 'a familiar technique since empty buildings are quickly stripped of lead and copper'.⁵⁷ However, one method used by 'culprits' was to smash the windows, thereby allowing the animal to escape and enabling themselves to 'strip' the building of its metals. In the meantime, the police

⁵¹ Police encounters were fraught, on both sides, in part reflecting poor relations between the local multi-ethnic population and the authorities. As such, when the 'nice young copper' had 'identified his enemy', it was, in his words, 'some half-castes [who] were on a rampage'; *ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*; for several nights in July 1981, Upper Parliament Street was the locus of significant urban disorder, known as the Toxteth 'riots'.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ On residents' concerns over the 'effect of vice on innocent by-standers', see SNAP, *Another chance for cities*, 101.

⁵⁵ See C. Pearson, 'Dogs, history, and agency', *History and Theory* 52 (2013), 128-45; and S. McFarland and R. Hediger, 'Approaching the agency of other animals: an introduction' in S. McFarland and R. Hediger (eds), *Animals and agency: an interdisciplinary exploration* (Leiden, 2009), 1-22.

⁵⁶ SNAP, *Another chance for cities*, 53.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 53.

were preoccupied with 'the added problem of catching or destroying a dangerous dog'.⁵⁸ While their presence was contingent on the actions of people within Granby, these dogs nevertheless formed an important part of the urban environment through the attempt to guard against petty crime thought to be engendered through dereliction and urban decay.

SNAP's narrative of everyday life in a neighbourhood, typified by moral and physical decay, was complicated by evidence of resilience. The acts of washing the pavement and of *not* vandalising trees, along with the brightly-painted front doors and recently-polished door knockers, provided a counter to the decay and despair emblemized by crooked pavements, wild dogs, and 'miserably furnished bedsits'. Added to this was a juxtaposition between night and day:

Our first walk through the area ended as service workers were already on their way to the bus stops. One night's siege was over and it was impossible to avoid a feeling of relief similar to the arrival of daylight on 14th Street, Washington D.C. or in South Bronx.⁵⁹

This 'feeling of relief' following the 'siege' was again shown through the assemblage of people, objects, and acts which together comprised urban society in inner Liverpool. This included the 'owner of a large house in Ducie Street [who] was painting his wooden fencing post-office red and canary yellow', door knobs being polished, a Wendy House being erected for local children, and that same woman, who evidently captured the attention of the charity workers, 'working her way with bucket and scrubbing brush across the pavement outside her house.'⁶⁰ It is unclear whether the events described above genuinely took place over the course of one evening, or whether the project workers' account was itself an accumulation of encounters, memories, and impressions. To an extent, however, this is less important than the insight the account provides into social change in inner Liverpool. By following the steps of these charity workers along the streets of Granby, it becomes clear that agencies charged with intervening in Liverpool's burgeoning 'urban crisis' understood the effects of economic decline, especially those linked to the welfare of residents, through the physical environment.

Dereliction and the Docks, 1972-75

Liverpool's docks were at the centre of its service-based economy, as well as the economic life of surrounding neighbourhoods. However, in the post-war decades, macroeconomic and technological changes began to undermine their economic role, leading to their closure. From 1956, the standardized shipping container revitalized the global economy, reshaping ports and

⁵⁸ Ibid., 55.

⁵⁹ SNAP, *Another chance for cities*, 55.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

port cities across the world.⁶¹ In Liverpool, shipping activity had long been based around a network of docks stretching along the Mersey waterfront, from Brunswick, located south of the city centre, to Vauxhall in the north. This network of docks extended into Bootle, a town connected to, but administratively separate from, Liverpool. From the late 1960s, the construction of Seaforth Docks near Bootle, to the north of Liverpool, shifted the locus of maritime trade, as the city's nineteenth-century port infrastructure and shallow waters were inaccessible to newer and larger container ships.⁶² The changing fortunes of Liverpool's port in the later twentieth century, partly as a result of containerization and partly through changes in the flow of international maritime trade, therefore provide an important lens through which changes in the city's economy and labour market can be understood. This was especially the case for the communities living and working along Liverpool's waterfront.⁶³ Reflecting on this shift in the 1960s and 1970s, Marc Levinson has argued,

The armies of ill-paid and ill-treated workers who once made their livings loading and unloading ships in every port are no more, their tight-knit waterfront communities now just memories. Cities that had been centers of maritime commerce for centuries, such as New York and Liverpool, saw their waterfronts decline with startling speed, unsuited to the container trade or simply unneeded.⁶⁴

The effects of this change were also wrought through the physical environment. In addition to the decaying effects of urban change on housing areas discussed above, the decline of the port was sharply felt through the increasing dereliction of the docks and maritime infrastructure.

With a move to containerization, the city's South Docks were increasingly regarded as obsolete. Setting out the rationale for their closure, the Chairman of the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board, J. G. Cuckney, said at a meeting on 26 April 1971 that 'Assets and resources must earn their keep or be eliminated. In the situation in which we find ourselves there is simply no alternative to such a policy'.⁶⁵ Discussions on the closure of the docks involved members of Liverpool Corporation with the aim of redeveloping the site. Nevertheless, at the first annual meeting of the newly-established Mersey Docks and Harbour Company (MDHC) the following

⁶¹ M. Levinson, *The box: how the shipping container made the world smaller and the world economy bigger* (Oxford, 2nd ed., 2016); on Liverpool, see 270-79.

⁶² The Mersey Docks and Harbour Board (MDHB) proposed the construction of the Seaforth Dock to the National Ports Council in 1965. This was approved in 1966 through the passing of the Mersey Docks and Harbour Act 1966; the new dock opened in 1971. See MDHB, *Annual report and review for the year ended 1st July, 1965* (Liverpool, 1965), 6.

⁶³ L. Balderstone, G. Milne and R. Mulhearn, 'Memory and place on the Liverpool waterfront in the mid-twentieth century', *Urban History* 41 (2014), 478-96.

⁶⁴ Levinson, *The box*, 2.

⁶⁵ Mersey Docks and Harbour Board, *Annual report and accounts for the year ended 31st December 1970* (Liverpool, 1971), n.p.

year, Cuckney acknowledged that 'Having regard to the present state of the market for land on Merseyside... the profitable redevelopment or disposal of this site will probably be achieved only in the long term'.⁶⁶ The South Docks were finally closed in September 1972, as trade relocated to the north of the city.⁶⁷ The sale of the docks was a vital aim for the MDHC which intended to use the proceeds from selling the Albert Dock to support the repayment of an unsecured loan taken out in 1973.⁶⁸ In fact, this repayment plan had been ordered by the High Court in 1974.⁶⁹ Progress on the sale was slow, attributed to the 'worsened' economic climate and a central government tax on property developers.⁷⁰ Problems persisted, with the 'depressed' property market accounting for the low sales of MDHC land in 1975 which provided only £33,250 for the company's coffers. During the 1970s, there were a number of proposals to redevelop and reuse the South Docks. For example, plans for the sale of the Albert Dock to the city council, under discussion in 1974 and 1975, would have provided additional accommodation for Liverpool Polytechnic and, it was hoped, raise £2 million for the company.⁷¹ There was also the possibility that the neighbouring Canning Dock could be sold 'for a Government Office scheme'.⁷²

These sales never came to fruition.⁷³ Increased taxes and continued economic problems were seen to have inhibited the company's ability to sell off surplus land, and in 1977 it was only able to raise £3,000 through the sale of a single property in the South Docks.⁷⁴ Moreover, the Community Land Act 1975 was claimed to have significantly reduced the value of the MDHC's surplus land, falling by £4,282,000 in real terms between 1971 and 1974.⁷⁵ The buildings owned by the MDHC in its South Docks system were not derelict in the 1970s, with small business units and storage spaces available for rent.⁷⁶ This continued use therefore partially explained the decision not to sell the docks 'until the funds are available for re-development' after plans were mooted in 1976 for the area to be given "New Town" status'.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, a depressed market

⁶⁶ Mersey Docks and Harbour Company (MDHC), *Annual report and accounts for the year ended 31st December 1971* (Liverpool, 1972), 5.

⁶⁷ MDHC, *Annual report and accounts for the year ended 31st December 1972* (Liverpool, 1973), 7.

⁶⁸ MDHC, *Annual report and accounts for the year ended 31st December 1974* (Liverpool, 1975), 3.

⁶⁹ MDHC, *Annual report and accounts for the year ended 31st December 1979* (Liverpool, 1980), 3.

⁷⁰ MDHC, *Annual report and accounts for the year ended 31st December 1973* (Liverpool, 1974), 4-5.

⁷¹ 'Statement of the advisory committee in respect of 1975', MDHC, *Annual report and accounts for the year ended 31st December 1975* (Liverpool, 1976), n.p.

⁷² MDHC, *Annual report 1975*, 3.

⁷³ The sale of the Albert Dock to Liverpool City Council to provide additional accommodation for the polytechnic was officially dropped in October 1975; see Liverpool Record Office, Liverpool (LRO): 352 MIN/FIN II/23/1, Minutes of a meeting of the Performance Review and Financial Control sub-committee, 29 October 1975, 86.

⁷⁴ 'Statement of advisory committee in respect of 1977', MDHC, *Annual report and accounts for the year ended 31st December 1977* (Liverpool, 1978), n.p.

⁷⁵ MDHC, *Annual report 1975*, 3.

⁷⁶ MDHC, *Annual report 1976*, 4.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

meant that the land which was to be used to pay off the company's debt became something of a burden, at least on the MDHC's balance sheet.

While the buildings remained in use, the South Docks were not immune to dereliction. Following the closure of the docks, the berthing infrastructure, and the river water itself, became the locus for concerns surrounding environmental decline and dereliction. The opening of the South Dock gates meant that the water level was tidal, and with no maintenance, silt which had been 'contaminated' by sewage was allowed to flow in and settle.⁷⁸ As shown through the later writings of Peter Walker, Secretary of State for the Environment from October 1970 to November 1972, and his eventual successor, Michael Heseltine, the environmental conditions of urban rivers were seen to constitute a significant problem in terms of social welfare and economic performance.⁷⁹ Linking the dereliction of the docks to the conditions of urban communities in the Toxteth area of Liverpool, Heseltine recalled a stark image of the docks and river:

Add to the mounds of waste the rotting warehouses of a port industry apparently in terminal decline, the great architectural triumph of the Albert Docks an empty ruin then threatened with demolition, and you get a feel of Liverpool's prospects at that time – as bleak as a winter's day.⁸⁰

From this brief account of environmental dereliction on the River Mersey, we can see how the decline of the port affected the infrastructure of economic activity. This dereliction, however, was not simply about buildings falling out of use, but the reclamation of physical infrastructure by nature. Through the docks, we can see how this kind of dereliction came to be constituted as a problem as the condition of urban waterways was subsumed within a larger landscape of urban decay and disused land. This larger landscape included sites across the city which were increasingly seen as an active impediment to Liverpool's economic regeneration.

Dereliction and Vacant Land, 1976-77

While Liverpool had substantial areas of disused land, these sites did not conform to the definition of 'derelict land' as set out in the Local Employment Acts of 1960 and 1972. Conceived within a regional policy framework, central government defined dereliction as land that was 'derelict, neglected or unsightly, and likely to remain so for a considerable period'.⁸¹ This circular definition prioritized economic issues through a focus on de-industrialized spaces and prospective

⁷⁸ This issue will be discussed in more detail below; see Merseyside Development Corporation (MDC), *Initial development strategy* (Liverpool, 1981), 5.

⁷⁹ See P. Walker, *The ascent of Britain* (London, 1977), 124-5; and M. Heseltine, *Life in the Jungle: my autobiography* (London, 2000), 211-12.

⁸⁰ Heseltine, *Life in the Jungle*, 211.

⁸¹ Similar wording was adopted through the Local Employment Act 1960, § 5 (1); and Local Employment Act 1972, § 8.

employment opportunities. Development Districts were therefore provided financial assistance for the clearance of derelict sites with the ‘necessary condition that clearance of the dereliction in question would promote employment within the area’.⁸² This was reflected in the concern that ‘The ugliness caused by widespread dereliction is a deterrent to incoming industry, which it must continue to be our aim to attract to these places’.⁸³ Within this framework, dereliction in the North West of England was seen to affect ‘the old colliery areas where pit heaps have been supplemented by the wastes from chemical and other plant’.⁸⁴ These post-industrial landmarks were not a feature of Liverpool’s landscape, and so a 1967 survey of derelict land conducted by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government listed the total acreage of derelict land in the city as ‘NIL’.⁸⁵ While categories of dereliction were therefore geared toward the fallout of de-industrialization, the decline of Liverpool’s port also contributed to the spread of vacant and derelict land in Liverpool. Central government’s somewhat narrow and tautological definition of dereliction therefore pointed towards an important tension between national policy and the material realities of the urban physical environment.

Through a series of reports published in 1976 and 1977, the local authority, planning consultants, and voluntary organizations identified the scale of disused land in Liverpool and developed policies through which these sites could be brought back into productive use. These included the inner area district statements (IADS), a series of planning documents produced by the City Planning Officer, E. S. P. Evans, in December 1976 and approved by Liverpool City Council in April 1977.⁸⁶ The IADS identified the extent of Liverpool’s ‘land resource’, defined as the area of land and buildings as ‘currently vacant’; land that was ‘interim treated’ but required further investment; and land or buildings which were ‘likely to become vacant in the next 5-7 years’.⁸⁷ The statements’ focus on the inner areas covered the majority of Liverpool’s housing built prior to the First World War, much of which had been scheduled for clearance or improvement.⁸⁸ As the statements made clear, the land resource was integral to the ‘overall strategy needed for tackling the problems of the inner areas’.⁸⁹ These problems were multifarious, but Evans claimed that ‘The importance of utilising the land resource... is self-evident by its scale and the aura of

⁸² The National Archives, London (TNA): EW 7/292, W. Guy, Note on dereliction, 11 May 1965.

⁸³ TNA: EW 7/292, Douglas Jay to Richard Crossman, 27 October 1965; emphasis in original MS.

⁸⁴ TNA: EW 7/294, Philip Chantler to Aaron Emanuel, 15 March 1968.

⁸⁵ TNA: EW 7/1250, Results of derelict land survey, 3 October 1968; the acreage of derelict land for the years preceding and succeeding 31 December 1967 was simply given as ‘—’.

⁸⁶ These statements built on a previous report submitted to the council’s Planning and Land Committee in June 1976; see E. S. P. Evans, *The city’s land resources* (Liverpool, 1976).

⁸⁷ E. S. P. Evans, *The inner area district statements: proposals for the development of the land resource* (Liverpool, 1976), 1.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

dereliction and decline which it presents'.⁹⁰ Within this vein, Evans stated that the geographical extent of vacant and derelict land was such that

not only does it detract from the physical appearance of the inner areas, but it is a positive deterrent to attracting private investment and retaining a "balanced" population structure.⁹¹

As we can see from Evans' assertion, the geographical spread of dereliction across Liverpool, but particularly within the inner areas of the city, constituted a problem from both a social and an economic standpoint as the physical environment was conceived as a barrier to the inward flow of people and private sector investment which the city needed.

The IADS were followed, in September 1977, by the publication of the final reports of the three inner area studies (IAS). Liverpool's IAS consultants—Hugh Wilson and Lewis Womersley along with the architectural and planning firms Roger Tym and Associates and Jamieson Mackay and Partners—spent five years studying different aspects affecting life in the 'inner city'. Along with the findings of the Birmingham and Lambeth studies, their reports represented a rejection of urban modernist approaches to the built environment through their criticism of the effects of planning, and other processes of urban change, on the inner areas.⁹² While the critique of planning practices was vital in this shift in policy towards the physical environment of inner urban areas, the link between the amenity of the urban redevelopment and economic regeneration was key.

While Liverpool's was not the most concentrated area of disused land—the East End of Glasgow comprised 20 per cent derelict land—the scale was still important.⁹³ The IADS has cited a figure of 457.1 hectares (1143 acres or 4.571 km²)—or approximately 15 per cent of the total area—of disused land in Liverpool.⁹⁴ In Liverpool, the IAS consultants utilized land use surveys published in March 1975 and October 1976 as the basis for their conclusions, citing figures of 56 hectares of vacant land within the project area covered by the IAS (approximately 11 per cent of the total) and 500 hectares across the city as a whole.⁹⁵ While Liverpool's acres of vacant land were attributed to a number of causes, including the 'social development programmes of the last twenty years', primarily slum clearance and the slow pace of redevelopment which followed rather than the remnants of Second World War bomb damage, the problem of disused land and

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid., 5.

⁹² O. Saumarez Smith, 'The inner city crisis and the end of urban modernism in 1970s Britain', *Twentieth Century British History* 27 (2016), 578-98.

⁹³ Glasgow Eastern Area Renewal project, *The future for GEAR: key issues and possible courses of action* (Glasgow, 1978), 28.

⁹⁴ Evans, *Inner area district statements: land resource*, 6; also see appendix 2, table 8 for a break-down of land use allocations.

⁹⁵ H. Wilson and L. Womersley, *Vacant land: report by consultants*, IAS/LI/11 (London, 1976), 1.

buildings was conceived within the broader social and economic needs of the city.⁹⁶ The impact of this widespread dereliction on inner Liverpool was therefore said to be ‘incalculable’, as the land

attracts vandalism and contributes to an atmosphere of obsolescence, dilapidation and decay. It is not only that people living nearby have their home environment blighted, but that attempts at regeneration through attracting private investment are stultified whether it be in housing or jobs; and little private investment is likely to come to the inner areas of its own volition.⁹⁷

Through the analysis of case studies, focused on individual sites located around clusters of vacant buildings, the consultants concluded that any progress in redeveloping the land would be slow.⁹⁸ As the consultants claimed, the ‘environmental damage’ brought through disused land ‘gives the surrounding area an air (and often smell) of depression which could not but discourage activity and enterprise on other, adjacent land’.⁹⁹ This sensory barrage, attributed to derelict land, was one means through which these sites were seen to discourage investment; as the consultants continued:

it implies a significant loss of people, activities, purchasing power that once both supported and depended upon the remaining area. That subtle economic interdependability has been disrupted, and the effects manifest themselves in areas not so far directly affected by [clearance] schemes.¹⁰⁰

Vacant land, therefore, was seen to have a negative impact on areas which had not been cleared by planners.¹⁰¹ What is more, this was seen as a waste of resources; communities suffered ‘by being deprived of houses or industry or open space’ and lost “‘productive” public spending’ on maintaining vacant land on top of losing land value in their area.¹⁰²

In identifying the geographical extent of disused land in Liverpool, planners and planning consultants had acknowledged a widespread problem. But disused land was also conceived as a ‘resource’. This land resource therefore represented more than a problem to be dealt with: it also signified a partial solution. With some 60 per cent of the land resource owned by the city council,

⁹⁶ Ibid., 1-2.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 5-17 and 26; similarly, the IADS concluded that, were funding available, it would take between four and a half and eight years to redevelop all of Liverpool’s vacant land, assuming the work was undertaken concurrently – see Evans, *Inner area district statements*, figure 2.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 27.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Cf. A. Kefford, ‘Disruption, destruction and the creation of “the inner cities’’, 492-515.

¹⁰² Ibid. The conclusions of the consultants’ survey of vacant land were supported by their environmental care project, which ran from 1973-77, though this focused more on the social than the economic effects of urban decay and dereliction; see H. Wilson and L. Womersley, *Environmental care project: report by consultants*, IAS/LI/19 (London, 1977).

‘every vacant and potentially vacant site’ was assigned to a particular department or agency depending on its allotted future use.¹⁰³ The IADS, however, were not simple planning documents setting out the city council’s policies regarding land use. While Liverpool had an abundance of land, it was lacking in financial resources. The statements formed part of a concerted attempt to leverage greater investment from central government, with Evans describing the report as ‘advocacy material’.¹⁰⁴ Vacant land, therefore, represented a significant issue for Liverpool; the land itself was seen to offer a way out of these problems, even if some of it was beyond repair. But land alone could not achieve this and as such, in conceiving dereliction as a resource, the IADS were an attempt to turn a problem into a solution.

While local authority planners sought to leverage the land resource to gain additional financial support from central government, voluntary organizations responded with proposals to use disused sites for the provision of community and social services. In May 1977, the Liverpool Council of Voluntary Service (LCVS), which brought together and advocated for many of the city’s locally-based voluntary organizations, responded to the IADS through its committee on urban poverty, known as ‘Enterprise Merseyside’. Enterprise Merseyside proposed that a land bank be established, overseen by an interdepartmental unit of Liverpool City Council, rather than having vacant land apportioned to different departments based on its intended use. Officers from a number of departments would be seconded to this unit which would be based within the City Solicitor’s Department. This, it was argued, would allow for a more consistent approach to dereliction.¹⁰⁵ A number of future land uses were set out, including housing, amenities, and enterprise, i.e. small businesses. The scale of the problem, however, meant that these uses could not be achieved immediately. In its so-called ‘ginger paper’—owing to the colour of the paper on which it was printed—Enterprise Merseyside argued that

Inner city decline could be partially offset by encouraging residents and possible employers to utilise vacant land and buildings for community facilities and by the sheltering of embryonic business initiatives, at little or no extra cost to the City Council.¹⁰⁶

Enterprise Merseyside thus proposed that voluntary organizations could occupy properties for a rent-free tenancy period of up to two years, thereby ensuring the buildings’ continued usage and maintenance as well as providing space for ‘a wide range of social welfare and community

¹⁰³ Ibid., 13; uses included housing, highways, education, and open space. On the plans for each planning district, see *ibid.*, appendix 1.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 1.

¹⁰⁵ Liverpool Council of Voluntary Service (LCVS), *Vacant land: an Enterprise Merseyside ginger paper* (Liverpool, 1977), 4.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 1.

facilities'.¹⁰⁷ This proposal would, it was argued, achieve the dual aims of stemming dereliction and providing amenities for voluntary and community groups. Through these land use policies, the voluntary group therefore identified a way to balance Liverpool's financial constraints with its abundance of disused sites.

[Figure 2 here]

The reports produced by these voluntary organizations—along with those published by planners and policy consultants—provide an evocative image of Liverpool's physical environment in the 1970s. Enterprise Merseyside published a cartoon on the cover of their ginger paper satirising the 'empty offices', 'wasteland', 'disused docks', and 'demolition' which greeted visitors on their arrival in Liverpool, a place in which redevelopment was 'prohibited for 20 miles'. Similarly, a group of voluntary organizations, in responding to the final report of the Liverpool IAS, described 'a form of environmental anarchy' and ridiculed the notion that people still wished to live in the 'brick strewn, massacred wastelands open to the Mersey winds'.¹⁰⁸ But dereliction in Liverpool was more than an image problem. The city's widespread derelict sites were a result of Liverpool's long-term economic decline throughout the twentieth century. What is more, the geographical extent of these sites, which spanned much of the city but were particularly concentrated in the inner areas, provided material resonance to Liverpool's decline through their impact on residents' welfare. Given the scale of these problems, Enterprise Merseyside argued that 'Derelict sites on the Wirral should not be a priority [in central government policy] when central Liverpool is blighted by vacant areas'.¹⁰⁹ The reason for this was simple, and highlighted the true importance of dereliction in late twentieth-century British cities: 'the conspicuous areas of vacant land seem the most pressing of such problems which the City needs to solve if Liverpool is not to continue down the spiral of decline'.¹¹⁰

The reports and responses produced around 1977 pointed towards an important tension in approaches to the physical environment. Derelict land was constituted as a problem. It blighted the urban landscape and impeded economic investment. Vacant land, on the other hand, was seen as a resource which could be used to bring investment into the city. It was the same land, but contemporaries attached different meaning to it depending on a number of factors, including environmental amenity and associations made with other social and economic problems within

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 4-5.

¹⁰⁸ Community Development Section of Liverpool City Council et al., *In our Liverpool home: a collective response by community organisations to the publication of the inner area study summary report* (Liverpool, 1977), Appendix B.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 6.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 2.

the area. Nevertheless, in opening up the definition of dereliction, which had previously been restricted by government legislation to post-industrial environments, these planning and policy papers highlighted the ruinous effects of service sector decline – the docks, but also the industries which were supported by the port – on the physical and social environments of urban spaces.

Conclusion

Across much of the western world in the 1970s, there seemed to be a pervasive sense of ‘urban crisis’. In the United States, the crisis was linked to the collapse of heavy industries in the north-west, racial inequality, and the periodic breakdown of law and order.¹¹¹ In West Germany, urban leaders identified physical decay, sprawl, and rising inequality as key markers of its urban crisis.¹¹² In Britain, the crisis stemmed from the ‘rediscovery of poverty’ in the mid-1960s, de-industrialization and the decline of manual services, and the apparent inability of policy-makers to successfully ameliorate the effects of these changes. Within these conceptions of the urban crisis, the physical environment of cities was critical in diagnosing the problem and prescribing remedies. By reading the effects of economic decline through the physical environment, we can therefore gain new insights into how particular urban agencies understood everyday life in urban areas in the later twentieth century. This shaped their responses to economic decline, as urban decay and dereliction in these areas gave material resonance to contemporary concerns surrounding a multitude of issues.

As this article has shown, Liverpool became an archetype of urban decline in Britain during the 1970s as its inner areas became the focus of significant investigation by local and national government and voluntary organizations. Evidence of the effects of economic decline in particular fed into contemporary understandings of de-industrialization. In spite of this, the city did not see a straight forward process of de-industrialization. The case of Liverpool therefore highlights the importance of the labour market, and manual labour in particular, in understanding urban economic change rather than an understanding of de-industrialization based on the Standard Industrial Classification system. Perhaps more significant, however, was the role of the physical environment in shaping the conceptions of agencies tasked with intervening in the urban crisis. Areas of high unemployment were conceived as areas of physical and social decay. As sites of economic activity closed, they bore markers of dereliction, including being taken over by nature. The growing body of evidence of the effects of economic decline on the physical environment—and the link which was drawn between this and the everyday lives of urban

¹¹¹ There is an extensive literature on this, but for an authoritative account, see T. Sugrue, *The origins of the urban crisis: race and inequality in postwar Detroit* (Woodstock, revised ed., 2005).

¹¹² M. Baumeister, B. Bonomo and D. Schott, ‘Introduction: contested cities in an era of crisis’ in M. Baumeister, B. Bonomo and D. Schott (eds), *Contested cities: urban politics, heritage, and social movements in Italy and West Germany in the 1970s* (Frankfurt and New York, 2017), 7-10.

residents—contributed to a shift in the definition of dereliction. This shift also reflected a growing concern that widespread urban decay and dereliction, including vacant and unused land, was becoming an active impediment to economic regeneration. The physical environment was therefore more than a symbol of urban deprivation or economic decline; it was conceived as an active agent.

This became all the more important in the early 1980s. Following the outbreak of urban disorder in Liverpool 8, known as the Toxteth ‘riots’, in July 1981, there were two competing policies advanced by senior members of Margaret Thatcher’s cabinet.¹¹³ Michael Heseltine, Secretary of State for the Environment, put forward a series of political reforms and environmental and economic regeneration policies as part of a ‘substantial commitment... to Merseyside and other hard-pressed conurbations’.¹¹⁴ The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Geoffrey Howe, suggested that an alternative policy, surreptitiously labelled ‘managed decline’, by which inner-city areas would be ‘stabilise[d]’, followed by a ‘sustained effort to absorb Liverpool manpower elsewhere’.¹¹⁵ Heseltine’s approach ultimately won out and the projects which he oversaw as ‘Minister for Merseyside’, especially the regeneration of the Albert Docks, emphasized the physical regeneration of the docks and surrounding areas as a starting point for the city’s economic renewal. Policies developed in Liverpool—including the trial of Urban Development Corporations and Enterprise Zones—formed the basis of urban regeneration projects elsewhere. From this, we can see how the physical environment was continually understood as an active agent within a vicious circle of economic decline which, it was believed, could only be reversed through the (albeit selective) treatment of dereliction and urban decay.

¹¹³ J. Arnold, “‘Managed decline’?: zur diskussion um die zukunft Liverpools im ersten Kabinett Thatcher (1979-1981)”, *Informationen zur modernen Stadtgeschichte* (2015), 139-54

¹¹⁴ TNA: PREM 19/578, Michael Heseltine, It took a riot, 13 August 1981.

¹¹⁵ TNA: PREM 19/578, Geoffrey Howe, memorandum on Merseyside, 4 September 1981, para. 5.

Table 1: Membership of the Liverpool Chamber of Commerce, 1950-93

Year	Total Members	Manufacturing Sector (%)	Services Sector (%)	Retail Sector (%)	Other Sector (%)
1950	2,277	25	70	4	1
1960	1,989	30	61	8	1
1970	1,915	36	56	2	6
1980	1,919	32	62	6	0
1993	1,046	10	85	5	0

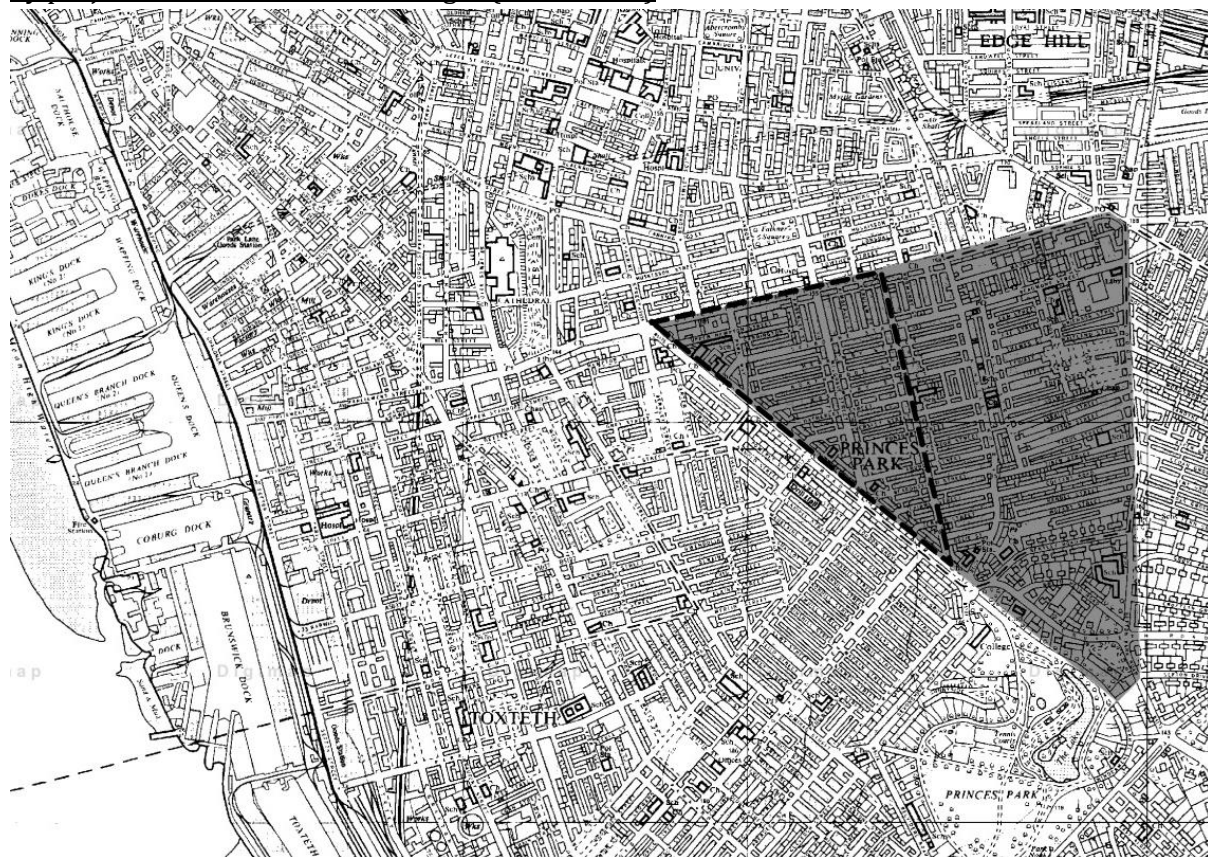
Source: Robert Bennett, 'Chambers of Commerce Historical Census and Benchmarking Data, 1790-2005,' *UK Data Service*, data collection SN 6878, 2011, <<https://discover.ukdataservice.ac.uk/catalogue?sn=6878>> [accessed 25 March 2015].

Table 2: Number of registered dock workers, 1947-89

	National register	Liverpool
1947	79,769	-
1957	75,500	16,085
1967	56,808	11,530
1969	49,225	11,100
1971	43,645	10,427
1973	34,590	7,550
1975	31,884	7,326
1977	29,168	6,402
1979	25,770	5,202
1981	18,219	3,402
1983	13,813	2,151
1985	11,922	1,862
1989	9,400	1,100

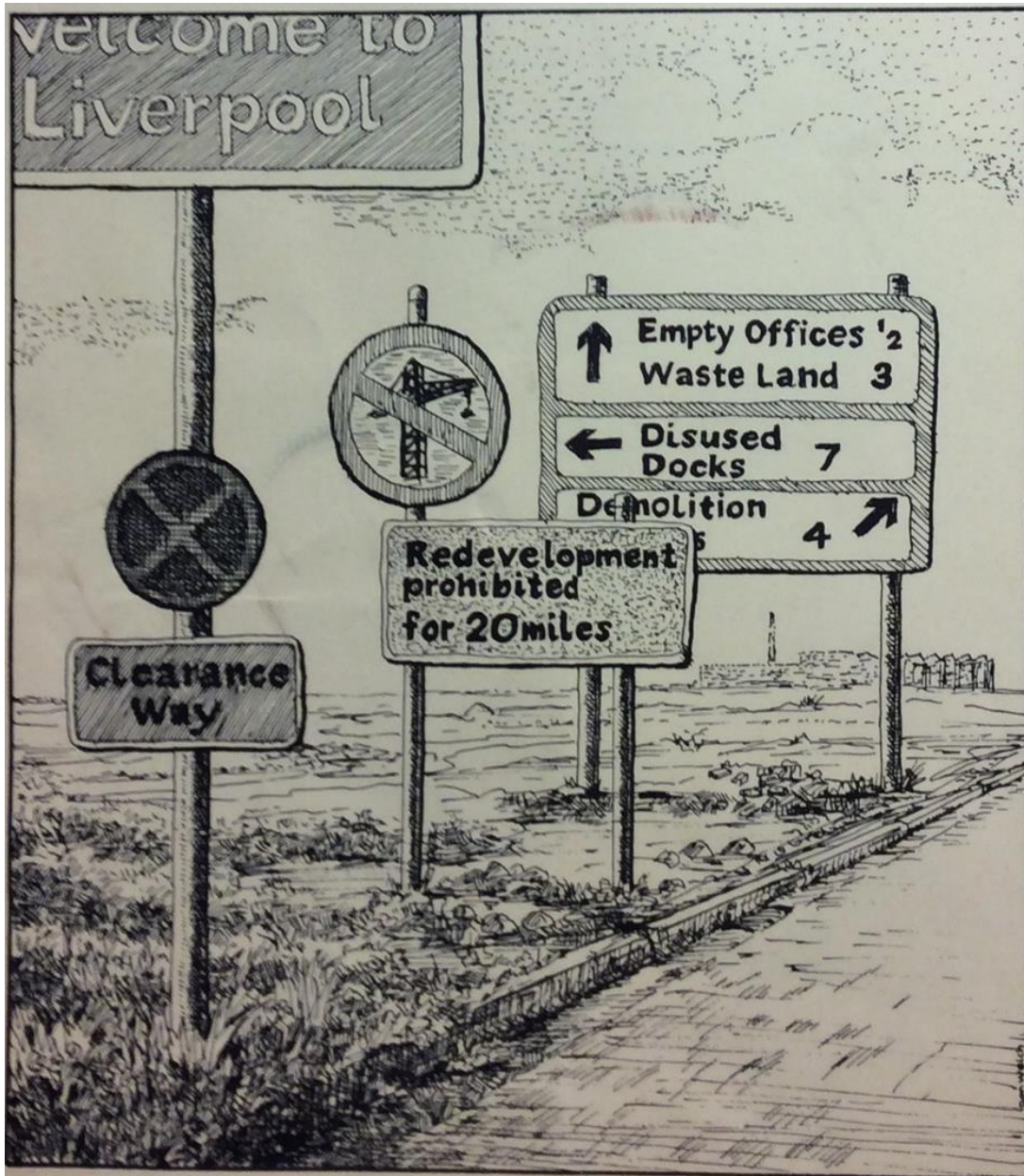
Source: Bill Hunter, *They knew why they fought* (London, 1994), 135 as cited in Brian Marren, *We shall not be moved: how Liverpool's working class fought redundancies, closures and cuts in the age of Thatcher* (Manchester, 2016), 206.

Figure 1: Map of the Shelter Neighbourhood Action Project area (shaded grey) and the route taken by project workers on their first night (dashed line)



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Figure 2: Cartoon satirising the problem of dereliction in Liverpool, 1977



Source: Liverpool Council of Voluntary Service, *Vacant land: an Enterprise Merseyside ginger paper* (Liverpool, 1977).