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# Albert Dock

*A jewel in Liverpool's crown*

It isn't all that long ago, that of all the British cities, Liverpool was being written off as a lost cause. With a declining port and mass exodus of industry and commerce, it was as though the city's very life blood was slowly draining away down the Mersey.

Now the tide has turned, and Liverpool has blossomed into one of Britain's premier locations, proving to be a magnet for tourists.

In a far sighted partnership between city officials and the private sector, vast warehouses that once stood guard over silent docks, have been restored to their former glory. Within their cavernous walls have been created shops, showrooms, restaurants and wine bars. Offices, museums, an art gallery and luxury apartments.

The result is the re-birth of a dying city, where once again there is hustle and bustle. Out of a decaying eyesore has risen a vibrant reminder of Liverpool's charismatic Victorian heritage, and somewhat ironically, a prestige business and commercial location.

Liverpool stood at the forefront of trade in the Victorian era, and nowhere was this more in evidence than at Albert Dock, where evocative square rigged sailing ships were constantly gliding across no less than seven acres of enclosed water.

Officially opened in 1846 by the then Prince Albert, amid great celebrations, Albert Dock was the centre of the flourishing import/export trade. Designed by former stonemason Jesse Hartley, the complex was a masterpiece of brilliant Victorian planning, forming secure warehousing of a unique fireproof construction for all manner of goods. Cotton was imported at the rate of 400,000 tons per year, whilst wool, sugar, grain and tobacco also featured highly. Coal and salt formed the basis of exports, along with garments and goods made from the cotton and wool.

And there were the emigrants too, some seeking a new life in America, while convicts were deported to Australia.

But times change and as the sailing ships gradually





gave way to the faster and more reliable steamships, so the relatively shallow Albert Dock also fell into decline. It closed in 1972.

Against this background, a massively ambitious project to rejuvenate the waterfront area was initiated by enlightened planners. Successful to the extreme, close on three million visitors now through the dock each year, like a colourful tide flowing through the veins of a lifeless corpse and once again bringing life

Approaching the dock today, one is indeed presented with an impressive panorama. Externally, the buildings have been painstakingly restored to their former glory, whilst inside they have been adapted to their new use with amazing skill. A whole new village of Victorian style shops and restaurants has been created so successfully, that were Prince Albert and his Queen to return, surely they would feel at home.

And so they might, for no expense has been spared, the commitment to accuracy being total.

It is the integration of modern business into virtual time warp accommodation, that has breathed life into what could have been a rather stagnant exhibit. Your first sight will be of the Granada Television News Headquarters. Originally the Dock Traffic Office, the building is externally original. But inside, this is now



the centre of worldwide newsgathering operations for Granada, with only the most up to date, high-tech systems installed, all computer linked to London and Manchester. Of rich red brick, and with an imposing pillared portico, it majestically guards the secrets about to unfold, as you start to explore this flashback to times gone by.

Opened progressively over several years, and beginning little over a decade from the former 'final' closure, the five impressive blocks around the dock

form a natural route for you to explore.

Edward Pavilion, one of the first to be completed, is also the first you will enter after leaving the news centre. Here you will wander through brick arches, browse through the period style shops, and wander onto the dock frontage, where steps lead down to the boat plying to and fro. Perhaps you might visit the basement wine bar, quietly unaware that modern business is being carried on in the newly created offices above.



And so the illusion continues as you wander through Hartley's warehouses, now re-named as Pavilions. Edward, Atlantic, Britannia, and finally to the newly opened Tate Gallery.

A jewel in Liverpool's crown, the gallery is the result of sponsorship from major businesses, both local and national, but with a common faith in the resurgence of the region. Set to become one of the country's major tourist attractions, the Tate opened in 1988 with a full prog-





ramme of shows planned, all topped off with a major exhibition each year.

But what is in a name?

Many things for many people of course, but for most, the very word 'museum' conjures up drab surroundings and boredom.

Quite the opposite in fact of what you will find in the Liverpool Maritime Museum. When the first phase of the Albert Dock development opened, the museum was housed in a building of some 140,000 sq ft. and even at that early stage it was impressive. Forming the fourth side of the dock, the huge building has many surprises in store.

You will walk right out onto the dockside where cargo is stacked up, waiting for a tall masted sailing ship to carry it on the next stage of its journey. Move up close, walk in among the

sacks piled high, touch the machinery that will lift them skyward, before slowly winching them down into the ship's hold. For make no mistake, the atmosphere will grip you like the ebb tide, the twentieth century being left behind as you become immersed in Victoriana.

You will find the same frighteningly realistic presentation employed throughout the many floors of this vast building. From basement to roof, the place is filled with imaginative displays which seem to capture the spirit and transport one back into time gone by.

Walk through a re-creation of an emigrant ship and you will not be the first to have directed a question at one of the seated passengers, so real do they appear.

Yet good as it was, and large as it was, there was

even more planned, so that now the museum has spread across the adjacent Canning Dock into the Pilotage Building which has become the new Ocean Gallery. Next to this you will find the boat hall with wooden craft of all ages, some in process of restoration. You will be allowed to wander just wherever the fancy takes you. Along the quayside, in and around the cargo, alongside the dry docks. Take your time, for there is plenty to see.

Climb up on board the old Liverpool Pilot Cutter 'Edmund Gardner', inspect each deck level, the dining, sleeping, and working environs. Soak up the atmosphere and leave with the adrenalin pumping.

For sure there is too much to see in one visit. You still have not been through the Piermaster's house. Up the quaint staircase and through the bedrooms. Back down into the kitchen and living rooms where once again the coal fires burn, just as they did when Prince Albert was here.

You have not been

through to the Cooperage, or to the Dock Office, seen the floating exhibits on Canning or Albert Dock, nor have you taken a quayside tour or a dock boat trip.

As a tourist attraction, Albert Dock Village, and the Maritime Museum of course, is an experience to savour. The learning process was never like this before.

As a business enterprise it is just as successful with commercial prosperity returning to the region and business' clamouring for the newly created prestige sites. Even a residential sector has been provided, with the Colonnades luxury executive apartments rising out of the dereliction of yet another of Hartley's warehouses.

Out of decline has come forth the uprising. Hitherto redundant buildings standing rejected and forlorn, have given birth to resurgence on an unprecedented scale. Industry and commerce are returning, and so are the tourists. Returning to a once proud city that is proud again. Proud to welcome you to her heritage.

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