

HISTORICAL INFORMATION FOR ROPEWALKS WEBSITE

About Ropewalks

The Ropewalks area is located within Liverpool's Riverside Ward to the South of the City Centre. The land rises gently from the Liverpool 1 development at Hanover Street up towards Berry Street and Liverpool's China Town along roads that have taken their form from the 'roperies' that were founded to service the shipping industry following the creation of the world's first commercial 'Wet-Dock', designed by Thomas Steers, on land reclaimed from the former Pool in 1715.

'Ropewalks' is synonymous with the Duke Street Conservation Area, Liverpool's Georgian Merchant's Quarter. Conservation area designation in 1988 has enabled Liverpool City Council to protect this area of the city that has its origins in the early 18th Century growth of Liverpool associated with Britain's expansion as a colonial trading power and the early period of the industrial revolution.

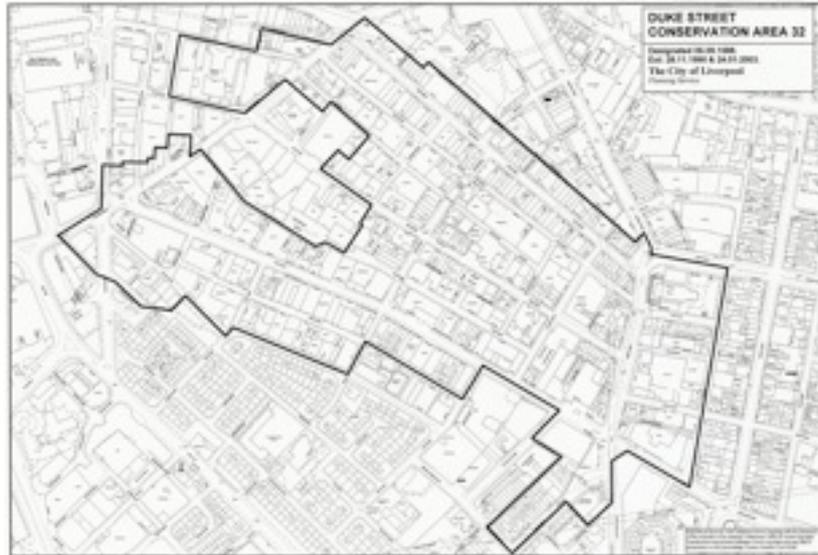
By the mid nineteenth century the 'Old Dock' had been reclaimed and the focus of the city's growth had moved elsewhere. As a result the townscape of Ropewalks is distinct from the shire counties and fields that preceded the construction of the 'Old Dock' and the Victorian development within Liverpool that post-date it. The area's international importance has warranted inclusion in the UNESCO Liverpool - Maritime Mercantile City World Heritage Site (area 6 - "Lower Duke Street").

Ropewalks today contains a mixture of late 18th and early 19th century merchants houses, counting houses and warehouses (early merchant's dwellings often physically linked with their warehouses, reflecting a dual residential and commercial function), along with later 19th century and early 20th century low-grade commercial and industrial adaptation and redevelopment. The area encompasses one of the City's major retail streets in the form of Bold Street, is home to a number of businesses in the creative industries, has a flourishing nightlife and includes Liverpool's vibrant China-town that developed in the area from the 1820s.

There are currently 102 individual listed buildings within Ropewalks.

Over the last 15 years there have been new developments for mixed-use and apartment buildings; a multi-million pound film and creative technology centre (FACT) and grant aided schemes to restore architectural features and bring historic floorspace back into use as shops, offices, hotel and living accommodation.

Much of the warehousing within Ropewalks has been brought back into use through the Lower Duke Street Townscape Heritage Initiative (1998-2001) and is now inhabited through mixed uses of apartments, offices and restaurants. The Liverpool: World Heritage Site THI (2005 - Present) is in the process of bringing back into use many of the buildings that are most 'at risk' within Ropewalks.



Map of the Duke Street Conservation Area Boundary: Liverpool City Council

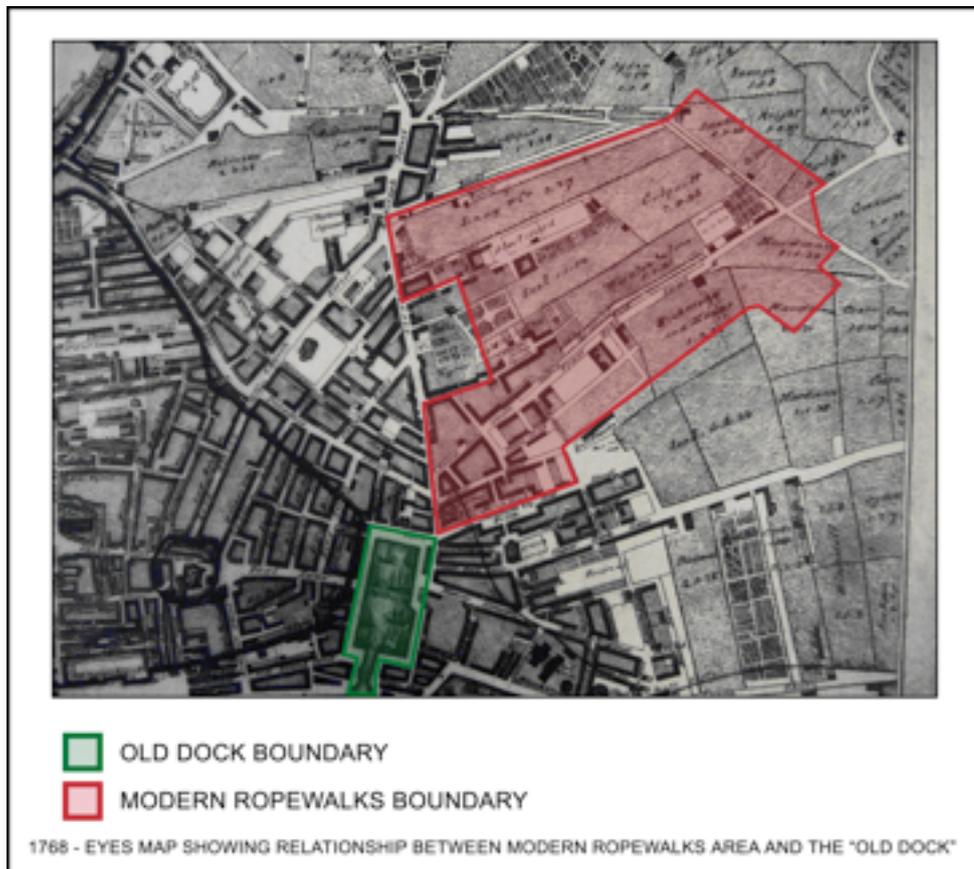


Map of the Ropewalks Area Boundary: Ropewalks SPD

18th Century

At the beginning of the 18th Century, Liverpool was becoming increasingly important as a commercial port. The City became geographically advantageous for new navigational routes to settlements on the Atlantic coast of North America, and was relatively unscathed following wars with France, Holland and Spain (that had led to the blockading of England's south-eastern ports).

The 'Old Dock', the world's first commercial 'wet-dock', was established in 1715 in response to discontent from ship owners that there was nowhere safe to dock ships that arrived into Liverpool bearing their valuable cargoes. A formal opening of the dock in 1719 led to high volumes of shipping and marked the beginning of Liverpool as a modern port. Thus began the erection of buildings and establishment of businesses, close to the dock, suitable to the wants of the shipping trade, and those employed in it.



The Duke Street/Bold Street area developed rapidly during the 18th Century as industries began to flourish (including ship-building, iron-works, breweries, clocks and watch-making, pottery and sugar refining - besides rope-making).

"Ropewalks" takes its name due to the prevalence of 'roperies' that were established within the area to service the shipping industry of the C18 and early C19 town following the construction of the Old Dock. At the beginning of the C18 the South East side of Hanover Street had contained grand houses with fields running uphill behind. The sites of the roperies that were then established on the fields have dictated the pattern of roads that exists today.

“The work required a straight, narrow stretch of ground, somewhat longer than the rope to be made. – the roperies that occupied the site of Bold Street were over 300 yards (274 metres) long.”¹

Roperies in and around the area were to be found on the sites of Bold Street, Renshaw Street, Ranelagh Street, Duke Street, Parr Street & Berry Street (formerly Colquitt Street). (The street names have derived from connections to important and influential landowners, tenants and merchants in the area on whose land the roperies, cooperages, timber yards and foundries operated).

“The Ropers were great men in election times and placed a high value on their votes”²

The area lay within a large area owned by the city corporation and leased to numerous tenants. There was no overall plan for the development of this area, the street grid was laid out by the city corporation while the building plots were developed in a speculative manner, the only control exercised by the corporation being regulations over the height and elevations of the buildings.

Hanover Street had been in existence at the turn of the century, subsequently Duke Street was among the earliest street in the area to be established in its use as “The way to the Quarry” through which stone was conveyed for the construction of the Dock and the city’s public buildings. Being such a prominent road, at one time or another some of the leading Liverpool Merchants dwelt on Duke Street.

The area between these streets quickly developed along Gradwell Street, Seel Street, Fleet Street and Wood Street so that by 1785 all the connecting streets had also emerged, and by 1810 the plan was as it is today. This has resulted in a dense urban form with a clear hierarchy of streets within the area. The broadest streets correspond to the former principal residential streets and thoroughfares along which trade and offices would develop, behind these are narrower streets of warehouses, workshops and poorer working people’s housing, while the smallest are the back streets and alleys servicing the houses.

Originally goods brought in through the docks were stored in the merchants' houses but this practice was superseded by the use of separate warehouses. Initially these were of a domestic scale as they were connected to the merchant houses but later they became increasingly separated as they grew in size.

18th Century – ROPEWALKS TIME LINE – key dates:

1715 In-filling of the ‘Pool’ leads to the opening of the world’s first enclosed commercial wet-dock. The area now known as Ropewalks is directly connected to the medieval town centre for the first time.

1715 – Port related industries and merchants’ houses flourish around the new docks. Rope manufacturing emerges as a prominent business.

1785 The current street pattern is established

¹ J. Sharples; Liverpool – Pevsner Architectural Guides, Yale University Press.

² J. Stonehouse – The Streets of Liverpool,

19th Century

Through the 19th Century although trade in Liverpool was thriving, aided considerably by the arrival of the railways, the area that is now 'ropewalks' fell into decline. The advent of the railways meant that the wealthier classes, often earning a living from the 'Old Dock', no longer had to live in the city centre and consequently they moved out to the wealthier suburbs such as Mossley Hill.

The Liverpool and Manchester Railway opened in September 1830, designed to carry both passengers and produce. The use of rail-freight enabled manufacturers to move their products away quickly and increased the prosperity of the city. More warehouses were built in the area in this period, including some of the largest in and around Henry Street (33 Argyle Street/14-18 Henry Street - late 19th Century).

By 1807 a modern network of roads and squares within the area had been established. Grand merchant houses and counting houses were interspersed with more modest terraces (as can be found along Seel Street); small sweatshops and workhouses were squeezed between massive warehouses. Many buildings within the area reflect their dual residential and commercial function, the most prominent example being that of the Grade II Listed Thomas Parr's House and Warehouse on Colquitt Street (1799).

The first ocean steamship crossed the Atlantic in 1840 and Liverpool became a major embarkation point for emigrants seeking their fortunes in the New World.

The Old Dock was 'filled in' in 1826 following the expansion of the shipping trade. Although its location was considered by many as being on "the very site which nature seemed to suggest the most fitting for a dock"³ The Old Dock was considered too small for the levels of trade attracted to the city (There were also problems associated with sewerage discharging into the Dock, resulting in the complaints of area residents). The Old Dock was replaced by the series of Docks engineered by Jesse Hartley that remain today and form a significant part of Liverpool's World Heritage Site.

The 19th Century saw a general exodus of the wealthier classes to more exclusive Liverpool suburbs but Bold Street began to flourish as a shopping centre with the ground floors of many houses converted to shops and newer retail buildings constructed. Poorer working people were confined to a number of courts with back-to-back housing (The last remaining example in the area, Dukes Terrace, is accessible off Duke Street). The Duke Street/Bold Street area at this time experienced a population explosion with a massive influx of Irish immigrants seeking opportunity in the City.

During this century cultural facilities were provided in the form of reading rooms and libraries. The Lyceum was completed in 1803 at the end of Bold Street to house a circulating library, the first of its kind in the country. A little beyond the Lyceum stood a building called the Rotunda, originally built for an exhibition but then used as a billiard hall for many years until its demolition in 1864 to make way for shops. The Union Newsroom at 105 Duke Street was built circa 1800 and became Liverpool's first Public Library from 1852 - 60.

Despite the continued success of small businesses in the Bold Street shopping street, much of the Duke Street area started to decline as the South Docks closed and heavy industry and smaller workshops moved in. The Georgian mansions and town houses acquired other uses and from being a fashionable residential and commercial quarter

³ J. Stonehouse - The streets of Liverpool

in the 18th Century, the district became more associated with industry. There was no longer the need to store goods near the docks as they would be transported straight from the ships to their destination via the railways, and therefore many of the warehouses became redundant.

19th Century TIME LINE

1800 - Merchants start to leave the area for the relative calm of the new suburbs above the town. They are replaced by migrant workers and sailors seeking cheap accommodation. Distinct communities begin to establish, including Europe's oldest Chinatown.

1826 Old dock too small to cope with contemporary shipping and is filled to make way for a new customs house.

20th Century

The 20th Century saw a period of economic and physical decline. Bombing in the raids of the Second World War caused some destruction, particularly in the Wolstenholme Square area. But the greatest cause of decline was the shift away of maritime activity from the area and the related economic exodus. This resulted in a decline of the condition of historic buildings and in some cases their replacement with newer developments, mostly of lower density and quality.

Because of the lack of comprehensive re-development and investment in the area much of the historic fabric survived, albeit in a state of extreme dereliction, vacancy and under-use. The Duke Street Conservation area was designated in 1988. Subsequently there have been a number of initiatives that have sought to redevelop the historic fabric of the area.

Liverpool City Council has identified this area as an important historic area with untapped potential and a policy/planning framework put in place reviewing the area's role in relation to the rest of the city centre.

Bold Street continued to be a popular shopping destination within Liverpool throughout the 20th Century and this street has suffered a mixture of fortunes.

20th Century TIME LINE

- 1900** The majority of residential accommodation has been cleared to make way for industry and warehousing.
- 1960s** During post-war reconstruction and the subsequent phases of comprehensive redevelopment the area was considered to have a peripheral location, a lack of institutional tenants and an 'obsolete' townscape. Property prices start to plummet
- 1974** Closure of the south docks
- 1980s** With the property market in Ropewalks having collapsed, absentee investors assemble substantial freehold interests, spending little if nothing on building maintenance. Problems of vacancy and dereliction become widespread.
- 1987** Liverpool City Council approves the '*Liverpool City Centre Strategy*'. The document identifies the importance and untapped potential of the Bold Street / Duke Street area. The quality and condition of the built environment, and the potential for the encouragement of mixed uses and residential accommodation are highlighted. One of the key recommendations is to declare the area a Conservation Area
- 1988** Duke Street Conservation Area designated – includes the majority of Ropewalks
- 1989** An English Heritage funded Townscheme is established in the recently designated Conservation Area
- 1990** Liverpool City Council publishes the 'Bold Street / Duke Street Action Plan'. This document reviews the area's role in relation to the rest of the city centre and defines a clear planning policy framework.
- 1990/91** Local developer Urban Splash opens Liverpool Palace – a complex of retail units, low-rent offices and a bar. The refurbishment of the building, at the heart of the conservation area, attracted Townscheme grant funding
- 1992** Having prepared ambitious regeneration proposals and persuaded the City Council to sell its extensive property assets in the area, the developer Charterhouse goes into receivership and its assets are sold to a private property management company.

1993 Merseyside designated an Objective One area by the EU. Bold Street / Duke Street forms part of one of the Pathways areas. The Duke Street Partnership is formed by Liverpool City Council and English Partnerships.

1995 Urban Splash opens the mixed use Concert Square scheme – incorporating the first significant new piece of public open space since the area was initially laid out.

Conservation Area Partnership established

1997 'Bold Street / Duke Street Integrated Action Plan' published following a community planning weekend. The plan draws together a range of partners and funding streams to provide a comprehensive strategy for the area's regeneration.

1998 The Ropewalks Partnership is formed to implement the Integrated Action Plan

The Lower Duke Street Townscape Heritage Initiative is established with £1.5million HLF funding

Present Day

21st Century Timeline

- 2001** The Rope Walks Partnership winds up having overseen a £110million investment programme. Responsibility for the area transfers for Liverpool Vision.
- 2002** Opening of the £10m FACT Centre
- Liverpool Maritime Mercantile City is nominated as a World Heritage Site. The nominated site includes Duke Street and much of the surrounding area.
- 2003** remaining pockets of blight begin to be targeted through the Liverpool Buildings at Risk programme.
- 2004** CPO for the Paradise Street Development granted on a site abutting Ropewalks.
- Liverpool Maritime Mercantile City inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.
- New £4.5million World Heritage Site THI launched focusing on Ropewalks and the Castle Street Conservation Area.
- 2005** Ropewalks Supplementary Planning Document is produced to aid permitted development.
- 2008** Creative Ropewalks Partnership attracts funding from NWDA to apply enforcement action within the Conservation Area to complement the THI programme. Enforcement action is used as a driver (stick) to encourage building owners to take up THI grants (carrot)

Archaeology

Although there are currently no Scheduled Ancient Monuments in the area, the Merseyside Sites & Ancient Monuments Record indicates that there could potentially be many sites of archaeological importance either neighbouring or within the conservation area. Desktop studies have revealed that there were once many varying industrial properties including breweries, timber yards, lime kilns, gold beaters and rope makers that no longer survive today. Little excavation work has been carried out in this area so it is unknown if there are any remnants of these sites, what condition they may be in and what their exact locations are. What is clear is that there are potentially many sites within the area that have a direct link with the original function of the area, that is industrial facilities linked directly to the Old Dock (either ship building or maintenance, or imports and exports).

Most of the potential sites are in the vicinity of Duke Street, Slater Street and Bold Street, there could however be many more sites in the area as many of the building plots have been developed many times due to the pressure for land in the area.

There have been recent works to preserve the Old Dock wall in situ, at the heart of the Liverpool 1 Development Scheme. The location of the Old Dock Wall and its proximity to the Duke Street Conservation Area is an important feature in understanding why the Ropewalks area developed as it did. The provision of a viewing 'porthole' at the Liverpool 1 development through the exposure of a substantial section of the wall has provided a physical connection for the viewing public to understand the importance of Liverpool as a World Heritage Site and connection to the Ropewalks Area as the Georgian Merchants' Quarter.

National Museums Liverpool have arranged free tours of the excavations starting in May 2010 every Tuesday for the public and every Wednesday for schools. Visitors meet at the Maritime Museum and walk across to the Old Dock.

For further information call 0151 478 4296

or visit http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/maritime/visit/old_dock_tours.aspx

Streets of Ropewalks

Bold Street

Bold Street is a strong retail centre within the city containing independent shops and café's and has regained some of that retail character over the past 10 years to become a more vibrant street.

The building types on the street range from converted 3-storey Georgian terrace buildings, through to purpose designed 19th and 20th century shop/retail buildings with lofty ground floors and retail and office space above. There are a small number of listed buildings but all contribute positively to the townscape character of Ropewalks.

There are two 'Landmark' buildings that mark the extent of Ropewalks at either end of this street. The Lyceum circulating Library completed in 1802 at the junction of Bold Street and Hanover street and the now bomb-damaged St Luke's Church completed in 1830 at the junction of Bold Street and Berry Street

On Bold Street stucco has been used in many places as a render and to apply elaborate details to the main facades of the buildings such as architraves, quoins, pediments and cornices. Several attractive traditional timber shop-fronts survive from the Victorian period on this street (such as at 61- 63 Bold Street), characterised by the use of stallrisers, mullions, pilasters, consoles and cornices in the shop-front design.

These details often echo the fine detail used in the upper stories of the properties on Bold Street.



1903 Postcard



Bold Street 1910



Bold street - 1920



Coronation Day in Bold Street



Bold Street - 1937



Midland Bank Building (corner of Hanover Street - Bold Street -1958)

Duke Street

During the construction of the 'Old Dock' Duke Street was established as the main thoroughfare in the area - "The road to the Quarry". At its south-eastern end it forms a junction with Berry Street and Great George Street which runs northwards. Beyond this junction the line of Duke Street is continued by Upper Duke Street. At its lower end Duke Street joins Hanover Street at its junction with Paradise Street and is connected to the Liverpool 1 development at this junction.

As a result of its function as a through route, and in contrast with some of the narrow streets within the Henry Street area, the street has seen continued evolution and investment leading to a mixture of building types from different periods. These include 3 and 5-bay Georgian terraced houses that set the general scale of development on the street. Public buildings such as the Union News Room (1852) at the junction of 105 Duke / Slater Street and later office and apartment buildings break away from this scale creating appropriate landmarks along the street.

Berry Street

Berry Street forms an important route from the south into the City Centre. The west-side of Berry Street consists of late 18th and early 19th century buildings. These are contiguous with buildings of a similar date and type that continue around the corners with adjoining streets (Seel Street, Bold Street, Wood Street, Duke Street).

Building types include modest traditional 3-storey Georgian brick terraces with shops inserted at ground floors. These predominate in the 32–60 Berry Street Block. However 8–30 Berry Street shows evidence of remodelling and rebuilding to form the symmetrical pedimented and pilastered stuccoed frontages of 10–14 and 24–30 Berry Street. These are arranged symmetrically on either side of 16–20 Berry Street, a four storey late Georgian/early Victorian building with decorative carved stone friezes, string courses and parapets.

The remains of the bomb-damaged St Luke's church which dominates the Berry Street/Bold Street junction is currently used to promote art projects within the area. Berry Street leads from the City centre into Liverpool's Chinatown area, giving access to Nelson Street at the Chinese Arch adjacent to "the Blackie" (a former congregational church built in 1840/41).

Seel Street and Slater Street.

Both Seel Street and Slater Street retain significant portions of original Georgian terraces built when the area was first laid out. Slater Street is the most complete, its north-western side being largely intact. However a number of the properties continue to be at risk, including two properties forming the junction with Seel Street – the Grade II listed 30 Slater Street/60 Seel Street (a former watchmaker's works dating from c.1850 with cast iron colonnades to the elevations, now in a very poor condition), and on the opposite side, 28 Slater Street (a Georgian terrace with a long frontage onto Seel Street. It is much altered and in poor condition)

There have been substantial improvements to the streetscape of Seel Street in recent years through the use of Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI – a grants programme managed by Liverpool City Council and funded by The Heritage Lottery Fund, NWDA, English heritage and Liverpool City Council) and private investment in the building stock.

Behind 28 Slater Street, but still within the conservation area, the scale changes from residential to that of 4 and 5 storey industrial works such as 29 – 35 Seel Street. The buildings on the north-east side of the street are destined for new uses, including a Hotel (Base2stay) assisted through grant aid from the World Heritage Site THI that has been successful in the area.

Travelling South-east and uphill from the junction of Seel Street and Slater Street the townscape retains short runs of early terracing. Numbers 45–51 (now mixed use office & apartments brought back into use through THI and bars developed privately) form a grouping near the junction with Slater Street, numbers 76 – 82 half way up the street (a mixture of offices and Heebie-Jeebies bar/club that benefited from THI funding) & 94–108 and 77–87 form a grouping near the junction with Berry Street. Most are listed, but the listing of all could be justified.

One of the most distinctive buildings on Seel Street is the Grade II listed St Peter's Church, originally a Roman Catholic Church, currently converted to restaurant and bar (Alma De Cuba). Opposite is St Peters Square, part of the original Ropewalks Public Realm Programme.

Beyond St Peter's Church and Back Colquitt Street, Georgian terraced houses are mixed with 19th Century workshop/factory buildings

Henry Street

The 18th and 19th century warehouses around Henry Street once stored the goods brought into Liverpool via the Old Dock, and some have been converted following the first phase of Townscape Heritage Initiative in Ropewalks. The development of the buildings in this area shows a transformation from the early warehouses to combined merchants houses and warehouses. The form of this traditional building type, typified by tall narrow, usually gabled frontages built tight to the back of pavements, and the narrow streets, defines the original character of the area. Some surviving warehouses are up to 6 storeys high. Brick is the predominant external material, with slate roofs and timber details. Some early features such as crane hoods survive.

This area suffered extensive decay in the second half of the 20th Century. Many of the early buildings have been demolished and replaced with low-grade recent industrial development. By the end of the 20th century many of the surviving buildings had fallen into disrepair and there was extensive dereliction.

The north-western end of the area (at the lower end of Duke Street) was targeted by the Lower Duke Street THI which commenced in 1999. The scheme dealt with properties located on Campbell Street, Argyle Street, Henry Street, York Street and Lydia Ann Street and focused on Campbell Square, a small square created as part of the Ropewalks Public Realm Masterplan.

Schemes for repair and re-use of existing buildings and new infill buildings to provide mixed use around Campbell Square along with other similar schemes along York Street and Henry Street have also been completed. This initial phase of THI grant aid was a catalyst to similar development along the remainder of Henry Street, privately funded. (i.e. The Cinnamon Building and Printworks ApartHotel situated outside the THI Boundary)

Nelson Street

Nelson Street is at the heart of Liverpool's China Town area containing the Chinese Arch and the many Chinese restaurants within converted Georgian terraces.

Website Links

Liverpool Maritime Mercantile City UNESCO World Heritage Site = <http://www.liverpoolworldheritage.com/>

Liverpool Townscape Heritage Initiative
<http://www.liverpooltownscape.com/>

Heritage Lottery Fund
<http://www.hlf.org.uk>

English heritage
<http://www.english-heritage.org.uk>

Liverpool City Council Building Conservation
http://www.liverpool.gov.uk/Environment/Land_and_premises/Conservation/index.asp

Ropewalks SPD
http://www.liverpool.gov.uk/Environment/Planning/Local_Development_Framework/adopted_documents/ropewalks_spd/index.asp

National Museums Liverpool
<http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/>