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The Evolution of Victorian Southampton

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Abstract

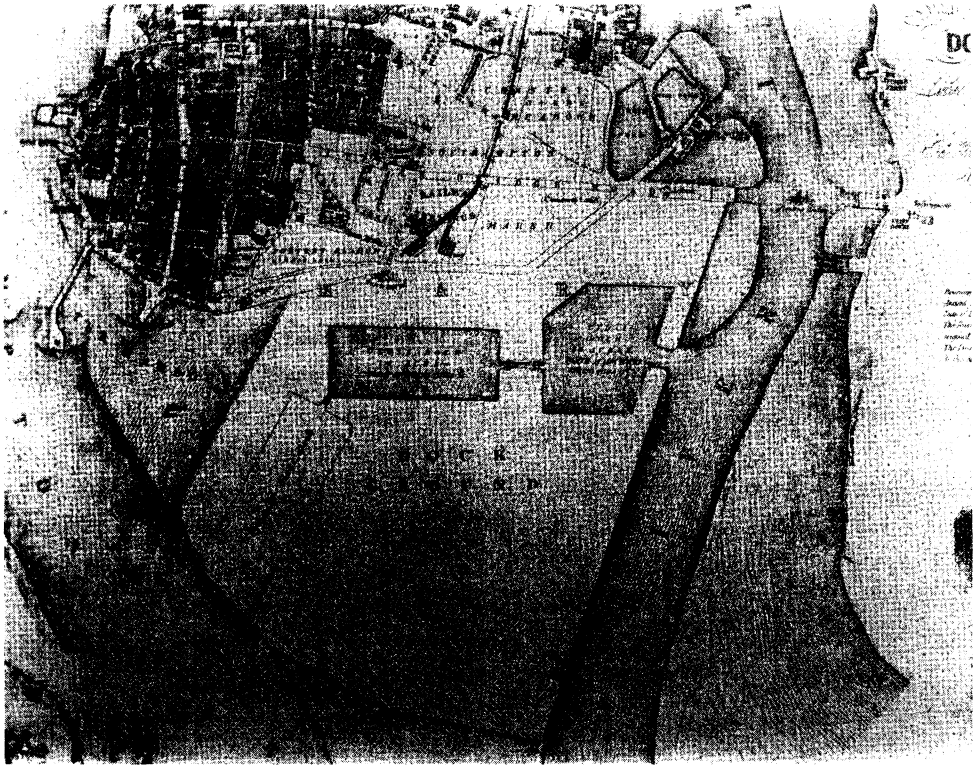
1. The significance of the Southampton to Nine Elms (London) Railway opened in 1840, in conjunction with the foundation of Southampton Docks in 1838 which heralded a new era in the mode of transportation, setting in motion a series of social and economic developments which were to change the face of Southampton in Victorian times.
2. Building Supplies local and natural sources and their effect on building design.
3. The establishment of the Ordnance Survey in Southampton in 1841 and its map making activity recording the expansion of the town, after the Medieval and Spa periods together with its road and rail network systems.
4. Cemeteries being a record of the lives and aspirations of the towns inhabitants together with the Victorians pre occupation with florid ecclesiastical design.

Introduction

With the death of King William IV in 1837 and the accession of Princess Victoria to the throne, so began an almost unparalleled era in British history, with the expansion of the Empire throughout the world. At that time Southampton still retained the configuration of a medieval fortified walled town, against whose walls the sea lapped, on the west and south with the remains of the Town Ditch which at one time had protected the eastern walls. From ordnance survey maps of 1846 we see in great detail the state of medieval Southampton before the changes brought about later in the 19th century in the wake of the Industrial Revolution. It was shortly after Queen Victoria's accession in 1837 that in 1838 the foundation of Southampton's 'Old Docks' was laid and this event is inextricably inter-related with the coming of the railway, and together these two events had a significant and far reaching effect on the economy and development of the town. For centuries the mercantile activities of the port had been carried out from West Quay and Water Gate Quay, but in the beginning of the 19th century land reclamation began on the vast mud flats to the west of the Itchen Estuary leading into Southampton Water, to form what was to be called the 'Outer Tidal' and 'Inner Close' Docks, completed in 1842 and 1851 respectively.

1. The Docks and Railways

The creation of the Docks was made possible by the 1803 Act of Parliament during the reign of King George III which when passed allowed for "improving the Port and Town of Southampton; for making a convenient Dock for the security of Ship's; for extending Quays and Wharfs, and making Docks and Piers in the Harbour there;...". The location of these so called Old Docks was in the vicinity of the then sea frontage alongside both Platform and Canute Roads, when by placing down materials dredged from the 'Dredged



Map of 1870. This shows the layout of the Outer (Tidal) and Inner (close) Dock completed in 1842 and 1851 respectively. Reproduced from the 1870 Ordnance Survey Map.

Channel' upon existing expanse of mud flats, to create a roughly triangular peninsula of reclaimed land, spreading its tapering finger out towards Southampton Water, bounded to the east by the River Itchen and to the west by the historic Water Gate Quay and Harbour. In order to administer the function of the proposed 'Old Docks' (then new) a body named 'Southampton Harbour Commissioners' was created in 1803 comprising the Mayor of Southampton, Recorder and Councilmen of the Town, together with 10 Named Commissioners. The formation of this board of Commissioners effectively took over from the Corporation of Southampton in the management of the Port.

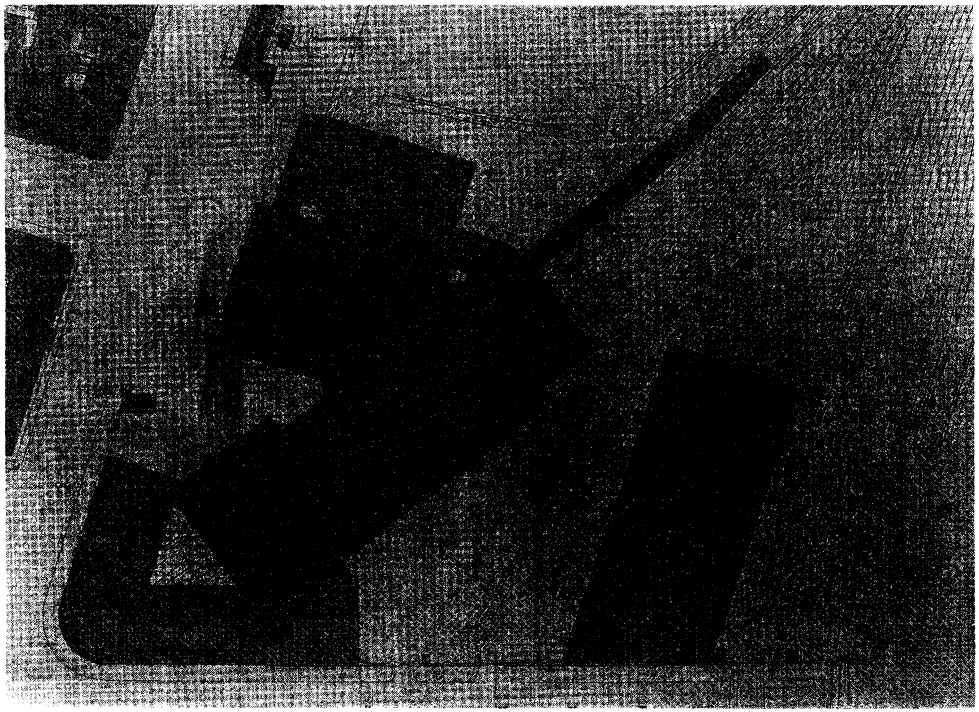
The creation of this Port at Southampton was supported by two key factors, one natural and the other geographic. Firstly the dual tides for which Southampton is famous was first noted by the Venerable Bede, who in the 8th century wrote "in this narrow sea (i.e. the Solent) two tides of the ocean...daily meet and oppose one another, beyond the north of the River Homlea (the Hamble). This tidal phenomenon known as the double tide gives four hours slack water at the highest level for ease of navigation in and out of the port. Secondly because of its geographic location i.e. Central Southern England, two to three day steaming time to London was saved in the 19th century; a significant economic fact, noted by those planning the London to Southampton railway link. The layout of the Old Docks owes much to the work of Alfred Giles the engineer as well as some of the buildings associated with the Dock's activities. It was he who carried out the initial surveys which led to the creation of the Outer (Tidal Dock) in 1842 and the Inner (Close Dock) in 1851.

The development of the railway link followed on when the London and South Western Railway formerly (the London and Southampton Railway) opened in May 1840 linking the capital London with Southampton and through its Docks forming a link with the rest of the trading world. These two events when considered jointly i.e. the founding of the Docks and the opening of the Railway (heralded a new era in the mode of transportation and set in motion a series of social and economic developments which were to change the face of Southampton in Victorian times).

2. Building Supplies and Design

Before the advent of the Docks facilities and the opening of the railway land communications land travel had been effected by stagecoach for transporting passengers, mail and newspapers; while goods were similarly moved by road on horse drawn "wagons". At sea ships moved passengers and goods around the coast line and across the seas and oceans. As a by-product of this sea travel, stone ballast used in ships (before the advent of water ballast tanks) was off-loaded and used for building purposes, while things like coal dust was employed in part as an additive to cement to produce early coloured mortars as well as a rough aggregate. One of the most significant effects on the typography of the land brought about by the coming of the railways in particular, was the ease of moving heavy building materials around the country, causing a breakaway from the tradition of using only local materials in building. Add to this the vast through-put of trade in and out of the Port of Southampton, the town grew dramatically with an expanding economy which financed a seemingly vast building programme for residential, commercial and ecclesiastical buildings.

In order to progress large scale developments of any kind, both land and resources need to be available, the land having been assembled by developers and surveyed, and designs produced. In addition the availability of building



Map of 1870. This shows the railway terminating inside the Imperial Hotel itself (later the South Western Hotel). Note the plan of the Terminus Station and goods and engine shed, the latter to be rebuilt on its present site. Reproduced from the 1870 Ordnance Survey Map.

materials close at hand and at affordable prices is a further pre-requisite to progress. In October 1842 T C Elliott 'Merchants and Commission Agent', set up business of Millbank Wharf on the west bank of the River Itchen for the sale of "Roman Cement, Plaster of Paris, Stone...and Ground Lime". In addition to these materials slate was imported and an agency set up for supplying stucco and paints for rendering, thus it was that Elliott's was founded and remains until this day, being a pre-cursor of the modern day Builders Merchants.

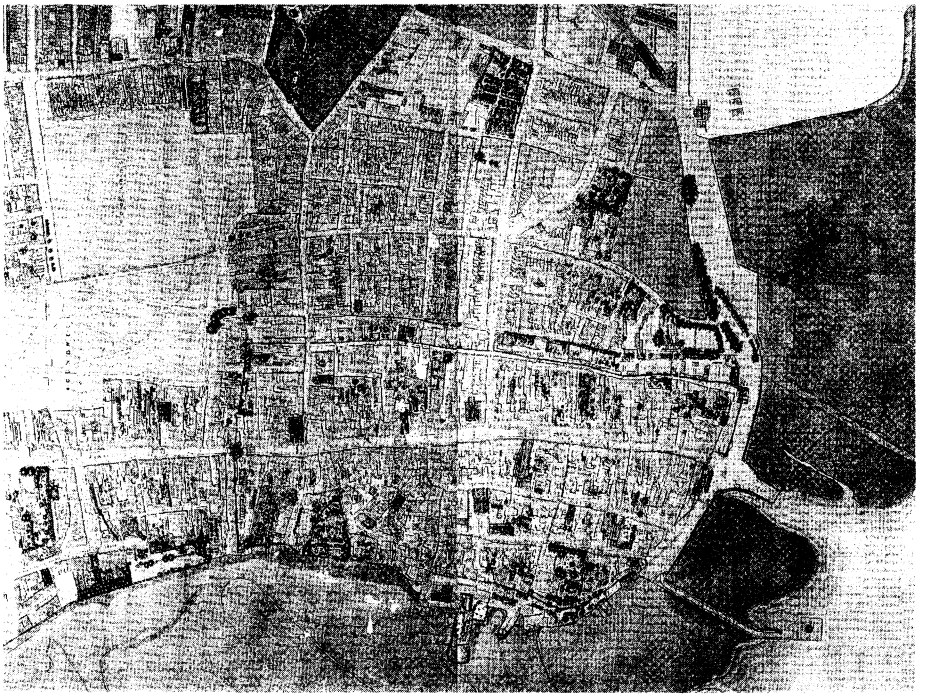
In addition to this facility, there already existed a brick works close at hand at Beaulieu, home of the famous 'Beaulieu Whites'. These bricks were manufactured since 1790 at Bailey's Hard Brick Yard at the Beaulieu River in Hampshire. Other notable sources of bricks supplied existed later on in the name of Blanchards at the Bishops Waltham Kilns, founded in 1862 to produce, in addition to bricks and roofing tiles, high quality and artistic 'terracotta ware' in various colours, but mainly red and blue, production on this site continued well into this century until the yard closed in about 1956. Another important source of supply were the brick yards at Burseldon established in 1897 producing beautiful red bricks in their heyday.

Without doubt the Beaulieu Kilns, producing both 'whites' (actually a light buff colour) and 'reds', were in operation at a critical time in the development of Southampton. The brick making process at Bailey's Hard was based on the local availability of clay for brick making process for making both 'reds' and 'whites', coupled with a ready supply of timber from the Forest for firing the kilns (before the availability of coal) in 1870, and proximity of the Beaulieu River to provide water transportation of the finished bricks to Southampton.

The brick making process itself was high labour intensive and firstly involved the digging of clay by hand, to be left out of doors for three to four months for 'weathering'. Then followed the 'pugging' process, i.e. mixing of clay with water (and lime for the 'whites' only) to achieve a texture suitable for brick making and moulding. This was first done by hand and then in 1854 by machine to keep pace with production demands and escalating orders to feed the building boom. The moulded bricks, now sized 4½" x 9" x 2¾" (11.4cm x 22.9cm x 7cm) with a top 'frog' (indentation), would be stored for about a month then fired for about four days and allowed to cool for a further two days, before removal from the kiln. This controlled process produced bricks of high reputation and performance, not only in their strength and durability, but also in their retention of their fine colour.

These bricks were used in many important buildings in Southampton and throughout the country. The Beaulieu Archives at Palace House recall that Mr Hooper of Southampton, a builder, was ordering loads of 20,000 bricks a day. These bricks were graded as best, seconds or thirds in quality, and 'specials' were catered for in the form of splayed bricks, plinth bricks and 'saddle back' brick copings. Rubbed bricks, so called because they could be rubbed to shape on site, were supplied to form tapered bricks suitable for the curved geometry of brick arches. All in all this multitude of components would meet the needs of the 1840's building programme and beyond, which when completed drastically altered the face of Southampton.

During the Victorian era most buildings were brick built, either red or buff in colour, with slate imported from Wales for the roofs, and a particular feature of Southampton architecture is the use of slate hanging to waterproof brick walls, usually on the rear elevations of properties. Terracotta has also been used to create some particularly ornate detailing on buildings of a prestigious nature whilst cement rendering was used to replicate stone details and finishes when shaped and ultimately painted.



Extract from 1846 Maps. Surveyed in 1845-6 by Sergeant W. Campbell and 'a detachment of the Royal Sappers and Miners under the command of Capt. W. Yolland R.E.'. These maps record in detail the state of medieval Southampton before the changes brought about later in the 19th century. Reproduced from the 1846 Ordnance Survey Map.

Of particular interest at the time was what R W Brunskill has described in his book *'Brick Building in Britain'* as "the general use of cavity walling in Southampton" where he refers to a letter in the *Builder* of the 19th April 1862 when a correspondent said he found "the hollow wall system prevailing to such an extent, that at least 80% of the dwellings of the working classes erected there within the last 10 years have their external walls hollow". This strangely enough is in contrast to the more prestigious buildings which retain solid wall construction in the main for external walls, with either a facing brick exterior or rendered surface, while inside we see an internal lining of timber battens supporting lath and plaster internal wall surfaces, in other words the creation of a cavity by a different method.

There exists a stylised view of early Victorian Southampton published in the Illustrated London News in 1844 showing in essence the completeness of the medieval walled town and to the east the early stages in the formation of the docks and the railway terminus but without the intensive building development which was to take place near and around these facilities in the years up to the end of the 19th century. Alongside Platform and Canute Roads, today we see the evidence of this past construction programme in Southampton, including the palatial three storey Post Office Building now leading into Dock Gate Number 4, which because of its size will indicate the sheer volume of mail which passed through this building in and out of the country.

3. Ordnance Survey

Away from the water front and to the north of Southampton's splendid parks, we see the previous head quarters of the Ordnance Survey Offices in London Road to include the Director General's House, added to the original military complex in 1841. The primary function of the so called Board of Ordnance "was to act as custodians of the lands, depots, and forts required for the defence of the realm and overseas possessions" originally based at the Tower of London but forced by a fire to move to these new premises in Southampton. The original buildings on the London Road ordnance survey site were built as barracks in about 1800 and were therefore laid out in military order around parade grounds and still functioned as a military type establishment while trained soldiers carried out much of the hands on field work during the course of the survey exercise. It was from these buildings that maps were to be produced until the Ordnance Survey moved to their present offices in 1969. Perhaps the most interesting and detailed maps from that era are the 'Sixty Inches to One State Mile' maps of Southampton in 1846, surveyed in 1845-6 by Sergeant W.A. Campbell and "a detachment of Royal Sappers and Miners under the command of Capt. W Yolland, R.E." These maps, beautifully produced in colour, give a highly detailed plan of the buildings and gardens and with shadow lines create an almost 3 dimensional, realistic affect. In addition these maps represent an encapsulation of history; they are the first systematic and scientific representation of the layout of the town of Southampton before the changes to its typography were brought about by the coming of the railway and the opening of the docks.

4. Cemeteries

Southampton is blessed with a seascape to the south, framed to the west by the River Test and penetrated to the east by the River Itchen; while inside the city boundaries there are fine open spaces comprising the common and cemetery and the parks. These green areas provide the backdrop to the cities buildings

and have been the subject of much comment over the centuries. With the population explosion which accompanied the vast building programme in Victorian Southampton, it was necessary to make dignified provision for the deceased. Within the confines of Southampton Common lying to the north of Southampton, we find Southampton Cemetery which originally comprised 15 acres (6.07 hectares) of land laid out during the period 1845 to 1863 and landscaped by W H Rogers. This cemetery was consecrated on the 9th May 1846 while today it is designated as a site of special scientific interest and is important historically as a record of the people of Southampton. Three chapels were erected inside the boundaries of the cemetery, marked by fine stone walls and iron gates, making provision for the Church of England, the Non-Conformists and the Jews. Many important personalities have been buried here and their graves marked by flamboyant and miniature edifices, so typical of the florid style of the Victorians. One such famous person was General Juan Manuel De Rosas, a dictator of Argentina who lived in Rockstone House in Carlton Crescent and later Burgess Street Farm, Swaythling and was buried here after his death in 1877. De Rosas lived out his years in exile in Southampton, after having been plucked from the clutches of a potential lynch mob in 1852, after seventeen years of ruthless rule, and carried to England by HMS Locust. However, the story does not end here for in September 1989 his remains were exhumed and returned to Argentina. He now lies in the Recoleta Cemetery in Buenos Aires, having been afforded a full scale civic funeral by President Carlos Saul Menem. (This arrangement was an act of reconciliation between the Conservative administration and the Government of Argentina, following the Falklands War).

The creation of the new cemeteries, and chapels came in parallel with the building of some 25 churches of various denominations between 1836 and the end of the century, and include the consecration of St Peters Church in May 1846 to coincide with the opening of Southampton Cemetery. The erection of these churches provided the Victorians with an opportunity to exploit their delight in the use of colour as well of all decorative elements to enhance the building. The Victorian era was typified by the need to achieve detail and decoration as an integral part of the appearance of a building, an art which had its romantic origins in the 19th century Arts and Crafts Movement, which looked back to an era long gone of rural tranquillity and isolation. There was, of course, a down side to all this, when we see the artisans dwellings of the Victorian era, the 'two up and two down' roomed terraces in which people were forced to live closely together, within walking distance of their work. Notwithstanding all this, the face of Southampton changed; the stucco terraces of Queens Terrace and curving Oxford Street reminiscent in appearance of the spa era, came in the early to mid 19th century (on land owned by the Queen's College Oxford) with Carlton Crescent in the 1830s and a little later Rockstone Place, built in a similar vein elegant town houses for the well to do, while in the suburbs villas sprang up, as did the consolidation of suburbia, reaching the outer boundaries of the present day city.

5. Conclusion

Without doubt the most significant evidence of the growth of Victorian Southampton is seen in and around the Old Docks and the Terminus Station mainly along the Canute Road and Platform Road frontages. The South Western Hotel (now South Western House) designed by the architect John Norton for the London and South Western Railway in 1872 is the most imposing of the examples of Victorian Railway architecture especially when viewed as a group with the adjacent Terminus Station and the Goods and

Engine Shed both designed by Sir William Tite in the mid 19th century. On the opposite side of Canute Road and along Platform Road to the south there are buildings recording the history of the Docks including Union Castle House designed by Alfred Giles the Docks Engineer and built in 1847 as the Custom House.

It is not possible therefore in this short paper to articulate on all the buildings from this Victorian era only to elucidate on the forces and circumstances which resulted in their birth both in the location of the Railway and Docks and outside the environs of the original medieval walled town.

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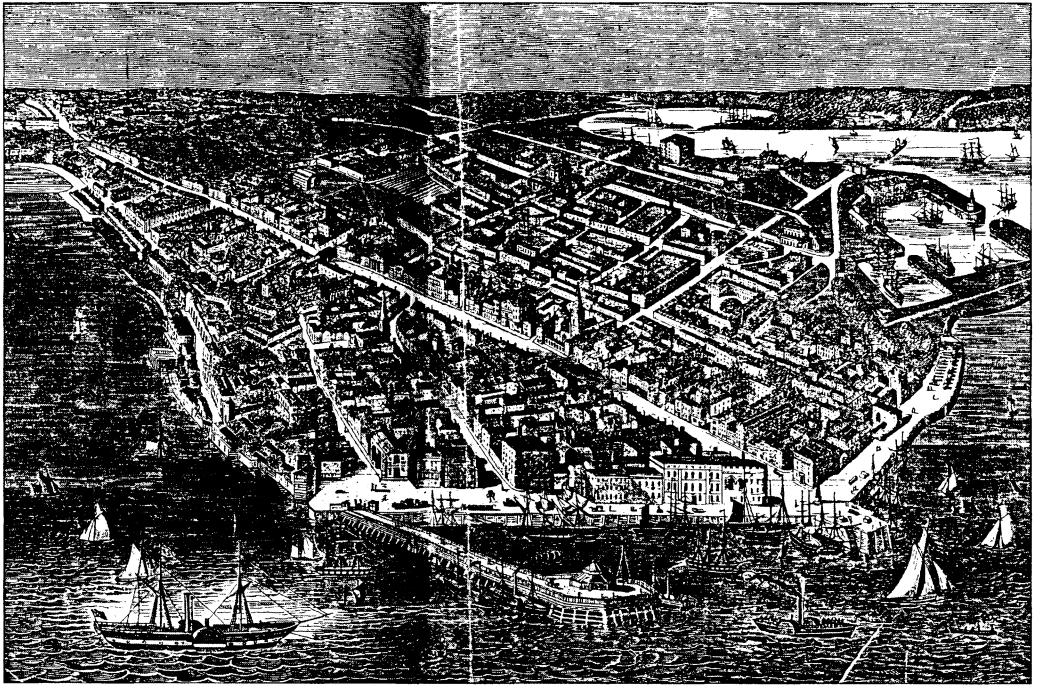

A stylized view of Victorian Southampton. Published in the Illustrated London News in an 1844 drawing signed "Smyth". Note the proximity of the sea to the walls of the old town. Reproduced by courtesy of City Library Archives and Information Services, Southampton City Council, UK.