

“THE GREAT MIGRATION” - FROM NORTHERN EUROPE TO AMERICA THROUGH THE PORT OF HULL 1848 – 1924

You can find out Hull Old Town Docks & Railways in another article in ‘Want to know more’ section.

But from the 1840’s the docks provided a questionable ‘benefit’ to the City. It became the northern centre for mass migration from Eastern Europe to North America.

Perhaps we might want to consider life in Hull in the 1840’s. In the summer of 1849 death stalked every street of Hull, while gravediggers worked around the clock and long queues formed at the cemetery gates as families tried to mourn their dead.

July, August and September of that year saw a cholera epidemic which, eventually, claiming more than 1,860 lives.

It was to this backdrop that the sad and bedraggled migrants arrived in Hull from the continent, so it’s little wonder that the local citizens were fearful of this new threat of imported disease. For that reason the immigrants were marched somewhat unceremoniously up the side of the Marina (then Humber Dock) and across what is now the A63, and into the town. Many of them were then taken to the

For over 70 years Hull played a crucial part in the movement of European immigrants to America.

Two Hull companies were at the forefront of this mass movement:

John Good and Sons and **The Wilson Line** (later to become The Ellerman Wilson Line).

In the 1800’s these shipping lines brought considerable wealth to Hull and added to the culture of the city, as thousands of migrants made their way through the port.

Both these companies played an important and vital part in what was to become known as ‘The Great Migration’ and incidentally, both still operate in Hull to this day

The Wilson Shipping Co

Thomas Wilson was born in the Drypool area of Hull in 1792. He started up a steamship business in 1820 with various partners and eventually founded Thomas Wilson Son & Co in about 1841.

The line eventually became the largest privately owned steamship company in the world. Based in Hull, in 1843 its main trade was carrying passengers and cargo to and from Scandinavia and the Baltic States. By 1858 it more or less monopolised the route and brought many thousands of immigrants to Hull, on their journey to America.

John Good and Sons

John Good was born in Scarborough in 1801. In 1833, after a chequered life, much of it at sea, John founded his company: John Good and Co.

He forged vital links between Scandinavia and Hull, and as agents for two Finnish shipping lines trading through the port, the company looked after the needs of over 300,000 emigrants that passed through Hull between 1891 and 1915.

This Blue Plaque commemorating the part John Good and Sons played in the Great Migration can be seen on the wall of the Maritime Buildings in Alfred Gelder Street

Hull was not initially prepared for such an enormous number of emigrants. Lodging houses and railway stations became overcrowded and posed a very serious health risk to the local population.

These were the days before quarantine and inoculations, and the rapid spread of disease was an ever present danger.



After disembarking at the Humber Dock, many emigrants were taken to the **Lazarus Hotel** in Posterngate, off Trinity Square.



This blue plaque commemorating the historical significance of this time in Hull's history can be seen on the wall of the building where the Lazarus Hotel once stood

The next stage in the brave and hazardous journey of these pioneers was to the Paragon Railway Station, where they were taken through the formalities and hastily put on to trains, bound usually for Liverpool and the ocean liners taking them onward to America and a new life.

After a further cholera outbreak in Hull in 1866, preventative measures were put firmly in place. The ships carrying the emigrants were no longer allowed into the Humber Dock, but were transported from the Victoria Dock which was further out of the city, and then by rail to Paragon Station, thus eliminating the need for them to pass through the city on foot.

Victoria Dock was the first Hull Dock to be built east of the River Hull, it was opened in 1850

Travellers were required to remain on board the steamers until their trains were ready to depart from the specially designated platform 1.

In 1871 a waiting room was built here which had facilities for the emigrants to meet the ticket agents, wash and take shelter.

By 1881 numbers were so great that the station doubled the size of its waiting room, and provided separate facilities for women and children.



This building can still be seen today, on the platform to the far left as you enter the station. It now houses a public house - The Tigers Lair, so called after the Hull City Football Club's nickname 'The Tigers'. A far cry from its original use, but nonetheless it still stands as a testament to all those brave souls who passed through Hull to begin their lives in the New World.

By 1914, due to the onset of World War One, immigration through the port of Hull had slowed down drastically, and it finally finished in 1924 when America introduced a law ending European migration

For more than seventy years over five million migrants flowed into Britain, with approximately 60% of them passing through Hull: It is a significant and important part of our city's history.