

a remarkable state of preservation, and therefore were able to provide an idea of what the gates of the Old Dock may have looked like, some 60 years earlier.

The Old Dock becomes the Customs House

With the massive expansion of the docklands out into the Mersey, the need for the Old Dock diminished, and eventually, after 100 years of service to the shipping trade, it became obsolete. Numerous factors can be blamed for its demise, including the increasing size of ships, the difficulty of access through Canning Dock, and the constant dumping of sewage, which caused the dock to silt up. In 1826, it was decided to fill in the Old Dock and it became the site for a grandiose new Customs House, designed by the City Engineer, John Foster Junior.

This was the most important, and certainly one of the grandest, buildings in the whole of the Liverpool dock system. Built in an elaborate I-shape, with Ionic porticoes at both ends and a central dome, it has been described as a mercantile pantheon and became the civic focus of the port. So much money was raised through the collection of customs that it became the Exchequer's biggest single source of revenue in the entire kingdom, and a special branch of the



Above from left The cellar as it was left after the 1941 Blitz, with numerous floorings, the boiler, and a lift still in situ. Many of the port bottles (dated 1937) had been warped by the heat.

Bank of England was opened there to collect all the money.

It was in continuous use until 1941, when, during the Blitz, it received two direct hits from incendiary bombs and was gutted by fire along with many of the surrounding buildings that were also excavated during the project. The main structure survived, but it was demolished later. During excavation for the Liverpool One development, the archaeologists uncovered large sections of the Customs House foundations, built of massive blocks of pink sandstone over 1.6m wide, sitting within the boundary of the infilled dock. The walls of the Old Dock, and, to a lesser extent, foundations of the Customs House, survive intact within the development and are sealed beneath the new walkways, for future generations.

The Three Graces

By the late 19th century, trans-Atlantic traffic was increasing and the long landing stage at the Pier Head was the mooring point for the trans-Atlantic liners. This led eventually to the filling in of the George Dock and its replacement by Liverpool's three great iconic buildings – the Three Graces. The first to be built was the Port of Liverpool building, set within the retaining



Above An early 20th century photograph of Canning Dock, showing the Dock Office, the Mersey Tunnel pump house and the White Star Line buildings in the background.