

The Excelsior Manuscript Magazine



The Excelsior Manuscript Magazine, [title page], No. 7, January 1862 (Liverpool Records Office, H050 EXC). Permission to reproduce this photograph has kindly been granted by the Liverpool Records Office.

Overview

There are nine extant issues of the manuscript magazine that was produced by this mutual improvement society. The title was taken from the poem, 'Excelsior', written in 1841 by the American poet, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and the poem's message of struggling towards a righteous, distant goal was used as the group's own precept. We do not know very much about the group itself as there are no other (known) records. Most likely, the society was associated with a local church in Liverpool as many of the contributions discuss religion and/or the Bible (e.g. a serial essay entitled, 'Praising God, No. 2'), and it was firmly pro-temperance.

We do know that it was a fairly small society: there are 17 members listed in an (undated) magazine circulation list. It was a mixed-gender group, with 13 men and four unmarried women. The members lived in and around the Toxteth area of the city. (For more information about this area, see '[History of Toxteth](#)' on the [Historic Liverpool](#) website.) One of the women, however, lived in London.

Each issue of *The Excelsior* is approximately 100 pages with roughly 20 contributions apiece, and contain a mixture of prose and poetry, articles and essays, a couple of short musical scores, with a small number of original illustrations (mostly pen-and-ink, to which should be added the detailed artwork on the covers on Nos. 7, 8 and 10).

There are a couple of unique elements to this magazine. First, the contributors seemed to particularly like writing serials, both non-fiction and fictional pieces, with pieces commonly running through most of the issues. Second, the members appear to have taken the 'improving' element to heart, as beginning in the sixth issue, a 'List of Errors in Spelling' is added to the back, which ran up to five pages in issue No. 10. Finally, whilst not including a separate section for readers' 'criticisms' *per se*, the Editor none-the-less allowed readers to write in to him with their remarks and he would include them in the next issue, a practice that readers took to with particular enthusiasm, or rather with vehemence; many of these are long letters outlining in detail the particular merits — and by no means neglecting the demerits — of the contributions.

Name of Club, Society or Group That Produced the Magazine

(currently unknown)

Date of Existence

1860?-1862?

Date of Magazine

No. 1, 1 October 1860; No. 2, 1 November 1860; No. 3, [no date given], December 1860; [No. 4], January and February 1861; No. 5, March & April 1861; No. 6, 1 December 1861; No. 7, January 1862; No. 8, February 1862; [No. 9 no longer extant?]; No. 10, April 1862

Number of Issues

Manuscript/Published Magazine

Manuscript

Contents and Contributions

Annotations; Art/Illustrations (original); Article s(non-fiction); Circulation List; Correspondence column; Editorials; Essays; Extracts (previously published works); Fiction/Narratives; Hymn; Letters to Editor; Lists of spelling errors; Music; Newspaper cutting; Poems (original); Poems (republished material); Poems (w/ original illustrations); Prefaces; Puzzle; Readers' Criticisms; Serial articles/stories; Tables of Contents; Title pages

Repository

Liverpool Record Office, Central Library

Reference

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