

West Africa in the Archives

A guide to material on Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone in the libraries, record offices, museums and churches of North West England



Survey

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Funder

University of Liverpool

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Edition

Atlas and guide, 2026

Introduction

This guide records where material on West Africa between 1880 and 1980 can be found in the archives of North West England. It is based on a three-month scoping survey carried out in May and June 2022, which visited 48 archives, libraries, museums, churches and sites over twelve field trips, mainly in and around Liverpool but reaching to Manchester, Lancaster and Chester.

West Africa was taken to mean the former British colonies of Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone, with neighbouring countries also considered. The starting themes were history, heritage, city design, planning, health, architecture and the making of cities. Each archive was recorded on a standard fiche, covering location, access, finding aids and the presence, extent and type of relevant material.

Each archive is graded by the extent of its West African material, on a five-step scale from little or none to major. The grade describes how much relevant material the survey found,

judged on the type, theme and quantity seen. It is not a judgement of the quality or importance of the archive, and is open to revision. Seven archives hold major collections: Barclays Group Archives, International Slavery Museum, Liverpool Hope Special Collections, Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, Maritime Archives & Library, The Athenaeum, Unilever Archives.

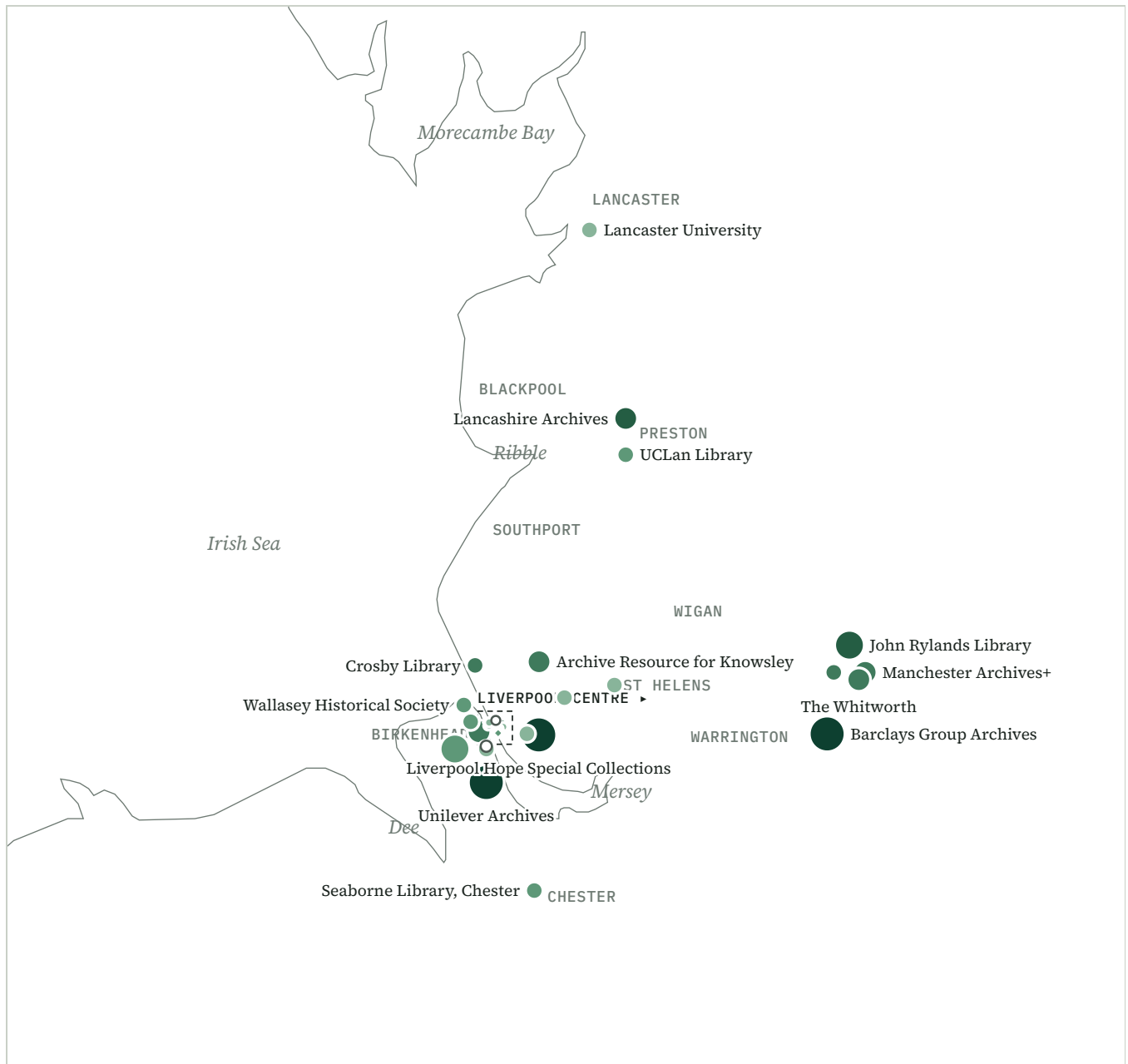
Access arrangements and opening hours are as recorded in 2022 and may have changed, so check with each archive before visiting. Quantities are approximate linear metres of relevant material. Contact names and photographs from the original survey records are not reproduced.

One finding stands out. Architecture and urbanism, among the survey's starting themes, was recorded in only two archives. Material on the built environment of West Africa is probably held within the trading-company, mission and medical collections, but it is not catalogued as such. Finding it is a task for future research.

KEY

HOLDINGS	Extent of West African material, 1880–1980: Major · Substantial · Moderate · Limited · Little or none
QUANTITY	Under 1 m · 1–5 m · 5–20 m · Over 20 m of relevant material
ACCESS	By appointment · Open hours · Open at all times
ASSESSED REMOTELY	Not visited in person; assessed by correspondence
NOT ASSESSED	No assessment of West African material was recorded

North West England

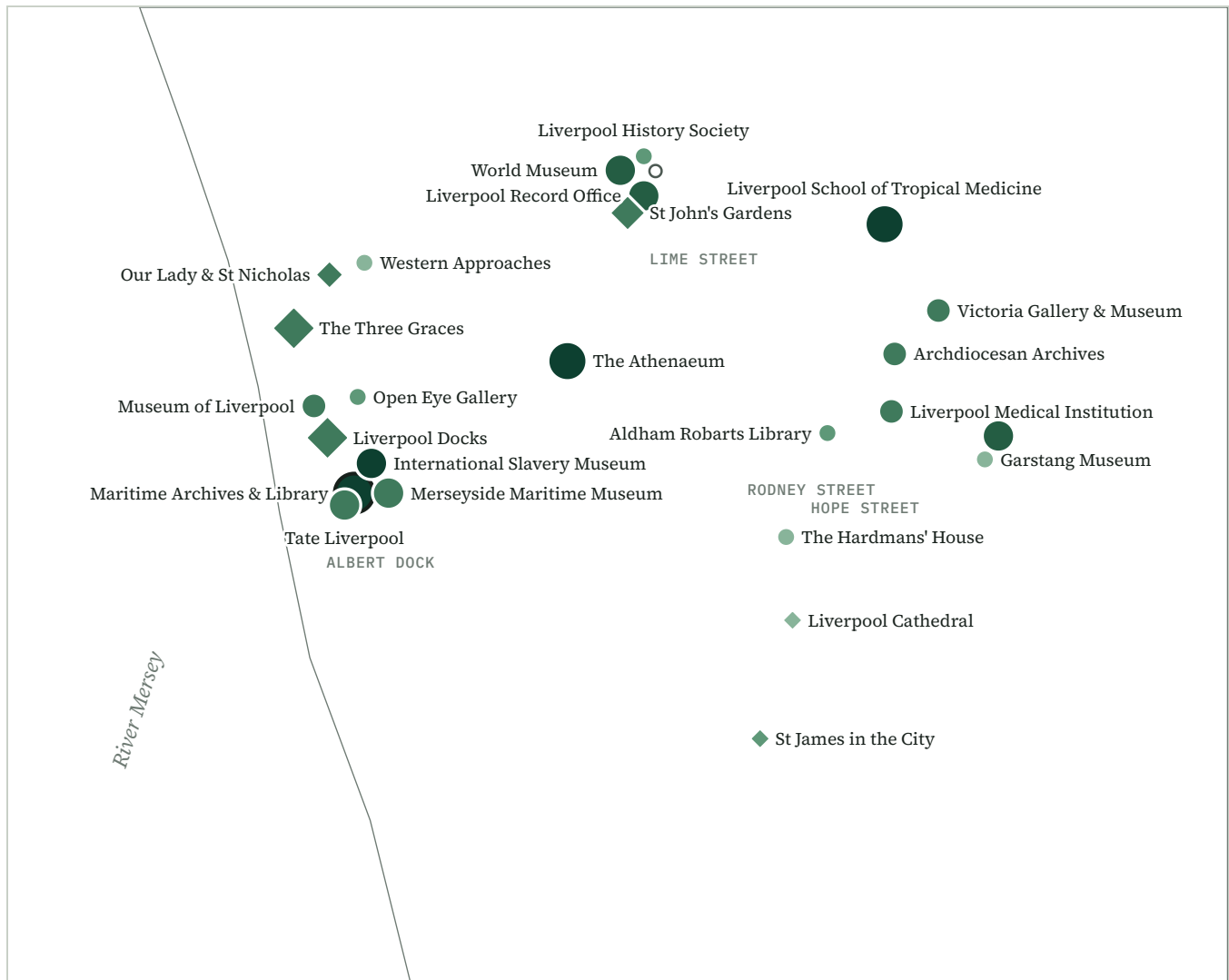


West African holdings ● Major ● Substantial ● Moderate ● Limited ● Little or none

○ Not assessed Size shows quantity of material ◆ Church or site

Circles are collections, sized by quantity and shaded by extent of West African holdings; diamonds are churches and sites. The 26 archives in central Liverpool are shown on Map 2.

Liverpool city centre



West African holdings ● Major ● Substantial ● Moderate ● Limited ● Little or none

○ Not assessed Size shows quantity of material ◆ Church or site

Twenty-six archives within a mile of the Pier Head. The riverside line is approximate. Map data: Natural Earth.

Themes and material, by extent of holdings

ARCHIVE	HOLDINGS	QUANTITY	THEMES								MATERIAL						
			SHIPPING	TRADE	SLAVERY	CULTURE	MISSIONS & CHRISTIANITY	HEALTH & MEDICINE	BANKING	ARCHITECTURE & URBANISM	BOOKS & PRINT	EPHEMERA	PHOTOGRAPHS	MODELS & OBJECTS	ART & SCULPTURE	TEXTILES	BUILDINGS & SITES
Barclays Group Archives WYTHENSHAW • ARCHIVE	Major	Over 20 m															
Liverpool Hope Special Collections LIVERPOOL • LIBRARY	Major	Over 20 m															
Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine LIVERPOOL • LIBRARY	Major	Over 20 m															
Maritime Archives & Library LIVERPOOL • ARCHIVE	Major	Over 20 m															
The Athenaeum LIVERPOOL • LIBRARY	Major	Over 20 m															
Unilever Archives BIRKENHEAD • ARCHIVE	Major	Over 20 m															
International Slavery Museum LIVERPOOL • MUSEUM OR GALLERY	Major	5–20 m															
John Rylands Library MANCHESTER • LIBRARY	Substantial	5–20 m															
Liverpool Record Office LIVERPOOL • ARCHIVE	Substantial	5–20 m															
University of Liverpool Special Collections LIVERPOOL • ARCHIVE	Substantial	5–20 m															
World Museum LIVERPOOL • MUSEUM OR GALLERY	Substantial	5–20 m															
Lancashire Archives PRESTON • ARCHIVE	Substantial	1–5 m															
Liverpool Docks LIVERPOOL • SITE OR MONUMENT	Moderate	Over 20 m															
The Three Graces LIVERPOOL • SITE OR MONUMENT	Moderate	Over 20 m															
Merseyside Maritime Museum LIVERPOOL • MUSEUM OR GALLERY	Moderate	5–20 m															

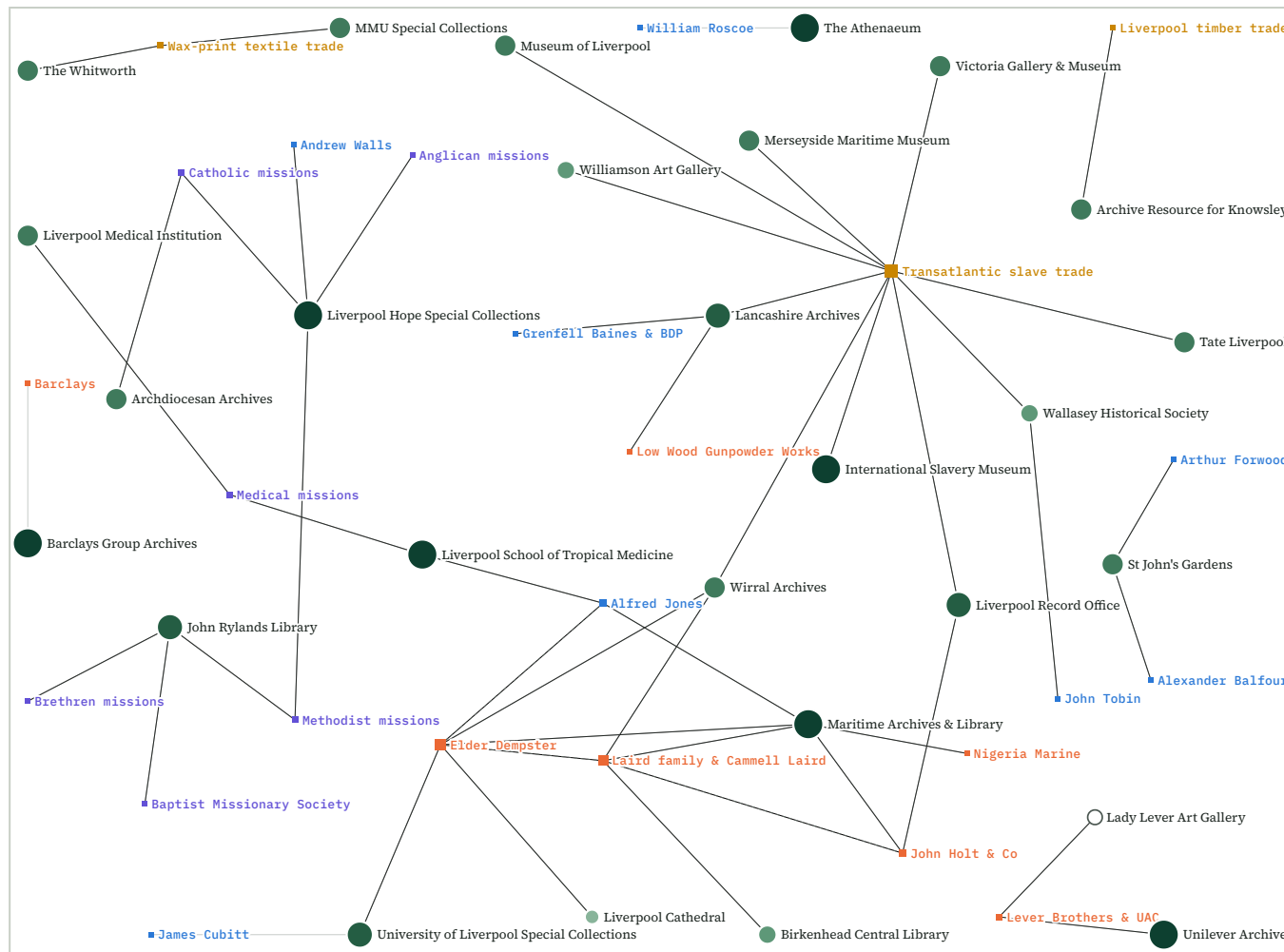
Archive	Holdings	Quantity	Themes								Material							
			Shipping	Trade	Slavery	Culture	Missions & Christianity	Health & Medicine	Banking	Architecture & Urbanism	Books & Print	Ephemera	Photographs	Models & Objects	Art & Sculpture	Textiles	Buildings & Sites	
St John's Gardens LIVERPOOL · SITE OR MONUMENT	Moderate	5–20 m																
Tate Liverpool LIVERPOOL · MUSEUM OR GALLERY	Moderate	5–20 m																
Archdiocesan Archives LIVERPOOL · ARCHIVE	Moderate	1–5 m																
Archive Resource for Knowsley KNOWSLEY · ARCHIVE	Moderate	1–5 m																
Liverpool Medical Institution LIVERPOOL · LIBRARY	Moderate	1–5 m																
Manchester Archives+ MANCHESTER · ARCHIVE	Moderate	1–5 m																
Museum of Liverpool LIVERPOOL · MUSEUM OR GALLERY	Moderate	1–5 m																
Our Lady & St Nicholas LIVERPOOL · CHURCH	Moderate	1–5 m																
The Whitworth MANCHESTER · MUSEUM OR GALLERY	Moderate	1–5 m																
Victoria Gallery & Museum LIVERPOOL · MUSEUM OR GALLERY	Moderate	1–5 m																
Wirral Archives BIRKENHEAD · ARCHIVE	Moderate	1–5 m																
Crosby Library LIVERPOOL · LIBRARY	Moderate	Under 1 m																
MMU Special Collections MANCHESTER · MUSEUM OR GALLERY	Moderate	Under 1 m																
Williamson Art Gallery PRENTON · MUSEUM OR GALLERY	Limited	5–20 m																
Aldham Robarts Library LIVERPOOL · LIBRARY	Limited	Under 1 m																
Birkenhead Central Library BIRKENHEAD · LIBRARY	Limited	Under 1 m																
Liverpool History Society LIVERPOOL · LIBRARY	Limited	Under 1 m																
Open Eye Gallery LIVERPOOL · MUSEUM OR GALLERY	Limited	Under 1 m																
Seaborne Library, Chester CHESTER · LIBRARY	Limited	Under 1 m																

ARCHIVE	HOLDINGS	QUANTITY	THEMES								MATERIAL						
			SHIPPING	TRADE	SLAVERY	CULTURE	MISSIONS & CHRISTIANITY	HEALTH & MEDICINE	BANKING	ARCHITECTURE & URBANISM	BOOKS & PRINT	EPHEMERA	PHOTOGRAPHS	MODELS & OBJECTS	ART & SCULPTURE	TEXTILES	BUILDINGS & SITES
St James in the City LIVERPOOL · CHURCH	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ Limited	■ Under 1 m	■														●
UCLan Library PRESTON · LIBRARY	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ Limited	■ Under 1 m				■					●						
Wallasey Historical Society WALLASEY · LIBRARY	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ Limited	■ Under 1 m	■		■						●	●					
Blue Coat School WAVERTREE · ARCHIVE	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ Little or none	■ Under 1 m				■					●						
Garstang Museum LIVERPOOL · MUSEUM OR GALLERY	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ Little or none	■ Under 1 m				■						●					
Knowsley Hall PRESCOT · LIBRARY	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ Little or none	■ Under 1 m				■					●						
Lancaster University LANCASTER · LIBRARY	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ Little or none	■ Under 1 m				■					●						
Liverpool Cathedral LIVERPOOL · CHURCH	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ Little or none	■ Under 1 m					■				●						
Shrewsbury Diocesan Archives PRENTON · ARCHIVE	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ Little or none	■ Under 1 m				■					●						
St Helens Archive ST HELENS · ARCHIVE	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ Little or none	■ Under 1 m				■					●						
The Hardmans' House LIVERPOOL · MUSEUM OR GALLERY	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ Little or none	■ Under 1 m				■							●				
Western Approaches LIVERPOOL · MUSEUM OR GALLERY	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ Little or none	■ Under 1 m				■						●	●	●			
Lady Lever Art Gallery WIRRAL · MUSEUM OR GALLERY	Not assessed	-															
Walker Art Gallery LIVERPOOL · MUSEUM OR GALLERY	Not assessed	-															
Archives			20	8	12	18	4	3	1	2	28	22	12	8	5	3	4

CONNECTIONS

Companies, people and missions across the archives

● Archive, shaded by extent of holdings ■ People ■ Companies & services ■ Missions & medicine ■ Trades --- Direct link between names



The 48 archives, A–Z

LIBRARY • LIVERPOOL

Aldham Robarts Library, Liverpool John Moores University

Liverpool John Moores University, L1 9DE

WEST AFRICAN HOLDINGS  **Limited**

QUANTITY Under 1 m

ACCESS By appointment

THEMES Culture

MATERIAL Books & print

No dedicated West Africa collection. About five metres of nineteenth-century periodicals, including Punch and The Strand, are partly indexed and carry occasional West African content.

KEY HOLDINGS

- Nineteenth-century periodicals (c.5 m), partly indexed

Visit the website <https://www.ljmu.ac.uk/study/undergraduate-students/visit-us/directions/aldham-robarts-library>

ARCHIVE • LIVERPOOL

Liverpool Archdiocesan Archives, Metropolitan Cathedral

Cathedral House, L3 5TQ

WEST AFRICAN HOLDINGS  **Moderate**

QUANTITY 1–5 m

ACCESS By appointment

THEMES Missions & Christianity

Slavery

MATERIAL Books & print

Ephemera

Catholic collections in which all four countries appear, among them the records of St Benedict's Coloured Mission and the Catholic Pictorial newspaper. The archive has compiled a guide to its Black history sources.

KEY HOLDINGS

- St Benedict's Coloured Mission, 1931–1960s
- Seminary of St Joseph collection, 1880–
- Derek Worlock collection, 1960–
- Catholic Pictorial, 1962–

FINDING AIDS

- [Black History sources and stories \(supplied guide\)](#)

Visit the website <https://liverpoolmetrocathedral.org.uk/history-heritage/cathedral-diocesan-archives/>

Archive Resource for Knowsley (ARK)

The Kirkby Centre, L32 8RR

WEST AFRICAN HOLDINGS ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ **Moderate**

QUANTITY 1–5 m

ACCESS Open hours

THEMES Culture Trade

MATERIAL Books & print

A small group of uncatalogued antiquarian books in Knowsley's special collections touch on West Africa, among them Latham's Timber Town, on Liverpool's timber trade with the region, and the 1884 history of Liverpool and the slave trade by 'Dicky Sam'.

KEY HOLDINGS

- F. A. Latham, Timber Town: a History of the Liverpool Timber Trade (1968)
- 'Dicky Sam', Liverpool and Slavery (1884)
- Histories of Liverpool commerce by Baines (1852) and Muir (1907)

FINDING AIDS

- Book list supplied by the archive, May 2022

Visit the website <http://archives.knowsley.gov.uk>

Barclays Group Archives

Dallimore Road, M23 9JA

WEST AFRICAN HOLDINGS ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ **Major**

QUANTITY Over 20 m

ACCESS By appointment

THEMES Banking Shipping

Trade

MATERIAL Books & print

Ephemera

The corporate archive of Barclays and its predecessor banks, on about a mile and a half of shelving. West African material is present but hard to measure within so large a collection; staff can supply country-specific source lists for visitors.

KEY HOLDINGS

- Records of Barclays Bank, its predecessors and constituents, 1567 to the present

FINDING AIDS

- Information for users and travel guide (supplied by the archive)
- Country-specific source lists on request

Visit the website <https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/search/locations/5da31e9e-620b-3c75-a22d-733f397da4fc>

Birkenhead Central Library

Borough Road, CH41 2XB

WEST AFRICAN HOLDINGS  **Limited**

QUANTITY Under 1 m

ACCESS Open hours

THEMES Shipping

MATERIAL Books & print

Around two dozen books on slavery and shipping, several of them on the Cammell Laird shipyard.

KEY HOLDINGS

- c.24 books on slavery and shipping, including Cammell Laird titles

Visit the website <https://www.wirral.gov.uk/libraries-and-archives/find-library/birkenhead-central-library>

Blue Coat School Archives

Church Road, L15 9EE

WEST AFRICAN HOLDINGS  **Little or none**

QUANTITY Under 1 m

ACCESS By appointment

THEMES Culture

MATERIAL Books & print

No relevant material identified.

Visit the website <https://www.bluecoatschoolliverpoolarchives.org.uk/>

Crosby Library

Crosby Road North, L22 0LQ

WEST AFRICAN HOLDINGS  **Moderate**

QUANTITY Under 1 m

ACCESS Open hours

THEMES Shipping

MATERIAL Books & print

Ephemera

Pamphlets and ephemera relating to slavery and West Africa. The local holding lists also cover eminent merchants, local business and some shipping.

KEY HOLDINGS

- Pamphlets and ephemera on slavery

FINDING AIDS

- Southport Archives and South Sefton holding lists

Visit the website <https://www.sefton.gov.uk/schools-learning/libraries/your-local-library/crosby-library/>

Garstang Museum of Archaeology, University of Liverpool

University of Liverpool, L69 7WZ

WEST AFRICAN HOLDINGS  **Little or none**

QUANTITY Under 1 m

ACCESS Open hours

THEMES Culture

MATERIAL Ephemera

Collections are ancient Egyptian and Sudanese. Twentieth-century correspondence from John Garstang concerns Egypt and Sudan, not West Africa.

Visit the website <https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/garstang-museum/>

International Slavery Museum

Maritime Museum, L3 4AQ

WEST AFRICAN HOLDINGS ■■■■■ Major

QUANTITY 5–20 m

ACCESS Open hours

THEMES Slavery

MATERIAL Art & sculpture

Ephemera

Photographs

Textiles

Permanent displays draw on material from all four countries and cover West African history, heritage, health and the design of cities and houses.

KEY HOLDINGS

- Permanent exhibitions: objects, photographs, sculpture, textiles and art

Visit the website <https://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/international-slavery-museum>

John Rylands Research Institute and Library, University of Manchester

150 Deansgate, M3 3EH

WEST AFRICAN HOLDINGS ■■■■■ Substantial

QUANTITY 5–20 m

ACCESS By appointment

THEMES Missions & Christianity

MATERIAL Books & print

Ephemera

Each of the four countries appears, above all through missionary work by the Nonconformist churches. The Methodist Archives hold Sierra Leone material from Wesleyan missionaries; the Guardian archive's Africa files concern mostly East and Central Africa.

KEY HOLDINGS

- Methodist Archives and Research Centre (MARC): West Africa references, including the papers of Thomas William Blanshard, Wesleyan missionary in Sierra Leone, c.1857–63
- Baptist Missionary Society letters, 1839–43 (MA 1977/620)
- Echoes of Service (Brethren) archive
- Foreign & Commonwealth Office pamphlets
- The Guardian archive
- Map collection

FINDING AIDS

- West Africa references in the MARC collections (supplied list)
- Africa references in the Guardian archive (supplied list)
- [Library search](#)

Visit the website <https://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/rylands/>

Knowsley Hall Library

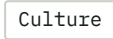
Knowsley, L34 4AG

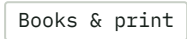
WEST AFRICAN HOLDINGS  Little or none

ASSESSED
REMOTELY

QUANTITY Under 1 m

ACCESS By appointment

THEMES 

MATERIAL 

A private library, assessed remotely without a visit; little relevant material was indicated.

Visit the website <https://libguides.liverpool.ac.uk/library/sca/knowsleyhalllibrary>

Lady Lever Art Gallery

Port Sunlight Village, CH62 5EQ

WEST AFRICAN HOLDINGS Not assessed

QUANTITY Not recorded

ACCESS Not recorded

Visited, but no assessment of West African material was recorded.

Visit the website <https://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/lady-lever-art-gallery>

Lancashire Archives

Bow Lane, PR1 2RE

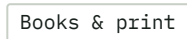
WEST AFRICAN HOLDINGS  Substantial

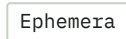
QUANTITY 1–5 m

ACCESS By appointment

THEMES  



MATERIAL 



The records of the Low Wood Gunpowder Works, which supplied gunpowder to Liverpool merchants trading with West Africa, and a package book from a Liverpool ship of 1792 listing its full cargo, enslaved people included. Port, mission, hospital and family records widen the field.

KEY HOLDINGS

- Low Wood Gunpowder Works, Haverthwaite, 1798–1842 (DDLO): correspondence, accounts and day books
- Package book of a Liverpool ship, 1792
- Port of Lancaster records, eighteenth to twentieth centuries
- Port of Preston records, nineteenth century to 1982
- Missionary, diocesan and Nonconformist records
- Lancashire hospitals (NHS) archives
- Papers of George Grenfell Baines, founder of BDP

FINDING AIDS

- [A Guide to Sources for the Study of Black and South Asian History](#)
- Low Wood Gunpowder Works catalogue (DDLO)

Visit the website <https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/libraries-and-archives/archives-and-record-office/>

Lancaster University Library: Special Collections

Library Avenue, LA1 4YH

WEST AFRICAN HOLDINGS  **Little or none**

ASSESSED
REMOTELY

QUANTITY Under 1 m

ACCESS By appointment

THEMES

MATERIAL

Assessed remotely without a visit; little relevant material was indicated.

Visit the website <https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/library/resources/special-collections/>

Liverpool Docks and Pier Head

Pier Head, L3 4AQ

WEST AFRICAN HOLDINGS  **Moderate**

QUANTITY Over 20 m

ACCESS Open hours

THEMES

MATERIAL

The historic docks themselves: the built fabric of Liverpool's maritime trade, including its trade with West Africa, open to view.

KEY HOLDINGS

- Dock structures and maritime heritage on display

Liverpool Cathedral

St James' Mount, L1 7AZ

WEST AFRICAN HOLDINGS  **Little or none**

QUANTITY Under 1 m

ACCESS By appointment

THEMES

MATERIAL

Lists of staff from shipping companies such as Elder Dempster who joined the Liverpool Pals regiment.

KEY HOLDINGS

- Shipping company staff lists, including Elder Dempster

Visit the website <https://www.liverpoolcathedral.org.uk/>

Liverpool History Society collection, Central Library

Central Library, L3 8EW

WEST AFRICAN HOLDINGS  **Limited**

QUANTITY Under 1 m

ACCESS By appointment

THEMES

MATERIAL

About six metres of shelving, with no index or catalogue. Books touch on the four countries and the project's themes to varying degrees.

KEY HOLDINGS

- c.6 m of books, uncatalogued

Visit the website <https://liverpoolhistorysociety.org.uk/>

Sheppard-Worlock Library, Liverpool Hope University: Archives & Special Collections

The Sheppard-Worlock Library, L16 9JD

WEST AFRICAN HOLDINGS  Major

QUANTITY Over 20 m

ACCESS By appointment

THEMES

Missions & Christianity

MATERIAL

Books & print

Ephemera

Material on all four countries, overwhelmingly concerned with Christian missions in West Africa. Much is not yet catalogued, including the Andrew Walls collections and around nine metres of pamphlets in African languages.

KEY HOLDINGS

- Andrew Walls Centre for African & Asian Christianity: books and periodicals (part uncatalogued)
- Andrew Walls archive: slides and 60+ boxes on Africa (uncatalogued)
- WEC Archive: ten-year survey of world Christianity (uncatalogued)
- Pamphlets in African languages, c.9 m (uncatalogued); African journals
- Microfiche of Wesleyan, Methodist and Church mission agencies
- Gradwell Collection (St Joseph's Seminary, Roman Catholic); Radcliffe Archive (Anglican Cathedral library)

FINDING AIDS

- [Finding aids](#)

Visit the website <https://www.hope.ac.uk/library/specialcollections/>

Liverpool Medical Institution

114 Mount Pleasant, L3 5SR

WEST AFRICAN HOLDINGS  Moderate

QUANTITY 1–5 m

ACCESS By appointment

THEMES

Health & medicine

MATERIAL

Books & print

Ephemera

Around twenty metres of papers from medical missions and doctors working overseas, each filed under the practitioner's name and listed in a paper index.

KEY HOLDINGS

- Papers of medical missions and doctors overseas, c.20 m

FINDING AIDS

- Paper index of the archive

Visit the website <https://www.lmi.org.uk/>

Liverpool Record Office, Central Library

Central Library, L3 8EW

WEST AFRICAN HOLDINGS ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ Substantial

QUANTITY 5–20 m

ACCESS By appointment

THEMES Shipping Slavery

MATERIAL Books & print

Records of the John Holt company and a published guide to Liverpool's Black history sources. The online catalogue holds much on trade with West Africa, and specialist help is available.

KEY HOLDINGS

- John Holt records (380 HOL)
- Twentieth-century collections on Liverpool's Black communities

FINDING AIDS

- Liverpool's Black History: a guide to sources at Liverpool Record Office
- John Holt index (380 HOL)
- [Online catalogue](#)

Visit the website <https://liverpool.gov.uk/libraries/>

Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine

Pembroke Place, L3 5QA

WEST AFRICAN HOLDINGS ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ Major

QUANTITY Over 20 m

ACCESS By appointment

THEMES Health & medicine

MATERIAL Books & print

Ephemera

Models & objects

Photographs

Extensive, largely uncatalogued material on all four countries, from health to buildings and business. Some 350 metres of shelving across four collections; an online search returns over 300 West Africa sources.

KEY HOLDINGS

- Blue Book Room: material on all aspects of colonial life, c.20 m, mostly uncatalogued
- Circulating Collection (catalogued) and Historical Collection & Journals, c.185 m, partly catalogued
- Maegraith Archive: annual and malaria reports, books, artefacts, drawings, diaries and apparatus, c.144 m
- LSTM archive held at the University of Liverpool

FINDING AIDS

- [Library catalogue: West Africa search](#)
- LSTM centenary history (1998)

Visit the website <https://www.lstmed.ac.uk/lstm-library-0>

Manchester Archives+, Central Library

Manchester Central Library, M2 5PD

WEST AFRICAN HOLDINGS ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ **Moderate**

QUANTITY 1–5 m

ACCESS By appointment

THEMES Culture

MATERIAL Books & print

Everything is searchable through the online catalogue; the archivists recommend direct contact for specialist enquiries, including sources on Manchester's ethnic minority communities.

KEY HOLDINGS

- Archives and local history collections

FINDING AIDS

- [Greater Manchester Lives](#)

Visit the website <https://www.manchester.gov.uk/info/448/archives-and-local-history>

Maritime Archives & Library, Merseyside Maritime Museum

Royal Albert Dock, L3 4AQ

WEST AFRICAN HOLDINGS ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ **Major**

QUANTITY Over 20 m

ACCESS By appointment

THEMES Shipping

MATERIAL Books & print

The principal archive for Liverpool's West African shipping: the Elder Dempster and John Holt company records and the papers of the Nigeria Marine, each with a published catalogue. Further material is held at the museum's North Street store.

KEY HOLDINGS

- Elder Dempster, Professor Davies Collection (B/EDL)
- Ocean Archive: Elder Dempster (OA), c.6 m × 3 m
- John Holt & Co. (Liverpool) Ltd (B/JH), c.12 m × 3 m
- Nigeria Marine, 1927–66: papers of Captain F. W. Skutil (B/NMA)

FINDING AIDS

- [Catalogues for Elder Dempster, John Holt and Nigeria Marine](#)
- Guide to the archives, volumes 1–2

Visit the website <https://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/collections/maritime-museum-collections/>

Merseyside Maritime Museum

Royal Albert Dock, L3 4AQ

WEST AFRICAN HOLDINGS  Moderate

QUANTITY 5–20 m

ACCESS Open hours

THEMES

MATERIAL

Permanent displays on Liverpool's waterfront and shipping history refer throughout to West Africa and the slave trade.

KEY HOLDINGS

- Permanent exhibitions: models, photographs and ephemera

Visit the website <https://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/maritime-museum>

Museum of Liverpool

Pier Head, L3 1DG

WEST AFRICAN HOLDINGS  Moderate

QUANTITY 1–5 m

ACCESS Open hours

THEMES

MATERIAL

Permanent displays on Liverpool's trade with West Africa, the slave trade, shipping and the city's leading merchants.

KEY HOLDINGS

- Permanent exhibitions: models, photographs and ephemera

Visit the website <https://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/museum-of-liverpool>

Special Collections Museum, Manchester Metropolitan University

Manchester Metropolitan University, M15 6BH

WEST AFRICAN HOLDINGS  Moderate

QUANTITY Under 1 m

ACCESS By appointment

THEMES

MATERIAL

Mainly art, architecture and textiles. A small group of textiles from the School of Art resembles the wax prints made in the North West for export to West Africa.

KEY HOLDINGS

- Textiles comparable to ABC wax prints for the West African market

Visit the website <https://www.mmu.ac.uk/special-collections-museum>

Open Eye Gallery

19 Mann Island, L3 1BP

WEST AFRICAN HOLDINGS  Limited

QUANTITY Under 1 m

ACCESS Open hours

THEMES

MATERIAL

A photography gallery with exhibitions changing every three months, sometimes by West African artists.

Visit the website <https://openeye.org.uk/>

Our Lady and St Nicholas, Liverpool Parish Church

5 Old Churchyard, L2 8GW

WEST AFRICAN HOLDINGS  **Moderate**

QUANTITY 1-5 m

ACCESS Open hours

THEMES

MATERIAL

The historic sailors' church, built partly with merchant money, with a roll of seafarers lost at sea and a timeline display of its history.

KEY HOLDINGS

- Roll of honour of seafarers
- Timeline display of the church's history

Visit the website <https://livpc.co.uk/>

Seaborne Library, University of Chester

University of Chester, CH1 4BJ

WEST AFRICAN HOLDINGS  **Limited**

QUANTITY Under 1 m

ACCESS Open hours

THEMES

MATERIAL

No dedicated West Africa archive. Several titles sit in the general collection, and older theological books may contain scattered references.

KEY HOLDINGS

- West Africa titles in the general collection
- Older theological books

Visit the website <https://www1.chester.ac.uk/learning-and-information-services/university-libraries/seaborne-library-exton-park>

Shrewsbury Diocesan Archives

2 Park Road South, CH43 4UX

WEST AFRICAN HOLDINGS  **Little or none**

QUANTITY Under 1 m

ACCESS By appointment

THEMES

MATERIAL

No relevant material identified.

Visit the website <http://www.dioceseofshrewsbury.org/about-us/diocese-of-shrewsbury/archives>

St Helens Archive Service

The Gamble Building, WA10 1DY

WEST AFRICAN HOLDINGS  **Little or none**

QUANTITY Under 1 m

ACCESS Open hours

THEMES

MATERIAL

The Gamble Building was closed for refurbishment at the time of the survey, so no assessment was possible.

Visit the website <https://www.sthelens.gov.uk/article/3145/St-Helens-Archive-Service>

St James in the City

Upper St James Place, L8 1UR

WEST AFRICAN HOLDINGS  **Limited**

QUANTITY Under 1 m

ACCESS By appointment

THEMES

MATERIAL

A church historically attended by seafarers.

Visit the website <https://www.stj.org.uk/>

St John's Gardens

St John's Lane, L1 1JJ

WEST AFRICAN HOLDINGS ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ **Moderate**

QUANTITY 5–20 m

ACCESS Open at all times

THEMES Shipping Trade

MATERIAL Art & sculpture

Public statues of the shipowners and merchants Alexander Balfour and Arthur Forwood.

KEY HOLDINGS

- Statues of Alexander Balfour and Arthur Forwood

Visit the website <https://liverpool.gov.uk/leisure-parks-and-wellbeing/parks-and-green-spaces/st-johns-gardens/>

Tate Liverpool

Royal Albert Dock, L3 4BB

WEST AFRICAN HOLDINGS ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ **Moderate**

QUANTITY 5–20 m

ACCESS Open hours

THEMES Slavery

MATERIAL Art & sculpture

Works by West African artists and exhibits on slavery and 'the other'. Tate's physical archive is in London.

Visit the website <https://www.tate.org.uk/visit/tate-liverpool>

The Athenaeum, Liverpool

12-18 Church Street, L1 3DD

WEST AFRICAN HOLDINGS ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ **Major**

QUANTITY Over 20 m

ACCESS By appointment

THEMES Shipping Slavery

MATERIAL Books & print

Ephemera

A private library founded in 1797, at the height of the slave trade; by the mid-nineteenth century around a quarter of its members were engaged with West Africa, as traders and as abolitionists. All four countries are represented, chiefly in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century material.

KEY HOLDINGS

- Committee Room: street directories 1766–1970, the William Roscoe archive, a handwritten slavery book, the Atlantic Neptune charts
- Reading Room: share register, ephemera, the old paper catalogue
- Library stacks: Africa travel (c.9 m) and history (c.4 m), biography, genealogy and local history including shipping
- Illustrated London News, 1842–1993 (c.20 m)

FINDING AIDS

- Printed and online catalogues (about 70% of holdings online).

Visit the website <https://theathenaeum.org.uk/>

The Hardmans' House (National Trust)

59 Rodney Street, L1 9ER

WEST AFRICAN HOLDINGS  Little or none

QUANTITY Under 1 m

ACCESS Open hours

THEMES Culture

MATERIAL Photographs

A photographic house-museum. The curator advised that it holds nothing specific to West Africa.

Visit the website <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/hardmans-house>

The Three Graces, Pier Head

George's Dock Gates, L3 1HU

WEST AFRICAN HOLDINGS  Moderate

QUANTITY Over 20 m

ACCESS Open at all times

THEMES Shipping

MATERIAL Buildings & sites

The Royal Liver, Cunard and Port of Liverpool buildings, built on the profits of trade, much of it with West Africa.

Visit the website <https://www.visitliverpool.co.uk/things-to-do/pier-head-and-the-three-graces-p17747>

The Whitworth, University of Manchester

Oxford Road, M15 6ER

WEST AFRICAN HOLDINGS  Moderate

QUANTITY 1–5 m

ACCESS By appointment

THEMES Trade

MATERIAL Textiles

Predominantly textiles, some with West African connections, dating from 1824 into the twentieth century.

KEY HOLDINGS

- Textiles, 1824 to the twentieth century

FINDING AIDS

- [Collection search](#)

Visit the website <https://www.whitworth.manchester.ac.uk/>

University of Central Lancashire Library

St Peter's Square, PR1 2HE

WEST AFRICAN HOLDINGS  Limited

QUANTITY Under 1 m

ACCESS Open hours

THEMES Culture

MATERIAL Books & print

A few West Africa titles in the general collections; special collections are held at Askew House.

FINDING AIDS

- Special collections at Askew House

Visit the website <https://www.uclan.ac.uk/facilities/library>

Unilever Archives & Records Management

Port Sunlight, CH62 4UY

WEST AFRICAN HOLDINGS ■■■■■ Major

QUANTITY Over 20 m

ACCESS By appointment

THEMES Architecture & urbanism

Culture Shipping

Trade

MATERIAL Books & print

Ephemera

Models & objects

Photographs

The records of the United Africa Company, the Unilever subsidiary formed in 1929 that dominated trade in Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Gambia, together with those of the many Liverpool trading firms it absorbed.

KEY HOLDINGS

- United Africa Company records (GB1752.UAC)
- Records of predecessor firms, including the Niger Company

FINDING AIDS

- [Online catalogue: United Africa Company](#)
- The United Africa Company: a brief guide

Visit the website <https://www.unilever.com/our-company/our-history-and-archives/>

Special Collections & Archives, University of Liverpool

University of Liverpool, L7 8BD

WEST AFRICAN HOLDINGS ■■■■■ Substantial

QUANTITY 5–20 m

ACCESS By appointment

THEMES Architecture & urbanism

Culture

Health & medicine

Trade

MATERIAL Books & print

Ephemera

Relatively little on West Africa overall, but it includes the James Cubitt archive, with architectural and planning work in Nigeria, Ghana and Sierra Leone (some for Elder Dempster), and part of the LSTM archive. Catalogue searches are needed to find material.

KEY HOLDINGS

- James Cubitt archive: architecture and urban design in Nigeria, Ghana and Sierra Leone
- Part of the LSTM archive

FINDING AIDS

- [Online catalogues](#)

Visit the website <https://libguides.liverpool.ac.uk/library/sca>

Victoria Gallery & Museum, University of Liverpool

University of Liverpool, L69 3DR

WEST AFRICAN HOLDINGS  **Moderate**

QUANTITY 1–5 m

ACCESS Open hours

THEMES Shipping Slavery

MATERIAL Ephemera

Models & objects

Photographs

Artefacts, decorative arts and ceramics relating to slavery and trade in the permanent collection.

Visit the website <https://vgm.liverpool.ac.uk/>

Walker Art Gallery

William Brown Street, L3 8EL

WEST AFRICAN HOLDINGS Not assessed

QUANTITY Not recorded

ACCESS Not recorded

Visited, but no assessment of West African material was recorded.

Visit the website <https://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/walker-art-gallery>

Wallasey Historical Society collection, Wallasey Central Library

Wallasey Central Library, CH45 5DX

WEST AFRICAN HOLDINGS  **Limited**

QUANTITY Under 1 m

ACCESS Open hours

THEMES Shipping Slavery

MATERIAL Books & print

Ephemera

Local history and shipping records, with three uncatalogued shipping folders that may contain West African content, and a file on John Tobin, nineteenth-century slave trader and merchant.

KEY HOLDINGS

- Shipping history folders (uncatalogued)
- File on Sir John Tobin

Visit the website <https://www.wirral.gov.uk/libraries-and-archives/find-library/wallasey-central-library>

Western Approaches Museum

1-3 Rumford Street, L2 8SZ

WEST AFRICAN HOLDINGS  **Little or none**

QUANTITY Under 1 m

ACCESS Open hours

THEMES Culture

MATERIAL Ephemera

Models & objects

Photographs

Focused on the Second World War and the Atlantic convoys, not West Africa.

Visit the website <https://liverpoolwarmuseum.co.uk/>

Williamson Art Gallery & Museum

Slatey Road, CH43 4UE

WEST AFRICAN HOLDINGS  **Limited**

QUANTITY 5–20 m

ACCESS Open hours

THEMES Shipping Slavery

MATERIAL Art & sculpture

Ephemera

Models & objects

Photographs

West African artefacts, a permanent maritime display, and a pair of shackles used aboard a nineteenth-century slave ship. The card catalogue is the best way in.

KEY HOLDINGS

- Maritime collection
- Slave-ship shackles

FINDING AIDS

- Card catalogue

Visit the website <https://williamsonartgallery.org/collections/>

Wirral Archives Service

Cheshire Lines Building, CH41 1AU

WEST AFRICAN HOLDINGS  **Moderate**

QUANTITY 1–5 m

ACCESS By appointment

THEMES Shipping Slavery

MATERIAL Books & print

Ephemera

Material on all four countries, especially Nigeria and the River Niger: the memoirs of Macgregor Laird and records of his Niger expeditions (1838–58), whose West African Steamship Company was a forerunner of Elder Dempster, alongside maritime, business and anti-slavery records.

KEY HOLDINGS

- Macgregor Laird memoirs and Niger expeditions, 1838–58
- Maritime records and letter books
- Anti-slavery and business records
- Online newspaper archive

Visit the website <https://www.wirral.gov.uk/libraries-and-archives/wirral-archives-service>

World Museum

William Brown Street, L3 8EN

WEST AFRICAN HOLDINGS  Substantial

QUANTITY 5–20 m

ACCESS Open hours

THEMES Culture Shipping

Slavery

MATERIAL Art & sculpture

Ephemera

Models & objects

Photographs

Artefacts from West and Central Africa, mostly sculpture, largely collected between 1895 and 1916 and brought to Liverpool by traders.

KEY HOLDINGS

- West and Central African sculpture and artefacts, 1895–1916

Visit the website <https://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/world-museum>

Index of names

Companies, people, missions and trades recorded in the survey, with the archives that hold related material.

COMPANIES & SERVICES

Barclays	Barclays Group Archives
Elder Dempster	Liverpool Cathedral; Maritime Archives & Library; University of Liverpool Special Collections; Wirral Archives
John Holt & Co	Liverpool Record Office; Maritime Archives & Library
Laird family & Cammell Laird	Birkenhead Central Library; Maritime Archives & Library; Wirral Archives
Lever Brothers & UAC	Lady Lever Art Gallery; Unilever Archives
Low Wood Gunpowder Works	Lancashire Archives
Nigeria Marine	Maritime Archives & Library

PEOPLE

Alexander Balfour	St John's Gardens
Alfred Jones	Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine; Maritime Archives & Library
Andrew Walls	Liverpool Hope Special Collections
Arthur Forwood	St John's Gardens
Grenfell Baines & BDP	Lancashire Archives
James Cubitt	University of Liverpool Special Collections
John Tobin	Wallasey Historical Society
William Roscoe	The Athenaeum

MISSIONS & MEDICINE

Anglican missions	Liverpool Hope Special Collections
Baptist Missionary Society	John Rylands Library
Brethren missions	John Rylands Library
Catholic missions	Liverpool Hope Special Collections; Archdiocesan Archives
Medical missions	Liverpool Medical Institution; Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine
Methodist missions	Liverpool Hope Special Collections; John Rylands Library

TRADES

Liverpool timber trade	Archive Resource for Knowsley
Transatlantic slave trade	International Slavery Museum; Lancashire Archives; Liverpool Record Office; Merseyside Maritime Museum; Museum of Liverpool; Tate Liverpool; Victoria Gallery & Museum; Wallasey Historical Society; Williamson Art Gallery; Wirral Archives
Wax-print textile trade	MMU Special Collections; The Whitworth

CREDITS

Survey and original records: Paul Robinson, postdoctoral researcher, Liverpool School of Architecture, 2022. Project lead: Iain Jackson. Funded by the University of Liverpool. Atlas and guide edition prepared in 2026 from the survey workbooks, finding aids and short paper. An interactive version of this guide, with map, grid, network and searchable gazetteer, accompanies it online.