# CHANGING PROVISION FOR SICK CHILDREN AND DISEASES IN CHILDHOOD IN LIVERPOOL SINCE 1850

## Introduction

"The standard histories of nursing barely mention this branch of Victorian nursing": so cautioned Malcolm Newby writing about the lack of knowledge of chilren's hospital nursing.(1) The closures and the amalgamations of so many separate institutions for sick children in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the 'imperialism' of general nursing(2) and the difficulties of locating primary data have combined to make children's hospital nursing a dark area of history. This paper, part of a larger study of the education and training of sick children's nurses,(3) looks at the developing provision of hospital care for sick children in a major provincial city, Liverpool, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

## The Royal Liverpool Children's Hospital

The Infirmary for Children at Liverpool was originally established as a dispensary for children and later as a hospital for children largely by the efforts of Mr Alfred Stephens: "Notwithstanding that many charitable institutions exist having for their object the providing of medical assistance for the poorer classes, it was a matter of some astonishment to Mr Alfred Stephens, Surgeon, that there was not one exclusively devoted to infantile diseases, and when he considered to what a variety of disorders children were subject it appeared evident that such an institution must be of incalculable benefit to the children of the poor, especially in such a densely populated town as Liverpool".(4)

On 28 January 1851 a meeting of interested people unanimously agreed that the projected institution should be established forthwith. A small private house in Upper Hill Street, in the centre of Liverpool, was acquired, and "The Institution for the Diseases of Children" opened its doors as a dispensary early in 1851.(5) Liverpool became only the third town in Britain to open a dispensary for children (London 1769 and Manchester 1829). New premises at 46 George Street were occupied in 1854 and the name was changed to the "Infirmary for Children". On 14 January 1856 in-patients were admitted, a resident house surgeon was appointed and the requisite attendant nurses employed. (It was considered that eight nurses, viz six day nurses and two night nurses, would be sufficient.)(6) The Infirmary transferred to a house at 58 Hope Street later in 1856 and in April 1866 another site in Myrtle Street was acquired. The foundation stone for this building was laid by the Duke of Edinburgh on 23 June 1866. That building could not meet the standards of the twentieth century and was demolished. A new infirmary, built on the same site, was opened in 1907.(7)

Between 1801 and 1851 the population of Liverpool had increased by nearly four times (77,653 in 1801). According to Mr Stephens:

> "... nearly half of them living in the narrow cul-de-sac courts and cellars which had been rapidly created to give shelter from the weather but with little in the way of water supply, sewage