

“Old 42”: The British and European Mission Headquarters in Liverpool, England, 1855–1904

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“Home is where the heart is,” as the saying goes. However, for the hundreds of Mormon missionaries who were part of the British and European Missions in the latter part of the nineteenth century, it was not difficult to distinguish an actual home that they could look upon as their “home away from home.” Since missionaries were temporary residents, renting rooms or small apartments in the cities and towns where they labored, the “home” they generally referred to during their months and years of missionary service was the mission headquarters. From 1855 to 1904, a period of nearly fifty years, the mission home and office located at 42 Islington Road in Liverpool, England, was their home. In addition, “Old 42” served as the headquarters of the Church in Great Britain and Europe, a publishing house, and a Mormon immigration center.

Missionary work in Great Britain began in 1837 in Preston and the surrounding Lancashire and Westmoreland countryside. Heber C. Kimball presided over the mission, assisted by fellow apostle Orson Hyde. When the two apostles left to return to America in April 1838, Joseph Fielding, who had accompanied Kimball and Hyde, remained to head up the mission. During the first three years of the mission no official mission office or headquarters existed. It was not until the arrival of Brigham Young and seven other members of the Twelve that an actual mission office was arranged for. In May 1841, within just a few weeks after his arrival, Young established the mission office in Manchester. Manchester remained the mission headquarters until early in

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1842, when the tasks associated with increased Mormon immigration led Parley P. Pratt, who succeeded Young, to move the office to Liverpool, the exit port for the Saints leaving to go to the United States.¹

During the next five years, leaders moved the mission headquarters to six different locations, finally settling at 15 Wilton Street, until March 1855, when Franklin D. Richards rented a more commodious building at 36 Islington. An article in the *Millennial Star* noted, “Our new office and residence are situated about three minutes’ walk from our present address . . . [and includes] space which will enable us to despatch our publishing and emigration business with more pleasure to ourselves, and we trust, with more profit to the Church at large.”² No one could have foreseen that this rented building would serve for almost half a century as the Latter-day Saint European mission headquarters.

Situated on the corner of Islington Road and Norton Street, the four-storied, ten-room brick building stood at the end of a row of office buildings built in the late seventeenth or early eighteenth centuries. It was located about two miles from Liverpool’s harbor and not far from the commercial heart of the city. The property also included an outdoor yard almost as large as the building itself. After 1861, the lot included a small building which housed the mission’s printing press and a water closet.

On April 18, 1856, after returning from seeing the emigrants off to the United States on the *S. Curling*, President Franklin D. Richards found to his surprise that the cabbie had dropped him off at the wrong address, even though he had very distinctly told the driver 36 Islington. In actuality, the cabbie had let him out at the right address, and Richards walked a short distance back to the office. Later in a letter to the missionaries he wrote, “After endeavouring to excuse what appeared to us his [the driver’s] stupidity, we were reminded again how easy it is for a well-meaning person to be mistaken; for sure enough, while we were absent, some one, it is said the Town Council, had caused the number on our door to be changed from 36 to 42.” Thus the endearing address to those missionaries became 42 Islington and not 36 Islington.³

Only a few written descriptions of the building exist, along with a few photographs and a sketch of the floor plan. The sketch was discovered tucked away at the end of the 1846 British Mission manuscript history, archived in the LDS Church History Library. The floor plan shows every room and designates what each room was used for with the exception of the basement. The plans show three basement rooms (two of them are quite small), accessed by a staircase and a hall. This floor must have included the kitchen and dining area. The first floor had a fifteen by seventeen-foot business office on the north side. The printing office on the south side was somewhat larger, with a small alcove on the south end of the room. Stairs led down and out into the yard

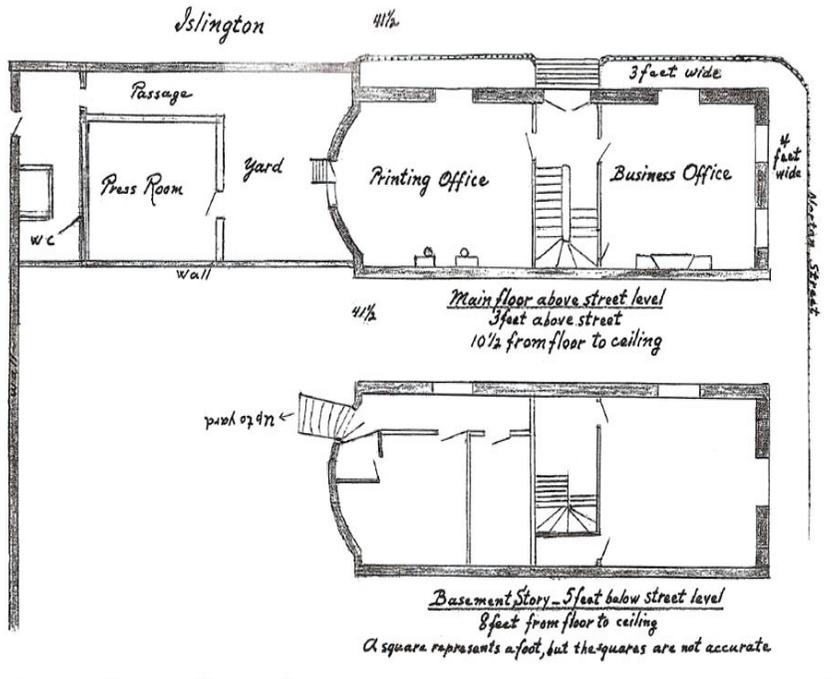


Figure 1. Floor plan of the basement and first floors of 42 Islington, Liverpool, England, included in the British Mission manuscript history, date unknown, after 1861, LDS Church History Library.

from this floor and also up to the yard from the basement floor (see Figure 1). The president's room and editor's room were on the second floor. The third floor had a large sleeping room directly above the president's room and two smaller rooms on the other side. The floors intersected, with stairs winding up to the top floor (see Figure 2). With ten rooms, the building was large enough for business to be transacted, and to provide sleeping quarters for most people in the house.

Beginning in 1861, the printing office and press room probably saw the most amount of activity in the building. Before that time, the printing of the *Millennial Star* and *Journal of Discourses* was contracted out to a printer, but in 1861 the Church purchased its own press and installed it in a small building located in the yard where the printing was done in-house. Over forty volumes of the *Star* and nineteen volumes of the *Journal of Discourses* (volumes 8–26) were printed at “Old 42.” The sketch of the floor plan shows the press room, indicating it must have been drawn by the artist sometime after 1861.

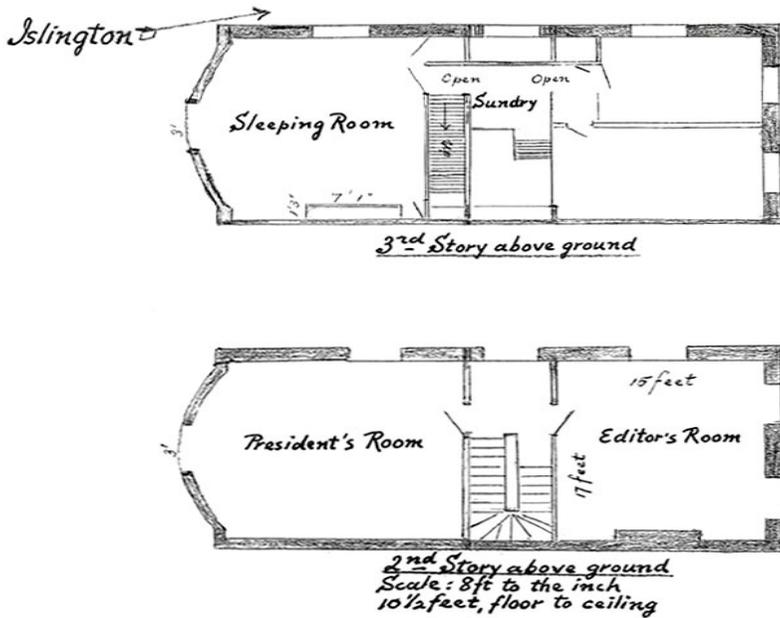


Figure 2. Floor plan of the second and third floors of 42 Islington, Liverpool, England, included in the British Mission manuscript history, date unknown, after 1861, LDS Church History Library.

On December 4, 1867, George F. Gibbs, a twenty-one-year-old English clerk and employee of the mission, wrote a description of mission headquarters in the back of Franklin D. Richards's letterpress copybook, another improbable place to find a description of this building. The words on the page are fading and some are almost illegible. A portion of his description, dated December 4, 1867, is as follows:

The premises occupied by the Latter Day Saints as Printing, Publishing and Emigration office, 42 Islington, Liverpool, England is situated eighteen feet on Norton Street and forty-two feet, front on Islington Road with thirty-six feet back-yard fronting on the same road. It is a common plane brick building with four stories and an attic.

The basement about half below and half above the surface of the street consists of one room used as kitchen and dinning rooms, and storeroom and a washroom. There is a hall six feet wide between the kitchen and store room. From this hall a door leads into the coal hole under the street sidewalk and the stair way leading to the first floor. There is a four feet passage leading from the kitchen past the store and wash room up six stone steps into the back-yard. In this yard is a boiler for generating steam to drive a 1 3/4 horse power engine which works one of Ulverstonians printing presses (No 126), capable of making 1000 impressions an hour.⁴ This machine does the print-

ing of the *Millennial Star* and *Journal of Discourses*, it is used one or two days each week. The machine and engine is in a small shanty built house, back of which is a privy and ashpit. A door leads from this yard through a brick wall into the street. There is also a door leading into the printing office.

The front or main entrance is from Islington Road up six stone steps through a double paneled door into a hall six feet wide. Before us the stairway leading to the upper floors; to the left of this is the stairway leading down to the basement. Turning to the left through a door we find ourselves in the office where the general business is done and all the accounts and account-books of the mission are kept, also bound books of the church for sale. Here the "Stars" and "Journals" are put up in packages for transmission abroad and to the various book-agents in the mission. C. W. Penrose and W. B. Preston each have a desk in this office.

On the right of the hall is the compositors room where all the type-setting for the "Star" and "Journal" is done, here also they are pressed and folded.

From the hall we ascend a winding stairway to the second floor. Turning to the right we enter into the upper and chief office, occupied by the President of the mission. This room is lighted by two large windows facing Norton Street.

On the left of the upper hall is another large room now used as a sleeping apartment, it is lighted by two large windows, one facing Islington the other the backyard.

From the hall on the first floor we ascend the stairway to the second floor, in front is a large closet with shelves in which are stored books, papers, etc., to the right is two small rooms, one used as bedroom by the house-keeper, the other as store-room for books, papers, etc. On the left of the stairway is a large bedroom. Up another short flight of stairs we come to the attick rooms, one on each side of the large skylight window, which is used for ventilation as well as to light up the hall and the stairway. All of the rooms except the attick have fire places with iron grates in which coal is used for fuel.

The house is covered with slate, much as you would use shingles. The outer walls are made of bricks, 14 inches thick, the inner walls are only 4½ inches thick. The floors are very shaky and the walls have cracked badly on both sides. The rooms are all papered on the sides and plastered over head. Water is brought into the basement through lead pipes.⁵

Gibbs's description notes a coal hole used for storing coal in order to heat the structure, which was not in the original plans. Significantly, the placement of the rooms in the basement is the poorest part of Gibbs' elucidation. A careful reading indicates that he puts the kitchen and dining room on the north side with a washroom and storeroom on the south side. He does not mention any solid wall in the basement, so perhaps the artist placed it there by mistake. He provides other details, such as the number of steps from the street to the front door and also the number of steps from the basement to the yard. The only unheated rooms were in the attic. The room on the south side of the second floor in the floor plan was labeled the president's room. By Gibbs's day the president had changed his office to the north side facing Islington Road and Norton Street, but the room on the south side was a bedroom, which he calls a "sleeping apartment."

After describing the physical structure and layout of 42 Islington, Gibbs lists the people who worked there. He writes, "It may also be interesting to give a brief sketch of the positions of those engaged in the different departments of business transacted on the premises above described." He then lists the names and the duties of the eleven people who worked at the office, beginning with Franklin D. Richards (president of the mission), Charles W. Penrose ("subeditor" of the *Millennial Star*), and William B. Preston (general business manager); each of whom were from the United States. The two principal clerks were George F. Gibbs and August W. Carlson. Gibbs was also an employee, but Carlson was a missionary. Joseph Quinney, eighteen years old, was a general office boy. William H. Davis was the chief compositor for the *Star*, assisted by Edward Flannigan, who also assisted in setting the type. William Ince assisted the others at the press. Fifteen-year-old John Farrington was the "printer's devil" and general shop boy who stoked the fire in the printing office." Mary Pennington was the cook and general housekeeper.⁶

Thirty-six-year-old William B. Preston⁷ penned a detailed description of 42 Islington in a letter written to his wife in Logan, Utah. Preston, bishop of the Logan First Ward, arrived in the British Mission in August 1865. Daniel H. Wells, his mission president, assigned him to preside over the New Castle, Tyne, and Durham Conferences. In January 1867, he began to clerk in the mission home in Liverpool, eventually becoming the office manager. His letter to his wife reads as follows:

42 Islington Lpool
 Jany 18th 1867
 Mrs. Wm B. Preston

My dear-dear wife—Once again I am seated to pen a few lines to you scarcely knowing what to write not knowing what would be most interesting. I know that if I was some where else in a new place and could describe it to you it would interest you but here I am literally (almost) pen[n]ed up here in this old dingy, rickety, smoky looking, inside and out-shaky floors and warped doorframes from the house settling one sided, the wall cracked from top to bottom at one end, three storys high, nine inch brick walls, papered inside with a rusty looking paper and every hole (an there are lots of them all over the house) crammed with old papers, books, old "Stars" and "Journals," profiles. Wood and steel engravings of various elders who once figured here in the Balmy days of this mission when money was plenty, tracts without number of all sorts from various authors such as P. P. Pratt, Orson Pratt, Jn. Taylor, Orson Spencer, Wm. Gibson, Lorenzo Snow, O. Hyde and many other authors of less magnitude, all the above mentioned the collection of 28 years are to be found in this old 42 Islington and another such a collection could not be found in a days ride in any country for I have not told you of the compositors room, filled with forms of all kinds of type and all the paraphanalua of material necessary to carry on the printing department to say nothing of the [word unclear] room attached, in which is the printing machine to print the *Star* and *Journal* on with the engine and of course the boiler to create the steam.

Besides a Cellar Kitchen with its rock on “flagstone” floor, a stable, two “kinds of cupboards, a regular English coal grate with an Iron square over (to bake bread or roast meat in) at the side about 14 inches square around which the fire circulates by regulating the damper, then there is the wash room on the other side of the hall (up which stair-way leads). This room has also a “flag stone” floor with a water tap to get water from, a fire place and I don’t want to make you blush, but there is in one corner also a “Necessary” or “privy”—especially for the convenience of the female portion of the family. This place, however is kept very clean and tidy it being supplied with a water spout that can be turned on when wanted to carry off the debris into the sewers, of which the town is abundantly supplied, besides there is a low door from this Cellar Hall that leads into the Coal room that extends under the side walk into the street. There is a round hole in one of the side walk stones through which the coal is put into this hall or room, Said hole is covered with an Iron grating fastened on the inside except when wanted to be opened.

The room in which I usually sit is called the lower office where all the clerking is done, and accounts are kept, also books for sale of our own publications. This room is filled with two large desks four book cases and shelves to keep book and papers in. Its hung around with pictures of various celebrities who once figured in this mission. The room over this is The Editors office. This contains but little except a desk a few shelves to hold books and papers. It supports a carpet that is getting very much worn—and the same floor on the other side of the hall is our bed room. It also has a little carpet, a bureau and two chairs, wash stand, various old coats, pants are hung around the wall, and a very good large bed for us to sleep on—there are two other rooms above, which are occupied by the office boys—clerks—and the cook. The Garrets are as before stated piled up with old Stars and c. [?] It’s a large-rickety dirty old house. Yet it answers our purposes very well and costs much less rent than a more stylish looking house. I don’t think I ever told you what sort of house we inhabited before. So I hope it will not be uninteresting to you. This class of houses are plentiful, they are built to rent. Put up in the cheapest manner and if it were not that they propped against one another, they would not stand.⁸

Preston’s description of the mission home includes words like *rickety*, *smoky*, *shaky*, and *warped*, expressions that eluded Gibbs and suggest that the building should have been demolished years earlier. Yet in his mind it still served a useful purpose for the mission. His description includes details about the bedroom across the hall from the editor’s room, presumably the room that he occupied, since he writes that it is “our bedroom.” He records that the bedroom on the third floor was used by the office boys and clerks. Perhaps Gibbs slept in that room. Preston embarrassingly mentions a women’s privy located in the basement floor of the house, but he overlooks the one located in the yard. Both Gibbs and Preston provide important and significant descriptions of “Old 42,” but Preston provides adjectives that better describe the condition of the house and allow the reader to visualize it more completely. However, taken together, the writings of these two men provide the reader with an eyewitness view and genuine feel for the building.



Photograph 1. British and European Mission headquarters, 42 Islington, Liverpool, England, ca. 1885.

A few photographic images of 42 Islington have survived. Photograph 1 is taken from a position across the street, and from an elevated position, probably a second-story window of another building. A group of six men (one is in the shadows and is very dim) are positioned on the steps of the front entrance to the mission home. Another individual rests on his elbows in the window to their right. People can be seen in the upper two windows but not distinctly enough to see their faces. Behind the wall of advertising signs is the lot or yard adjacent to the mission home.

In Photograph 2 the position of the photographer has changed. Two or three men have exchanged places on the steps, and additional individuals appear in the windows. The photographer has attracted some attention, and several local men pose for the photograph while leaning against the railing. In the far left of the photograph, several “ghostly” pedestrian figures can be seen passing by as they make their way across the street. The persons appear blurred due to the timed exposure.

In Photograph 3 the photographer has shifted position again, this time exposing the corner of 42 Islington on Norton Street, and focusing on a couple with a baby standing outside on a second-story window balcony, with the men



Photograph 2. British and European Mission headquarters, 42 Islington, Liverpool, England, ca. 1885.

on the steps more in the background. Once again, some locals, attracted by the photographer, and have stopped to be in the picture.

On all three of these images the sign “LATTER-DAY SAINTS MILLENNIAL STAR OFFICE” can be seen protruding from the corner of the building. The sign is double-sided, so the wording can be read from both Norton Street and Islington. The names of the roads, “Islington” and “Norton Street,” are also attached to the mission home in a prominent place. In all the images, 42 Islington shows a brick facade with a white-brick painted basement. The three photos were each taken around 1885 when Daniel H. Wells was the mission president. He is probably the elderly white-bearded man pictured in each of the photographs.

“Old 42” remained the mission headquarter until Heber J. Grant arrived as mission president in 1904. The April 28, 1904, *Millennial Star* announced that: “The current number of the *Millennial Star* is the last that will be edited at old 42 Islington. For half a century, lacking but a few months, ‘42’ has been the old world mission home of Elders and Saints, and the sacred memories that are connected with the historic building will be awakened in tens of thousands of hearts, the wide world over, when they realize that the dear old



Photograph 3. British and European Mission headquarters, 42 Islington, Liverpool, England, ca. 1885.



Photograph 4. Probable site of the British and European Mission headquarters, now part of the intersection of Norton and Islington Streets, Liverpool, England, 2004. Photograph by Ronald G. Watt.

place is, for us, a thing of the past.” The writer then affectionately bids a fond goodbye:

From the “prayer room” [probably the president’s room or the editor’s room] of “42” has every Elder who, for fifty years, has labored in great Britain or on the continent of Europe been sent forth to his work with the counsel and blessing of the servants of the Lord, and in the same room have they received parting instructions and a blessing for their faithfulness ere they set sail homeward, Here, too, have the Saints assembled, time and time again, preparatory to gathering with the people of God in the distant valleys of Deseret. These little incidents of life are treasured up in the hearts of those who have helped to make the history of this mission, no matter how small or apparently insignificant the part that they have taken. To them the mere mention “42” will bring a sense of joy and happiness—a testimony of duty done, a knowledge of approbation won. What matter then if the old home passes into other hands, and is devoted into other purposes? . . .

It has served its period of usefulness. The work accomplished beneath its roof is recorded in books that time cannot destroy, and we leave it with thankful hearts for the many blessings which the Lord has blessed His Church . . . and for the happy memories that, in the minds of the Saints, will always be associated with 42 Islington.⁹

It is not known why Heber J. Grant decided to relocate the mission offices. He probably felt his family and the mission needed something newer and more accommodating. On May 1, 1904, the mission moved to a two-story mansion located at 10 Holly Road.¹⁰ The building looked more the part of a home, complete with trees and shrubs, and a beautiful entrance-way fronted by a fence wall. However, on January 1, 1907, the mission home and offices were relocated again, this time to the “Durham House,” located at 295 Edge Lane in Liverpool. Charles W. Penrose, First Counselor in the First Presidency, dedicated the building.¹¹ Durham House remained the mission headquarters until 1933, when the Church moved the headquarters to London.

Lydia D. Alder, who had strong ties to the old mission headquarters, put to verse her feelings about “Old 42”:

Farewell to Forty-Two

O Forty two, old Forty two
 What mem’ries e’er will cling round you?
 Of Liverpool and days of Yore
 When first the Gospel reached that shore.

Historic thou wilt ever be
 By many loved far o’er the sea
 Oft missionaries came and went
 With Gospel tidings they were sent.

To all the world a change must come,
 The race of life some day be run;
 And thou home of the past art done
 No L.D.S. resides there now

Old crumbling walls and creaking floor.
 Their echoes we will hear no more;
 Two Ninety Five Edge Lane the new
 With trees and shrubs bursts in our view.

To lands afar the tidings sing,
 "Prepare, prepare for Christ the King!"
 In raiment fair shall Zion shine,
 O'er spread by glorious love divine.¹²

In 2004, one of the authors, upon the request of a colleague, and having a deep curiosity in "Old 42," returned to the spot where the building once stood, but found only two broad streets intersecting at Islington and Norton, and a bus station where it once may have been. After looking at the roads closely and noticing the width of the two present-day streets, we determined that it probably was located in the middle of the present intersection of Islington Road and Norton Street and not on the lot behind (see Photograph 4). It is not known what happened to the building. Perhaps the structure was hit during the bombing raids of World War II, which demolished the building or damaged it to the point that it was no longer habitable. Or the city may have demolished it to make the streets wider.

Rented in the halcyon and sometimes turbulent days of the mission, "Old 42" saw some eventful years during nearly half a century it rendered service to the Church.

Notes

1. For a discussion on the 1837–1838, and 1839–1841 missions to Great Britain see James B. Allen, Ronald K. Esplin, and David J. Whittaker, *Men with a Mission, 1837–1841: The Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in the British Isles* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992).

2. "Removal of our Office," *Millennial Star* 17, no. 9 (March 3, 1855): 140.

3. "Our Address Changed," *Millennial Star* 18, no. 18 (May 3, 1856): 283. "Islington" was probably pronounced without the "s" and would sound like the word "isle." At least one diary entry has it as "Ilington." See Adolf Haag, Diary, March 15, 1892, LDS Church

History Library.

4. The Ulverstonian press, developed in the Great Britain in mid-nineteenth century, was an important machine in the history of the printing industry, It is thought that only fifty presses of this type were made. The Ulverstonian press was the first press to use a stationary cylinder and a moving bed, that is, the printing bed moves under the cylinder instead of the cylinder moving across the bed.

5. George F. Gibbs, Description of 42 Islington, in Franklin D. Richards, Letterpress Copybooks , 1860–1899, vol. 1, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

6. Gibbs, Description of 42 Islington.

7. For a historical treatment of William B. Preston, see Kenneth W. Godfrey, “William Bowker Preston: Pioneer, Colonizer, Civil Leader, Church Official, Husband, and Father,” *Mormon Historical Studies* 5, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 87–126.

8. William B. Preston to Harriet Thatcher Preston, January 18, 1867, Special Collections, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University, Logan, Utah.

9. “Vale, Islington!” *Millennial Star* 66, no. 18 (May 5, 1904): 283.

10. “Notice of Removal,” *Millennial Star* 66, no. 18 (May 5, 1904): 283.

11. See “European Mission Headquarters Dedicated,” *Millennial Star* 69, no. 14 (April 4, 1907): 222–23.

12. Lydia D. Alder, “Farewell to Forty-Two,” LDS Church History Library.