

15 A meeting room inside a harbour crane

From the corner of Muidelaan and Dok-Noord, you have a nice view of the blue harbour crane, built by Boonse Metaalwerken in 1973. For many years, it scooped up gravel and sand on top of the concrete containers, but it came close to being scrapped after the relocation of sand and gravel company Kesteleyn. Fortunately, the project developer of the nearby ACEC site restored it to its former glory. The machine room has been converted into an office and a meeting room overlooking the old harbour.

Continue along Dok-Noord towards Muidebrug.

Along the way, you will pass Schippershuis (Sailor's Home) and Schipperskapel (Sailor's Chapel). As the name suggests, the building served as a chapel, but it also housed a boarding school for sailors' children.



▲ If you stop at Schipperskapel and Schipperhuis and turn around, you will have a nice view of Houtdok and the imposing ST1 crane. Photograph by Martin Corlazoli, 2023

Cross the water via the Muidebrug bridge and enter the Muide neighbourhood. Once you've crossed the bridge, turn right.

16 A giant in the port of Ghent

The 55-metres-tall green harbour crane towering over the Muide neighbourhood is the eye-catcher of a new park: Kapitein Zepposark. This ST1 crane or cargo crane was also constructed by Boonse Metaalwerken. It dates from 1983 and was used at Sifferdok by the port-infrastructure company Euroports. Just like the Sobemai crane, you can climb this crane.

Steel platform of the ship lift used by ship repairer De Pecker to carry out repairs on the water. Photograph by Martin Corlazoli, 2023

'All people are my brothers'

In 1818, the ST1 crane appeared in the former port area around Oude Dokken, a project which wouldn't have been possible without the financial support of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). The European Union has also invested considerably in other projects to redevelop Oude Dokken. As a thank-you, a version of the European hymn by Ghent song writer Lieven Tavernier can be seen on the side of the crane.

The ST1 crane towers over Houtdok. This dock was constructed in 1880 to accommodate for the increasing import of wood from the Scandinavian and Baltic region. It is sometimes said that the wood was stored between the picturesque brick arches, but that is not true. The arches supported a level platform that was strong enough to carry the shipments of wood that were unloaded here. The platform was more or less level with the deck of the ship, which made it easier to unload the planks and logs. Nowadays, the brick arches no longer serve any practical purpose and adorn the promenade around Houtdok.

Not just any concrete block

Until the turn of this century, ship repairer De Pecker worked on the site where the ST1 crane now stands. Nothing is left from that workshop, except for the massive concrete block next to the harbour crane. This was the foundation on which the company installed its machines. The steel platform floating in a corner of Houtdok, is another reminder of the ship repairer. This lift was used by De Pecker to repair ships on the water.

VOORHAVEN

The additional 2.5-kilometre walking loop takes you through the Voorhaven area, the spectacular former outpost boasting 15 listed monuments and forming the largest listed townscape in Ghent. It was created in 1885, when the Ghent-Terneuzen Canal was widened and deepened. The Voorhaven area has the unmistakable signature of Emile Braun. As the city's engineer, he was responsible for the design of the new port project, and later on became mayor of Ghent.

Continue towards Terneuzenlaan.

Ghent architect Geo Henderick has left his mark on Terneuzenlaan. First, you come across the alley he designed in Assenedestraat. Then you will see the manager's house in Art Nouveau style, with behind it the warehouses he designed for the former ship repairer Beauval, the oldest firm that repaired ocean-going vessels in Belgium. Until 1893, Beauval was based in Stokerijstraat, the first stop on this walk.



▲ Façade of the manager's house of ship repairer Beauval. Ghent Archives collection

At the Wiedauwkaibrug bridge, you cross the railway line between Ghent and Eeklo.

An exact replica

In the 19th century, an iron swing bridge was constructed here so that the railway line could cross the canal. The swing bridge was destroyed in the First World War, but rebuilt in the 1920s. By the turn of this century, the mechanism had become completely worn out. In 2008, the listed swing bridge was replaced by an exact copy, but not everything was lost: the original swing mechanism can be found next to the new bridge. The bridge still pivots whenever ships need to pass: a spectacular view.

Continue in the direction of Voorhavenkaai.

1 Four in a row

Along Voorhavenkaai, there used to be six huge warehouses, four of which are still standing today. In these warehouses, all sorts of goods used to be unloaded: grain, linseed, wine, chemicals, flax, machines and even livestock. The skeleton of the vacant warehouse number 20 is the first one you see. To reduce the construction costs to some extent, the iron trusses and girders were recovered from the pavilions of the 1885 World's Fair in Antwerp. The warehouse was built on a platform with the ideal unloading height for freight wagons that came and went via a branch of the circular railway. The two harbour cranes, both constructed by Le Titan Anversois, are dwarfed by the dozens of cranes that used to move up and down the whole length of the dock on rails along the façades of the warehouses.



Workers pose next to a freight wagon in front of a warehouse in the Voorhaven area. Museum of Industry collection

Stories from up high

Until 1990, Frans De Backer worked as a crane operator in the port of Ghent: "In winter, we had to climb the crane with a bag of coal, some firewood and some oil on our back to light the potbelly stove. In humid weather, you got a nasty surprise. I cannot tell you how many electric shocks I got, what with all the iron. They were serious jolts all right." You can hear more stories about the life and work of Ghent's crane operators in the series 'Verhalen uit de hoogte' (Stories from up high) by the Ghent Raconteurs. (Surf to stad.gent/raconteurs.)

2 Burnt down

The Voorhaven area has also undergone a thorough facelift over the past few years. On the site of the former warehouse number 21, which burnt down in 1924, was rebuilt and eventually demolished, a neighbourhood park has been laid out with a pergola with the outlines of the previous structure.

Continue in the direction of warehouse number 22.

A danger to his co-workers

On the corner of warehouse number 22, you can find a drinking fountain where dockers could quench their thirst. A century ago, dockers who drank alcohol instead of water were immediately dismissed "since a worker in a state of drunkenness poses a danger to his co-workers", as stated in the work and pay rules of the Socialist Dockers Union. Crane operators in particular were not allowed to consume alcohol, since they had to work very accurately.



▲ Dock workers who unloaded ships are resting on the quay in Voorhaven. Ghent Archives collection

3 Loft apartments and offices

Warehouses number 22 and 23 underwent a total makeover and now house loft apartments and offices. Warehouse number 24 has vanished without a trace. The building was torn down shortly before the Voorhaven area was listed as a townscape in 1996. Now, a brand-new apartment block is under construction on this site. There is now warehouse number 25. On this site, goods were stored that did not require any protection against the elements. The recently opened park Honfleurpark is enclosed with a fence for cattle and horses from warehouse number 23. Further on, you can see a cage with scales for weighing livestock.

Continue along Voorhavenkaai and cross the site of ship repairer Ketels.

Werkhuizen Florimond Ketels brought warehouse number 26 into use at the turn of the 20th century. Originally, this was an open metal construction through which the wind could blow freely, ideal for unloading and drying wooden beams. Soon, the construction was bricked up and converted into a ship repair yard, which is still active.

At Meulestedekaai, you have reached the most northerly point of Voorhaven. Turn right and then immediately take a turn to the right again: follow the cobbled path with rail tracks.

4 Railway heritage

The path will take you to the unloading quay for freight wagons at the rear of warehouse number 26. If you look up, you can see the warehouse's original skeleton structure. On the rails, an old freight wagon and a road-rail vehicle are reminders of the goods transport that took place here. This type of locomotive was used on industrial sites. Now you cross Amsterdamstraat, and further on you can also find Rotterdamstraat, Dublinstraat, Kopenhagenstraat, Oslostraat and Londenstraat: all street names referring to the home ports of the ships that moored here.

Follow Dublinstraat along the back of the warehouses. On your left-hand side, New-Yorkstraat is lined with several warehouses. The depot of Union Margarinère Belge can be easily identified by the painted wall sign.

▼ The painted wall sign of Union Margarinère Belge is still clearly legible. Photograph by Martin Corlazoli, 2023



No admittance!

A hundred years ago, it was impossible to have a relaxed stroll in this area. The port area was closed off to the general public. The entire area was completely enclosed with an iron fence. If you wanted to enter, you had to pass through one of the five entrance gates.

5 Castle or fire station?

At the start of the 20th century, a fire station was built in Londenstraat whose turrets and crow-stepped dormers are reminiscent of a castle. In the park in front of the fire station, the railway heritage is brought back to life with a crisscross of rails, buffers stops and freight wagons. Local residents can use two wagons for exhibitions, workshops or lectures. A third freight wagon located near warehouse number 20 was used for transporting train wheels between the railway worksites of Gentbrugge and Salzinnes (near Namur).

Leave the park and immediately turn right towards the bunker.

The bunker at the rear of warehouse number 20 is one of dozens of nuclear bunkers built in the early 1950s during the Cold War. Here, dock workers could shelter in case of a nuclear attack by the Soviet Union. Further on, you can see a brick warehouse dating from the interwar period. On a side wall, you can see the faded name Theo Machtelynck & Fils, a port trader and stevedore who loaded and unloaded ships.

▼ You really need to make an effort to read the name Theo Machtelynck on the façade. Photograph by Martin Corlazoli, 2023



Follow Oslostraat between the newly built blocks of flats and turn right into Bijzerigepad along the railway track. The name of this path refers to a post mill that stood on this spot until the mid-19th century. Cross the railway track once more and return to the Muidebrug bridge via Terneuzenlaan.

RETURN

Cross the Muidebrug bridge, follow Voormuide and cross the R40 ring road. You will arrive at Sint-Salvatorstraat. Follow this street for about half a kilometre up to the traffic lights.

At the end of Sint-Salvatorstraat, you can find the Holy Christmas Church or St Salvador's Church. Thanks to its location near the old port, this church became the meeting place for the nautical community. The bow of Rihera, a cargo ship built in 1952 at the Langerbrugge shipyard, symbolises the close link between the sailors and this church.

▼ The bow of cargo ship Rihera lies in the shadow of the Holy Christmas Church as a reference to the nautical community. Photograph by Martin Corlazoli, 2023

A SOFT SPOT FOR HERITAGE

The walk begins and ends at the Museum of Industry. Three exhibitions bring back to life the large and small stories of Ghent's eventful industrial past. In the main exhibition, you can discover old maps of the former port docks as well as the story of dockworker César Van de Rostyne. César was born in 1909 and worked in various cotton mills for many years. From 1946 until the end of his career, he was a docker and foreman at Houtdok. He died in 1995. → industriemuseum.be

Are you interested in heritage and want to find out more about the history of Ghent's docks and maritime industry? Then pay a visit to the museum library, the place to be for research, knowledge sharing and connecting with people. If you have any questions about the broader technical, scientific and industrial heritage, you can ask them to the ETWIE expertise cell. → industriemuseum.be/fr/bibliotheque → etwie.be



A VISIT TO THE OLD GHENT DOCKS

A walk along Handelsdok, Achterdok, Houtdok and Voorhaven

complete route: 10 km ⌚ 3 hours
shortened route: 7,5 km ⌚ 2 hours

© Storm Calle, 2010

A VISIT TO THE OLD GHENT DOCKS

A walk along Handelsdok, Achterdok, Houtdok and Voorhaven

Until well into the 20th century, Handelsdok, Achterdok, Houtdok and Voorhaven were bustling with the activity of sailors, dockers, crane operators and ship builders who kept the Ghent port running day and night. Nowadays, all is quiet at the Old Docks. As ocean-going vessels have become ever bigger, they now moor in the larger docks north of the city.

The unique cityscape of Handelsdok and Voorhaven still boasts plenty of relics from the area's maritime past, including harbour cranes, warehouses, swing bridges and gems of Art Nouveau architecture. To breathe new life into the disused quays, two urban renewal projects were rolled out at the beginning of this century: Oude Dokken and Muide Meulestede Morgen.

This walk takes you along the former quays, loading and unloading docks, warehouses, harbour cranes, industrial relics and new developments. You'll explore Handelsdok and Houtdok, and an (optional) extra 2.5-kilometre loop will guide you through Ghent's largest listed townscape: the Voorhaven area.

EATING & DRINKING

A MUSEUMCAFÉ INDUSTRIEMUSEUM
Enjoy a light lunch or a cup of coffee, indoors or in the museum garden. Minnemeers 10 | industriemuseum.be

B NOAH
In summer, you can board NOAH for some antipasti, fresh hand-made pastas and wine. Handelsdokkaai 16/W | noah.gent | 09 223 66 89

C KLEINDOK
At Kleindok, you can sit down for delicious filled sandwiches, soup and coffee. Kleindokkaai 25 | kleindok.be | 09 328 42 10

D HAL 16
The old transformer hall at Dok Noord houses microbrewery Dok Brewing Company as well as a cosy eating market featuring grilled delicacies, (vegetarian) burgers and Tuscan cuisine. Dok-Noord 4 | hal16.be

E FROU FROU
Frou Frou can be described as the best kept secret in the old port of Ghent and serves antipasti, brunch and coffee outside the winter months. Terneuzenlaan 5 | froufrou.gent | 0473 67 71 51

F PATRON
This coffee bar next to the new park in Voorhaven also offers lunch, soup, salads and brunch. Londenstraat 64 | instagram.com/patrongent

G AMOUR
On weekdays, Amour offers an extensive lunch buffet including salads, tapenades, bread and hot dishes. Sint-Salvatorstraat 18a | amourgent.be | 09 352 05 70

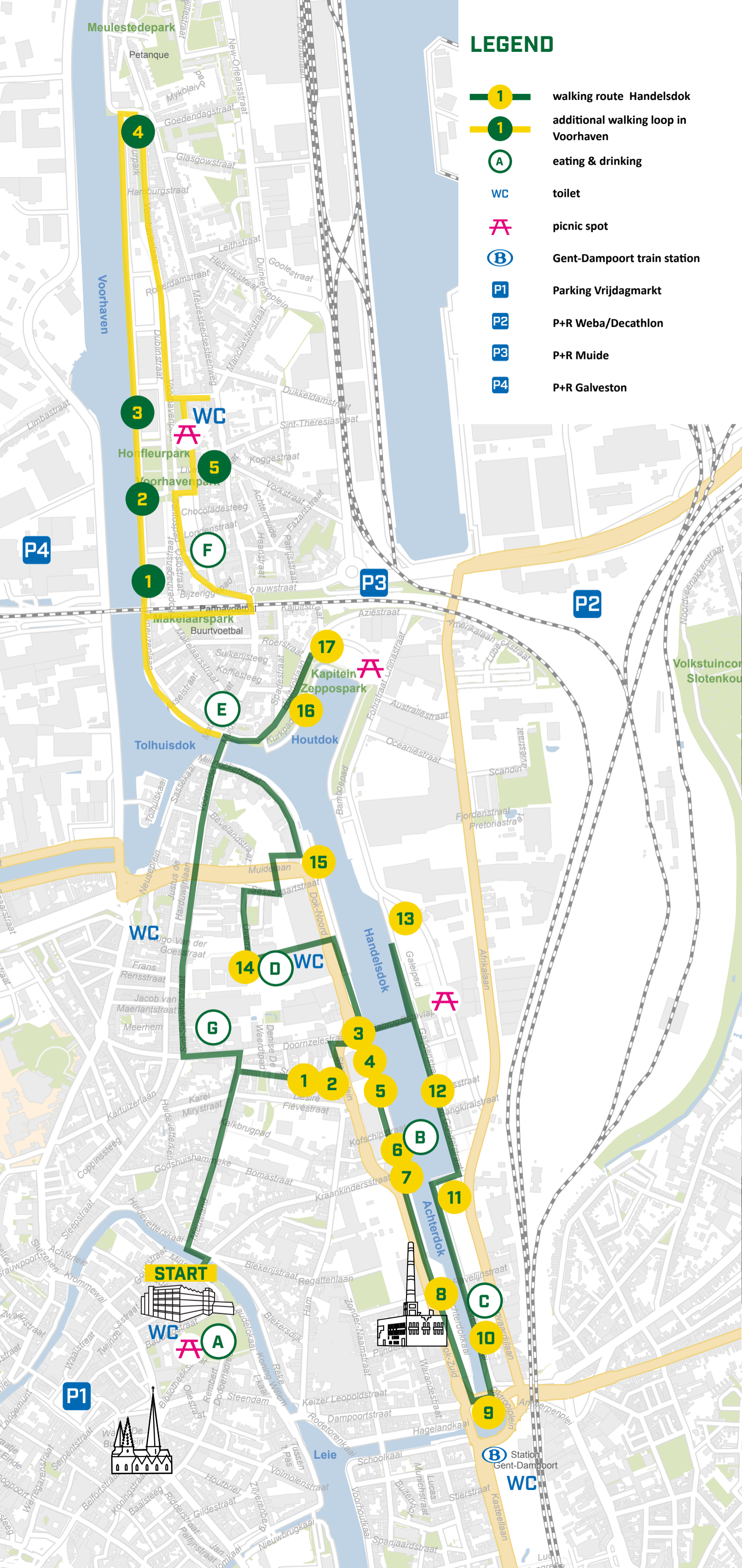


Turn left at the Holy Christmas Church into Doornzelestraat and then turn right into Nieuwland. Follow this street up to Huidevetterskaai on the river Lys. You're now back where you started, the Museum of Industry.

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This walking route was developed by the museum of Industry in partnership with the Urban Regeneration Department, the Urban and Spatial Planning Department and Sogent.

stad.gent/oude-dokken



LEGEND

- 1 walking route Handelsdokter
- 1 additional walking loop in Voorhaven
- A eating & drinking
- WC toilet
- A picnic spot
- B Gent-Dampoort train station
- P1 Parking Vrijdagmarkt
- P2 P+R Weba/Decathlon
- P3 P+R Muide
- P4 P+R Galveston

HANDELSDOK

Leave the Museum of Industry behind you and cross the river Lys via the Minnebeursbrug bridge. A little further downstream, near the Portus Ganda marina, the river flows into the Scheldt. Ghent's location at the confluence of the Lys and Scheldt explains the role of the city as a trading hub. Immediately turn left into Huidevetterskaai and then turn right into Nieuwland. Follow this street for a few hundred metres and then take a right turn into Stokerijstraat.

1 5,000 bales of cotton from New Orleans

Stokerijstraat once boasted three alleys with labourer's cottages. They were built around an enclosed courtyard. They were all constructed in the 1880s, but the alley on Banelierstraat is the only one that has survived. Right in front, maritime broker De Baerdemaeker had a warehouse built at the turn of the 20th century. The name 'Magasin De Baerdemaeker' was painted over the entire length of the façade. De Baerdemaeker has left no trace in the street. Nevertheless, from the 1850s onwards, his company was one of the largest players in the port of Ghent, together with L'Agence Maritime, John P. Best & Co. and Ghent Trading Company.

▼ The former façade of the Magasin De Baerdemaeker warehouse, 1978. Collection of the Flemish agency for immovable heritage



2 Royal warehouse

At the end of Stokerijstraat, you can see the contours of Handelsdokter. Belgian King Leopold I lay the foundation stone of this building in 1844. But the original building, designed by Ghent architect Lodewijk Roelandt, went up in flames in 1919. On the reinforced foundations of the old Entrepôt, the current building was constructed two years later: a fireproof complex which could hold 10,000 tons of goods, double the capacity of the previous building. Nowadays, the former municipal warehouse is used as an office block. The street you have reached is called Stapelplein or "entrepôt square", which refers to the original function of Handelsdokter.



▲ View of the Entrepôt near Handelsdokter, which was destroyed by fire in 1919. Photograph by Edmond Sacré. Ghent Archives collection

On the right of the road Stapelplein you will find, at number 41, the former firm of L. De Brabant, which operated steam to London, Rotterdam and Amsterdam. We turn to the left and follow the ring road, with Handelsdokter on the other side, until we reach the apartment block called Residentie Benelux. Here we can cross the R40 safely and arrive at a black dock-side crane.

3 The oldest and smallest crane

For many years, the harbour cranes dominated the skyline of Handelsdokter. To bring the maritime past back to life, a dozen harbour cranes have been installed in the past few years. Not only do they create a maritime atmosphere, they also show the evolution of crane technology. This hand crane is not just the oldest but also the smallest one in the port of Ghent. It dates from 1870 and is parked on the tracks of one of the oldest quays in Handelsdokter. It was built by the firm Nicaise et Delcuve from La Louvière. Although this hand crane comes from a railway depot in Saint-Ghislain, similar cranes were also used in Ghent for loading and unloading freight wagons. Although it was propelled manually, the crane had a lifting capacity of three tons. After a century and a half, the mechanism still works perfectly, but it has been blocked for safety reasons.



▲ The oldest and smallest crane in the port of Ghent is located near the Residentie Benelux building. Photograph by Martin Corlazoli, 2023

6 Decorative fence

Two apartment blocks are located next to the new residential tower. For their typology and scale, architecture firm '360 architecten' drew inspiration from the original warehouse. Just like the warehouse, the newly built complex is enclosed by the original decorative fence dating from the 1920s.

To the right of the harbour crane, several winding-on cylinders from cranes and rejected chains from drilling rigs have been spread out to discourage people from parking their car here. On the waterfront, you can see red crane buckets of the Ghent company Konstruktiewerkhuizen Eeckhout.



▲ View of the new residential tower and apartment blocks, with Handelsdokter on which they are based in the distance. Photograph by Martin Corlazoli, 2023

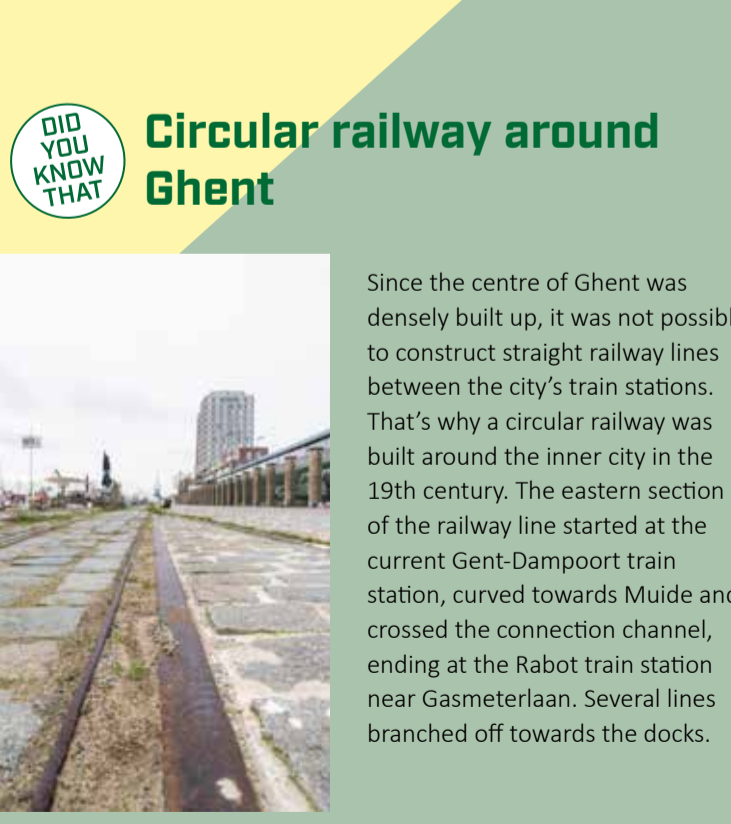
Retrace your steps towards the former warehouse via the walking and cycling promenade on the waterfront. This is Handelsdokterkaai.

4 Two-hundred-year-old docks

Nearly 200 years old, Handelsdokter and Achterdokter are among the oldest docks in Ghent. They were constructed in 1828 to accommodate the large number of ships entering the city via the recently opened Ghent-Terneuzen Canal. Thanks to the emergence of cotton spinning mills, a golden age dawned for the port of Ghent. As early as 1880, the docks became too small and Handelsdokter was extended with Houtdok. On the quay walls, you can still see the bollards that were used for mooring ships.

5 Built for and by Cockerill

The black crane you see once you've passed the warehouse is no longer propelled manually, but steam powered. Constructed in 1906 by Cockerill in Seraing, it was used on the shipyard of the same company in Hoboken to transport shipbuilding plates. The crane is parked on the old tracks that used to carry freight wagons.



▲ The old rails of the former circular railway can still be seen on the quays. Photograph by Martin Corlazoli, 2023

Continue along the promenade to the transport carts, another reference to the maritime past.

7 Antwerp titan

The icing on the cake for the renovated Handelsdokterkaai area is a crane cab from the collection of the Museum of Industry. Le Titan Anversois built it in 1925, about a century ago. This manufacturing company from Hoboken was founded in 1901 and exported cranes throughout Europe. In the mid-20th century, it was taken over by Boonse Metaalwerken, a manufacturing company that built several harbour cranes you'll see along the way. What makes this portal crane unique is hidden under the bonnet: its electric propulsion. This crane demonstrates the blind faith of the Ghent port authorities in a new technology: electricity. As early as 1904, the first electric cranes made their appearance on the Ghent docks.

A tribute to the Ghent crane children

If you crossed the inner ring road where this crane stands, you would end up in Kraankindersstraat, a street named after the so-called "crane children" (who were, in fact, short men) who powered the harbour cranes by means of a treadwheel. The street does not feature any cranes, but you can see another example of industrial heritage: the former power station. Nowadays, the former power station houses the intercultural music centre De Centrale.

Go through the gate behind the crane towards the low brick building. This used to be a pumping station that provided the power plant across the street with cooling water from the dock. Continue past the pumping station towards the next crane.

8 Coal for the power plant

At Dok-Zuid, ships and trains unloaded the coal that powered the turbines in the power plant. A conveyor belt transported the coal from the quay across the street to the power station. In a sidewalk of the building behind the silos, you can still see the bricked-up opening through which the coal entered the building.



Zwart Marietje

Whenever a new load of coal arrived, it was as if a feast was laid out. Local residents, including a woman nicknamed Zwart Marietje (Black Mary), ran into the street and swept up the coal dust. The sale of this black gold was her only source of income and the dirty work also explains her nickname.

Perhaps you don't expect it here, but a harbour crane was also used in this dusty setting. This Stork crane was built in 1928 for the port of Antwerp by Ateliers métallurgiques de Nivelles. The electric motors were made by ACEC. Built by the Dutch manufacturer Stork, the harbour crane was acquired by the Nautical Museum Rotterdam in the 1980s, and eventually ended up in the Ghent docks in the summer of 2018.

Walk underneath the crane towards Dampoort. You will cross a vacant plot on which Artevelde University of Applied Sciences plans to construct a new campus.

9 Zwaaiikom near Dampoort

Now you've reached the far end of the old port of Ghent: Zwaaiikom. On this spot, ships that wanted to leave Handelsdokter could make a U-turn and head for the sea. Barges, on the other hand, could continue their journey inland via Zwaaiikom and Portus Ganda.



▲ View of Zwaaiikom from Gent-Dampoort. In the background, you can see the Gent-Oost goods station, near the current Dampoort train station. Ghent Archives collection

Cross the Dampoortbrug bridge and immediately turn left into Kleindokkaai. Walk to the green booms, relics from the former unloading installations.

10 Kleindokkaai

The brick façade near these booms belongs to one of the surviving warehouses on Kleindokkaai. This is where the Dutry-Colson family stored their sugar, hence the heavy concrete support structure visible in the wall.



▲ The concrete beams are still visible in the façade of the Dutry-Colson warehouse. Photograph by Martin Corlazoli, 2023

View of the boiler rooms with chimneys, the coal park with coal bunkers, the grab crane and the conveyor installations of the Ham municipal power plant. Photograph from L'Industrie Mondiale Photo & Film, 1961. Museum of Industry collection

Walk along Kleindokkaai until you reach the green crane.

11 Made in Belgium

This Sobemai crane comes from the port-infrastructure company Euroports in Ghent. This is a special case. It is a hydraulic balance crane that moved around on caterpillar tracks, which was handy in places without any tracks. The crane was developed in 1988 by Sobemai, a company located in Maldegem and specialised in balance cranes. From the observation platform, you can see the port through the eyes of the crane operators who used to work here.



▲ The Sobemai crane on Kleindokkaai towers over Handelsdokter. Photograph by Martin Corlazoli, 2023

At the foot of the crane, there is a turntable that allowed freight wagons to take a sharp turn. The two pillars sticking out of the water will soon carry the Matadibrug bridge. Just like in case of the other new bridges and quays, its name refers to a place that had an economic link with the Ghent harbour, in this case Matadi: a port in Congo. On the right-hand side is the site of the former De Keuleleij scrapyard. Awaiting the construction of a neighbourhood park, the vacant space is temporarily used as a skate park. Back on ground level, you can see a ship's engine built by Bohn & Kahler, a manufacturer from the German port of Kiel.

Continue up to Schipperskaai, a car-free walking and cycling promenade where a new neighbourhood appears.

12 Three harbour cranes in a row

The three harbour cranes stand out in the neighbourhood. The first two blue cranes were constructed by the German firm Peiner between 1966 and 1974. For nearly half a century, they scooped up sand and gravel on the premises of Kesteleyn at Zuiddok. After Kesteleyn decommissioned these two workhorses, the 44-metre-tall beasts were moved to Schipperskaai. The furthest, green crane is the only thing left of the Inter-Beton concrete mixing plant, but more on this later on.

Follow the quay up to the foot of the Bataviabrug bridge. The maritime past is not far away here either. In Robinson Crusoeëpark, the green area alongs Bataviapad, a discarded buoy from the North Sea is the eye-catcher.

13 Former concrete mixing plant

The green harbour crane marks the location of the former Inter-Beton concrete mixing plant. The cement and concrete industry boomed after the First World War, and Handelsdokter also had to accommodate this new industrial sector. In the early 1960s, the companies Gent-Beton and Giment d'Obourg each built their own concrete mixing plant. After a few years, they merged into a single entity: Inter-Beton.

The influence of modernism from the interwar period was still noticeable in the architecture of the silos, the floating footbridges and the winding stairs next to the yellow harbour crane that matched the bicoloured whole. But that is a thing of the past now. In 2009, Inter-Beton moved to another location on Alphonse Sifferlaan and the concrete mixing plant was demolished in 2021 to make way for a neighbourhood park. The yellow harbour crane was repainted green in reference to the former colour of Ghent's municipal cranes.



▲ Graffiti on the walls of the now demolished Inter-Beton plant. Photograph by Storm Calle, 2010

Who wants to go to Verapaz?

The foot and cycle path that runs to Houtdok is temporarily inaccessible due to the construction of the Verapazbrug bridge. From 2024 onwards, traffic on the Ghent ring road will be routed through Verapazbrug and Afrikaan towards Dampoort. As a result, Dok-Noord, Stapelplein square and Dok-Zuid will become low-traffic zones. The name of the Verapazbrug bridge refers to a former Belgian colony in Guatemala. From 1841 onwards, Ghentians who lived in poverty were lured to Verapaz with promises of a better life. However, the Belgian colony never really got off the ground. Yet the story of the endeavour continued to be told in the Muide neighbourhood. Until the mid-20th century, seamen who left the port used to sing 'Who wants to go to Verapaz?' as a farewell song.

Retrace your steps and cross the Bataviabrug bridge. A section of the bridge can be lifted so that ships can pass under it. Turn right and follow the water until you reach the entrance of the former ACEC machine factory. Cross the street and enter the ACEC building.

14 The first harbour crane at Handelsdokter

Dok Noord is a new neighbourhood located between the historical workplaces of Ateliers de Constructions Électriques de Charleroi (ACEC), the former Carels factory. Carels, a manufacturer of steam engines, locomotives, diesel engines and gas turbines founded this factory in the mid-19th century. To move the extremely heavy components, Carels built the first harbour crane at Handelsdokter in 1857. This iron hand crane could lift loads of up to 15 tonnes. But powerful cranes were also needed within the factory walls. One of them has been preserved, namely at the rear of the former foundry, nowadays an interior design shop called De Direkteurswoning. A retractable bridge rests on top of an iron construction here.



▲ Behind the interior design shop called De Direkteurswoning, an old retractable bridge has been preserved. Photograph by Martin Corlazoli, 2022

Go straight ahead passing De Direkteurswoning. Pass right underneath the iron construction of the retractable bridge and follow the path between the trees towards Muideaan. Continue up to the pedestrian crossing next to the Q8 filling station across the road and cross Muideaan there. First turn right and then left into Dok-Noord.