

The fall and rise of Liverpool docks



Liverpool docks were once filled with the sound of horses' hooves, the commotion of emigrants leaving for a new life and the din of stevedores loading heavy goods on to vessels bound for the Atlantic. Following a rapid decline in the 20th Century, it is now hoped the docks are witnessing a renaissance with the opening of a vast new container terminal.

The construction of a huge new deep-water shipping dock dubbed Liverpool2, which can cater for a new breed of giant container ships, is seen as a new start for the city.

It forms part of the new SuperPort project extending across the north-west of England, created to revive and boost the region's industry.

Liverpool's history is bound to the tides of transatlantic transportation: from the city that grew powerful and prosperous from the slave trade, to the mass migration of people seeking a better life in the new world and the age of luxury cruises.

As a gateway for mass emigration between 1830 and 1930, nine million people sailed from Liverpool, most bound for North America, Australia and New Zealand.

But when the trend dwindled after World War One and Cunard's luxury liner services moved to Southampton in 1919, the port's decline seemed assured.

Despite these setbacks Liverpool retained a cargo industry and earlier this month, the arrival of huge new cranes from China signalled a new chapter in the port's long history.

Bigger docks

Sarah Starkey, curator of maritime and slavery archives at the **Merseyside Maritime Museum**, said its new exhibition - On the Waterfront - which opens on 25 November, charts the port of Liverpool's changing economic fortunes down the centuries.

Because tankers are getting larger, Ms Starkey said Liverpool has "had to constantly build bigger docks and are still doing today".

She said Albert Dock, constructed in 1846, was outgrown by the ships using it within a few decades "although the warehouses remained profitable for years".

She said although Liverpool port's decline was "undeniable", large amounts of cargo were still moved in big container ships which were less labour-intensive.

Liverpool's super port

- The port's capacity will increase from 1.5 million containers a year to 2 million
- The Liverpool2 cranes will lift containers off and on to ships and allow vessels carrying up to 13,500 containers to call at the port
- The Mersey approach channel is being deepened to 16m (52ft) to accommodate the vast ships arriving from the newly widened Panama Canal
- Peel Ports has previously said 5,000 jobs will be created as a result of the expansion
- The port's current capacity is currently limited to ships with fewer than 3,500 containers
- At 90m (300ft), the Megamax cranes are taller than the city's famous Liver Building

The redevelopment of the Albert Dock in the 1980s was the brainchild of the then Secretary of State for the Environment, Michael Heseltine, who helped breathe new life into the rundown warehouses which are now an entertainment and shopping hub and home to the **Tate Liverpool** gallery.

Liverpool also saw the return of cruise liners, which traditionally sailed from Southampton, and its **leaders were engaged in a verbal spat.**