fact, even more than the port itself, underlay Liverpool's great fortunes. So although other ports overhauled it during the twentieth century, the final collapse in those fortunes came after 1970, with the near-extinction of the UK Merchant Navy.[15]

The boldest engineer of the port that impressed Kohl and Melville was Jesse Hartley. In 30 years, he built as many docks; above all the Albert, which integrated wharf and warehouse with hydraulic lifts and cranes. Hartley disposed stone and iron with articulate gravity and functional grace; yet his powerful *architecture parlante* also ran to maniacally fortified towers and gates of minatory grimness. 'Granite was the material in which he delighted to work. His walls are built with rough cyclopean masses, the face dressed, but otherwise shapeless as from the quarry, cemented with a lime as hard as the granite itself.'[16] As the century wore on, so extended and ramified the walls, locks and coulisses of the docks. In the fogs of the *fin-de-siècle* (praised by Oscar Wilde in a lecture at Birkenhead), the labyrinth of docks became a mysterious domain of symbols. In 1892, Atkinson Grimshaw painted the dock road as a rainy procession of masts and gaslamps in vaporous twilight. Yet Grimshaw's nocturnes were retrospects to a Georgian waterfront already overtaken by forces altogether more industrial and unknowable, sensed in the Piranesian images of Dixon Scott's visionary impression of 1907: 'It is a region, this seven-mile sequence of granite-lipped lagoons, which is invested ... with some conspicuous properties of romance; and yet its romance is never of just that quality one might perhaps expect ... Neither of the land nor of the sea, but possessing both the stability of the one and the constant flux of the other – too immense, too filled with the vastness of the outer, to carry any sense of human handicraft – this strange territory of the Docks seems, indeed, to form a kind of fifth element, a place charged with daemonic issues and daemonic silences, where men move like puzzled slaves, fretting under orders they cannot understand, fumbling with great forces that have long passed out of their control ...'[17]

The Overhead Railway

'Out of control' was what, by the year that Grimshaw painted it, the Dock Road had become – a continuous thoroughfare, parallel to the river, of all the port's traffic. Liverpool had brought the world's first public railway, in 1830, through tunnels down to the docks, and in 1886 opened an underground railway to the Wirral. Now it was decided to adopt from New York the solution of an elevated railway to run along the Dock Road, but to outdo New York's 'El' by making it the world's first electrified 'Overhead Railway'. 'The Dockers' Umbrella', as it became known, opened in 1893 and carried millions each year until its closure, to general dismay, in 1956.[18]

That dismay reflected its immense popularity, often from memories of the parade of ships and docks afforded to all who rode aboard it. That its appeal was immediate was evidenced in that, in 1896, it prompted Lumière's cameramen to film from it what may be the world's first 'tracking shot', running from Canada to Albert Docks, past timberyards, sailing-ships and giant steamers. Far from Grimshaw's nocturnes, this movie is a kinematic harbinger of a twentieth century that had not yet even begun. Without montage, it presents a single continuous view; but that is its key: a one-to-one correlation of lens to motif, which translates space, through 'real to reel' motion, into time. This new technique of the visible would open Dixon Scott's intractable dockworld to new eyes; and the tracking view from the Overhead would feature in every montage of modern Liverpool. Throughout Anson Dyer's 1927 'city symphony' film, *A Day In Liverpool,* shots from and of the Overhead recur as a motif of urban energy among streets, offices, exchanges, liners, cranes, brokers and dockers – the roaring scene that, surely also viewed from the Overhead, excited Karel Capek on his visit in 1924:

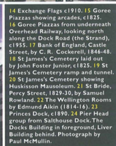
'But Liverpool is the biggest port ... there was something to see from Dingle up to Bootle, and as far again as Birkenhead on the other side. Yellow water, bellowing steam ferries, white trans-atlantic liners, towers, cranes, stevedores, skiffs, shipyards, trains, smoke, chaos, hooting, ringing, hammering, puffing, the ruptured bellies of the ships, the stench of horses, the sweat, urine, and waste from all the continents of the world ... And if I heaped up words for another half an hour, I wouldn't achieve the full number, confusion and expanse which is called Liverpool.'[19]

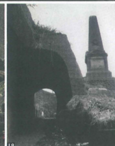
Indeed, a half-hour was the Overhead ride from Dingle to Bootle, which unfolded not just a pageant of ships, but Liverpool's master-narrative, which was recorded by countless eyes and amateur cameras following Dyer and Lumière. In architecture, 'narrative' is a line, like a rope, which twists spatial and temporal events together into organised and self-evident form. We can say, then, that the era of the Overhead was when Liverpool attained a comprehensible form as, in effect, a linear city running parallel to the river, from the airport at Speke to the Formby dunes where Hawthorne and Melville strolled. This was the premise of a project which, in 1994, when Merseyside was designated 'Objective 1' for massive EU funding, I exhibited in Milan with architects from the group NATO (Narrative Architecture Today) – to use the EU fund to build a new Overhead that would remagnetise the Mersey as a linear city.[20]

Contenders at the Pier Head

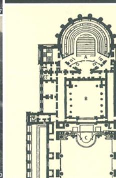
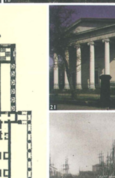
The fulcrum of the Overhead was the Pier Head; yet, as Lumière's film shows, when the line opened, that climactic trio of giant buildings that became twentieth-century Liverpool's world-image did not yet exist; the Pier Head was what it had always been – the pier for ferries to the Wirral, which drew to it the focus of the tram system. What transformed it was the liners, which began to moor there on the mile-long floating landing-stage, adjoining Princes Dock station with its awaiting Pullman trains. Yet in 1900, this great threshold was still in effect an island, cut off by George's Dock. It was the Dock Board's decision to close that basin – which was big, but too small for the latest steamships – that created the site for the enormous monuments and plaza that ensued. Yet how much of it was planned? Adrian Jarvis has described the Dock Board's bluff and opportunism in using the south end of the dock as site for a new headquarters to impress investors.[21] This they completed by 1907, with no plan for what might fill the other sites; so that when, in 1911, the taller, American-scale Liver Building rose on the north site, they were put out, and were with those who thought that the Cunard Building in the middle, should be lowered. Peter de Figueiredo has cast light on the Pier Head development; yet much remains obscure as to how this most monumental parade actually came about.[22] Evident however, is that, as with Canning Place, the civic domain again benefited from translating the functional rationality of the dock estate into formal rationality in the city plan. As the Custom House had arisen on the Old Dock, flanked by quaysides that became Canning Place, so now George's Dock was divided by extensions of Brunswick and Water Streets into the insular sites on which arose the three giants of the Pier Head.

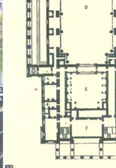
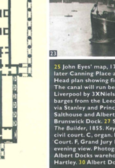
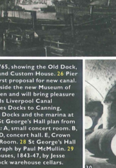
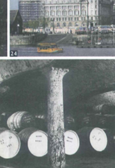
On the Pier Head trio, much has been written about their variable elevations, but not enough about their site plan. The significance of the Pier Head is that only there are reconciled two contradictory pulses in Liverpool urbanism. One, modelled by the docks, and evident in the Georgian districts and Lancelot Keay's housing and boulevards, is towards formal ensembles; but the other is to showy and extravagant one-offs – 'iconic' solitaires: the Town Hall, Custom House, St George's Hall, two totemic cathedrals, Rowse's Mersey Tunnel towers, St John's beacon and the fantasy of the '4th Grace'. Whatever the merits of the various designs for the '4th', none of them followed the logic of the prime trio. Which was: to maximise their power as freestanding monuments to themselves, but also to affirm the transcendent order of the civic domain. This they do by squarely measuring their sites (on rational commercial grounds) and conforming as blocks to streetlines in a disciplined rhythm of solid-void-solid-void-solid. The utopia of the block-as-single-monument grid is of course Manhattan, whose pragmatic ideology was celebrated in Rem Koolhaas' *Delirious New York.* Yet, beyond the Pier Head, grids and planned layouts do not reappear in Liverpool until the Georgian districts and Princes Avenue. The most consistent grid indeed, is Birkenhead, laid out by shipbuilder Laird and his Scottish architect Gillespie Graham, running a mile from Hamilton Square to Birkenhead Park.[23] But unlike





14 Exchange Flags c1910. 15 Goree Piazzas showing arcades, c1825. 16 Goree Piazzas from underneath Overhead Railway, looking north along the Dock Road (the Strand), c1955. 17 Bank of England, Castle Street, by C. R. Cockerell, 1846-48. 18 St James's Cemetery laid out by John Foster Junior, c1825. 19 St James's Cemetery ramp and tunnel. 20 St James's Cemetery showing Huskisson Mausoleum. 21 St Bride, Percy Street, 1829-30, by Samuel Rowland. 22 The Wellington Rooms by Edmund Aikin (1814-16). 23 Princes Dock, c1890. 24 Pier Head group from Salthouse Dock. The Docks Building in foreground, Liver Building behind. Photograph by Paul McMullin.

25 John Eyes' map, 1765, showing the Old Dock, later Canning Place and Custom House. 26 Pier Head plan showing first proposal for new canal. The canal will run beside the new Museum of Liverpool by 3XNielsen and will bring pleasure barges from the Leeds Liverpool Canal via Stanley and Princes Docks to Canning, Salthouse and Albert Docks and the marina at Brunswick Dock. 27 St George's Hall plan from *The Builder*, 1855. *Key:* A, small concert room. B, civil court. C, organ. D, concert hall. E, Crown Court. F, Grand Jury Room. 28 St George's Hall evening view. Photograph by Paul McMullin. 29 Albert Docks warehouses, 1843-47, by Jesse Hartley. 30 Albert Dock warehouse cellars.