

# Maria Thereza Alves



## Seeds of Change

Marseilles 1999-2000  
Reposaari 2001  
Liverpool 2004  
Exeter/Topsham 2004  
Dunkerque 2005  
Bristol 2007

# Seeds of Change

Seeds of Change is an ongoing investigation of ballast flora in the port cities of Europe which has been realized for Marseilles, Reposaari in Finland, Dunkirk, Exeter/Topsham, Liverpool, and Bristol.

Material such as stones, earth, sand, wood, bricks and whatever else was economically expedient was used as ballast to stabilize merchant sailing ships according to the weight of the cargo. Upon arrival in port, the ballast was unloaded, carrying with it seeds from the area where ballast had been collected. The source of these seeds can be any of the ports and regions (and their regional trading partners) involved in trade with Europe.

Seeds contained in ballast may germinate and grow, potentially bearing witness to a far more complex narrative of world history than is usually presented by orthodox accounts. Although they have the potential to alter our notions of the identity of place as belonging to a defined bioregion, the historical importance of these seeds is rarely acknowledged. Seeds of Change is, therefore, designed to question those discourses that define the geographical and 'natural' history of place: At what moment do seeds become 'native'? What are the socio-political histories of place that determine the framework of belonging?

The botanist, Dr. Heli Jutila writes, "Although seeds seem to be dead, they are in fact alive and can remain vital in soil for decades, and even hundreds of years in a state of dormancy." Some of these seeds have already germinated; others, given the right conditions, still retain the potential to germinate.

Seeds of Change does not duplicate scientific work within an 'art' context but rather contributes with original research by locating historical ballast sites and ballast flora. Local archives are first researched for evidence and then ballast sites are located with the aid of historical map references. From these sites, samples of earth are taken and potted and the seeds germinate.

Seeds of Change is a proposal for a garden which would be planted with hundreds of samples collected from historical ballast sites. The garden would serve as a forum at which individuals can actively participate in and develop the direction of the artwork.

Local residents, some originally from rural regions of their countries which were involved in trade, can provide expert information on the origins of the plants. The residents along with the scientific community can cooperate in identifying the ballast flora which have arrived in European ports for centuries.

If official accounts of history fail to account for, and even work to erase local knowledge and experiences, by contrast, art has the potential to reclaim such narratives to contemporary social realities.

# Marseilles 1999-2000



Vieux Port of Marseilles

For two thousand years, seeds arriving from regions trading with Marseilles, ranging from Norway to South Africa and from Mexico to Vietnam have been accumulating along the corners of the port of Marseilles - - - without being noticed. Seeds of Change is an attempt to find these seeds.



flora in the Vieux Port of Marseilles



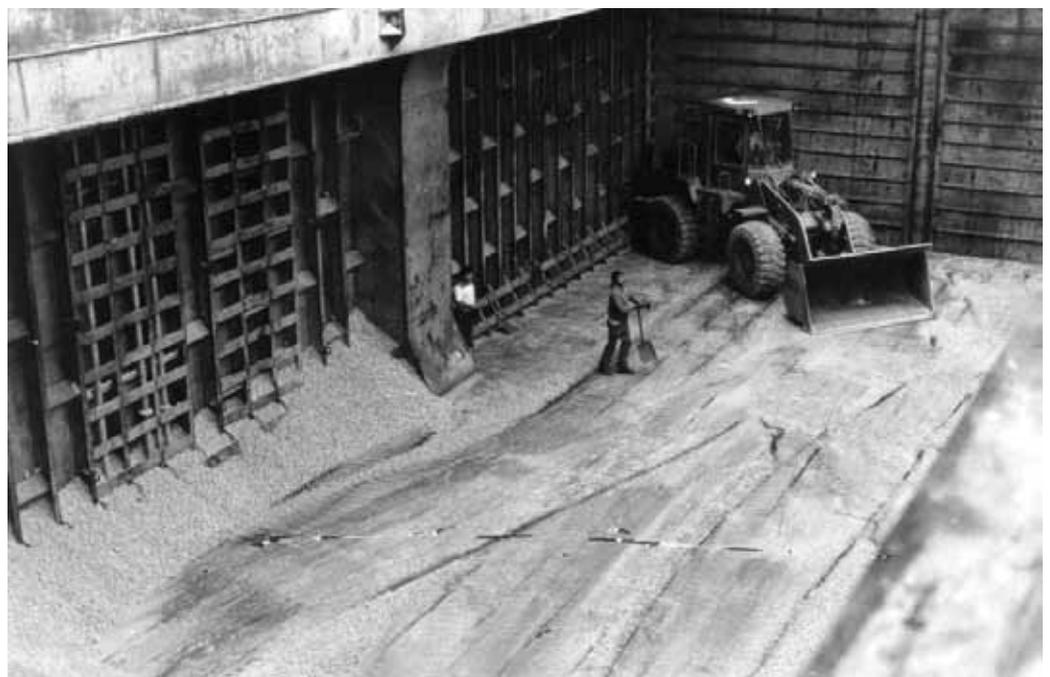
ballast site

A new depot was built in 1824 between a shipyard, a construction site and the Pierre de Marbre Quay. None of these sites exist today. At the port, a likely place is a parking lot with ancient walls built high, an area large enough to build a ship in.

Trading partners of Marseilles from 1200 to the present:

The Levant, the Barbary States, Holland, French Islands in America, Pondichery and Chandernagor, Isle of France, Ter re Neuve, the Ponant, Cabotage, Saint Domingue, Cayenne, Morues, England, Belgium, Sweden, Denmark, Gibraltar, Malta, Ionian Islands, Austria, Sardinia, Two Sicilies, Tuscany, Roman States, Spain, Greece, Turkey, Russia and the Black Sea, Egypt, Algeria, Portugal, West Coast of Africa, Senegal, Haiti, Martinique, Guadeloupe, Guyana, Danish Antilles, Spanish Antilles, Peche de la Morue, USA, Mexico, Colombia, Brazil, La Plata, Uruguay, Maurice, British Indies, Dutch Indies and Reunion, Australia, Madagascar, Argentina, USA, Cuba, Colombia and Chile.

Seeds among the ballast in ships arriving from any of these places which traded with Marseilles could have been unloaded in the Port of Marseilles and become part of the flora of the region.



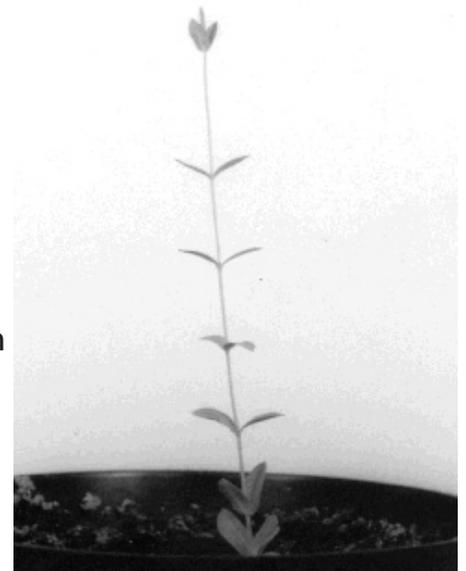


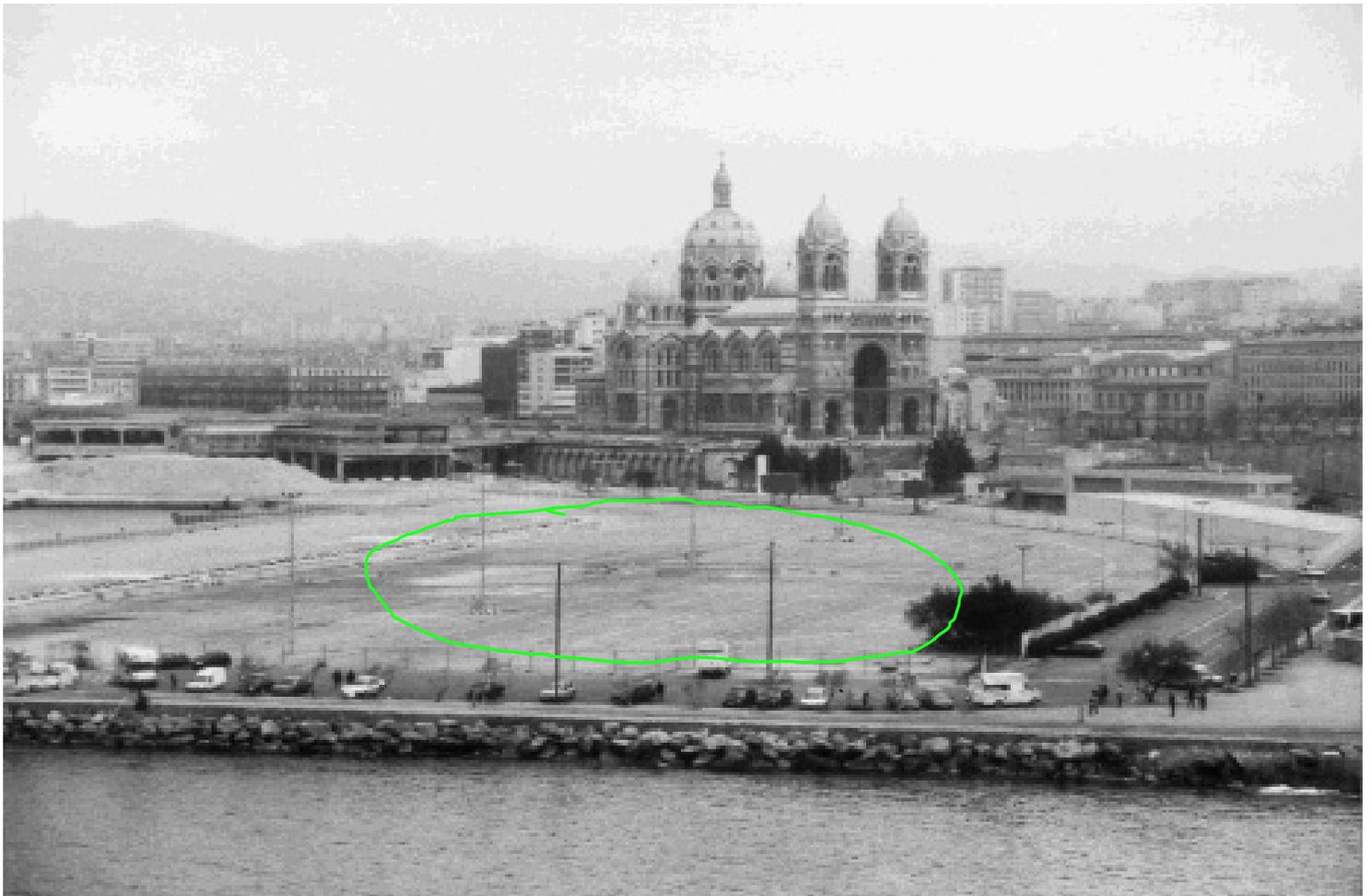
Investigations led to the discovery of the following ballast sites in the Port of Marseilles:

- \* Pierre de Marbre Depot
- \* Depot X at the foot of Fort St. Nicolas
- \* Depot at the Bassin du Carenage
- \* Depot at the Bassin de la Gare Maritime
- \* Depot at Major

(Sometimes ballast was even carted off to the countryside of Marseilles.)

Soil samples of up to 40 cm in depth were collected with a botanical tool at the ballast sites. Samples were potted and germinated in a greenhouse.



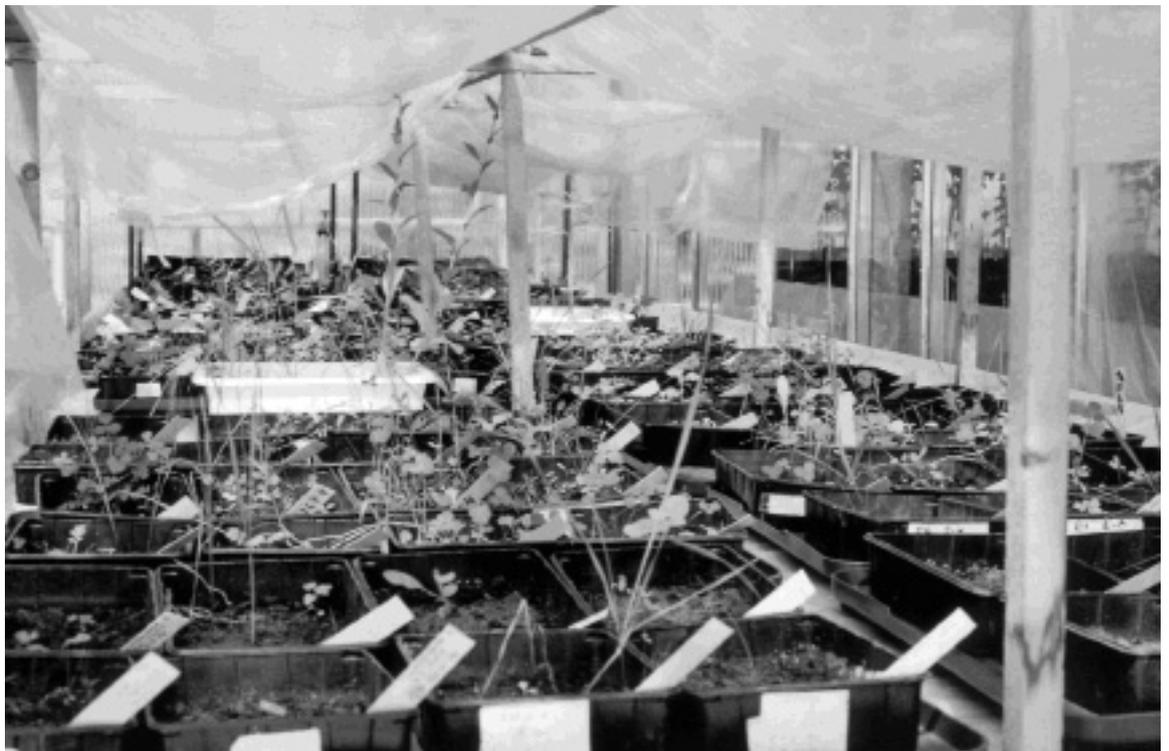


Seeds of Change proposes a garden on the Vieux Port of Marseilles, where many of the residents there are immigrants (and their descendants) from the different regions of the world which trade with Marseilles.

# Reposaari 2001



Reposaari was at one time the major port of Finland and ballast material arriving there was used as landfill to build up the island. Two hundred samples of earth from ballast sties were collected from the homes of local residents. Ballast flora grows abundantly throughout this small community whose residents have become interested in their non-native plants.





Soili Tuukki has several ballast plants growing in her garden. Some have sprung up naturally; others have been the results of bartering with neighbours.



In the middle of Eero Raesma's garden, a solitary exotic ballast plant stands regally. Towards the back, large areas are covered with ballast flora.



Vekko Andersson's house lies along what had been known as the London Road which had been a temporary road built to transport ballast material from the docks to across the island so that it would provide the foundation material for the construction of London Villa, built by the owner of a dock in the port of Reposaari. Along the way, ballast material spilled from the wagons and plants grew where one would not think to look for them since they were so far away from the original ballast areas. The road has since long closed but Vekko pointed out that the ballast plant *Chelidonium majus*, originally from Asia, grows well there.



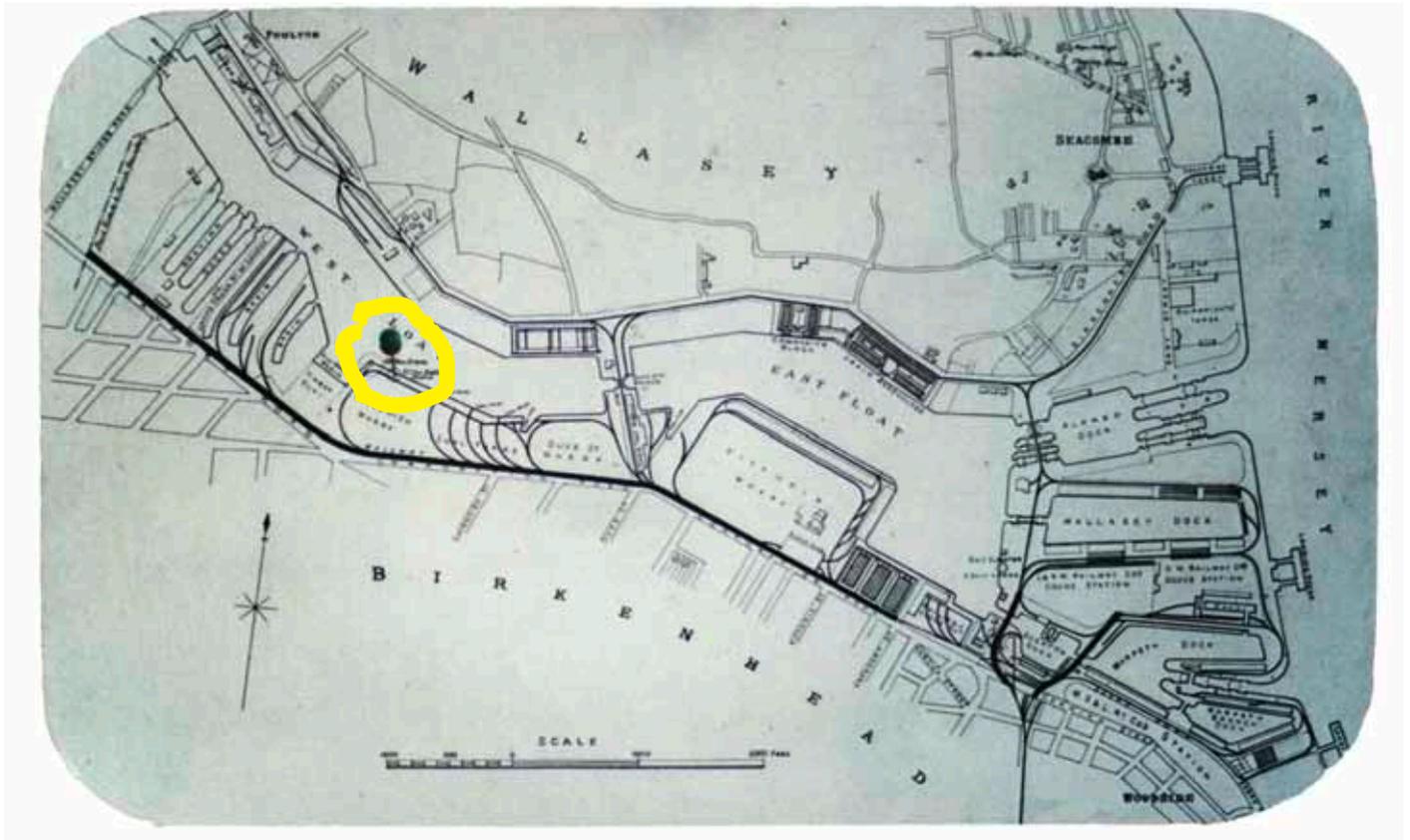


Samples of earth taken from ballast sites were germinated and placed in a greenhouse in the Taidemuseo (Museum of Contemporary Art) in Pori. Each sample exhibited at the museum was labelled with the name of the garden's owner. This became a meeting place for sharing information between the residents of Reposaari and Pori and the scientific community. (Since ballast flora grew freely in Reposaari; a ballast garden project would be redundant)



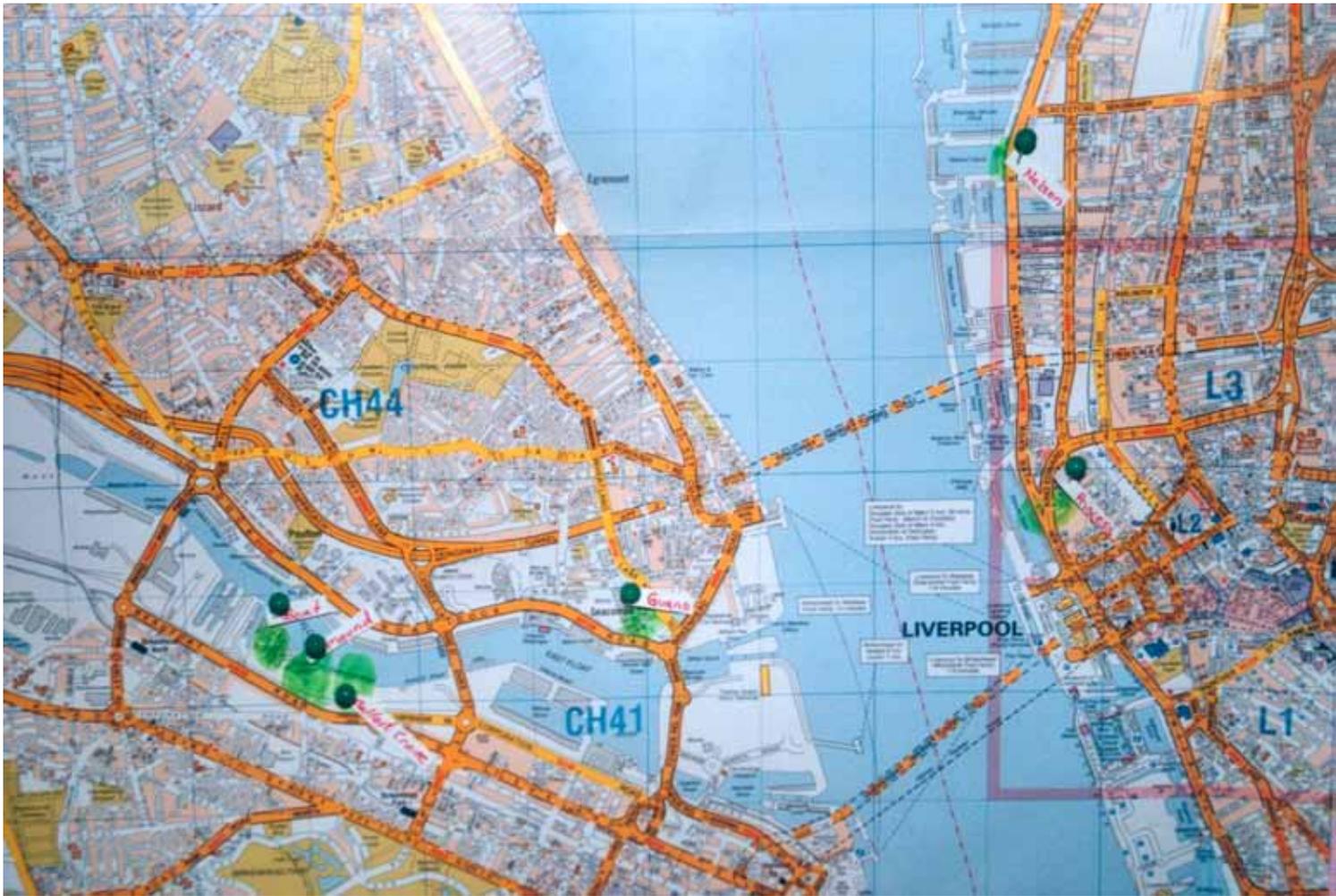
# Liverpool 2004

After the 1740's, Liverpool became the leading slave trading port in the world. Ballast was used from the colonies in the Americas to Liverpool in the last part of the Atlantic triangle slave trade route. It was far more profitable to immediately return from the Americas without waiting for colonial goods to be ready for loading and go directly to England with only ballasted vessels. Back in Liverpool, the ships would then pick up English goods and leave immediately for Africa to trade for more slaves and then continue on to the Americas to sell them.



A map in the Maritime Museum in Liverpool provides the location of a „Ballast Crane“ which existed in Birkenhead, an extension of the Liverpool port.





ballast sites in the port of Liverpool



Samples of earth were taken at the Cavendish Wharf in the West Float in the Birkenhead part of the port, from the Alfred Docks in Seacombe, the Nelson and Princess Docks on the Liverpool side (all others have undergone intensive refurbishment) and were germinated at the National Wildflower Centre.

During the 19th century, botanists who went for walks along the docks became excited by strange plants which were not in catalogues of English flora but were instead native to Asia, North Africa, the Mediterranean and the Americas and made a new category for them, Ballast Flora.



Surprisingly there were non-native plants found growing on the "Ballast-made roads at Claughton and Birkenhead" (according to an earlier flora catalogue). There had been so much ballast coming into the port of Liverpool, as evidenced by the ballast crane, that some way of getting rid of it had to be found, such as using it as construction material.



Ballast flora sprout and yet have been removed from their intimate history with centuries of ship trade in Liverpool. We walk past these small histories of complexities as they keep coming up in 'waste areas', along roads and in the cracks and seams of concrete.

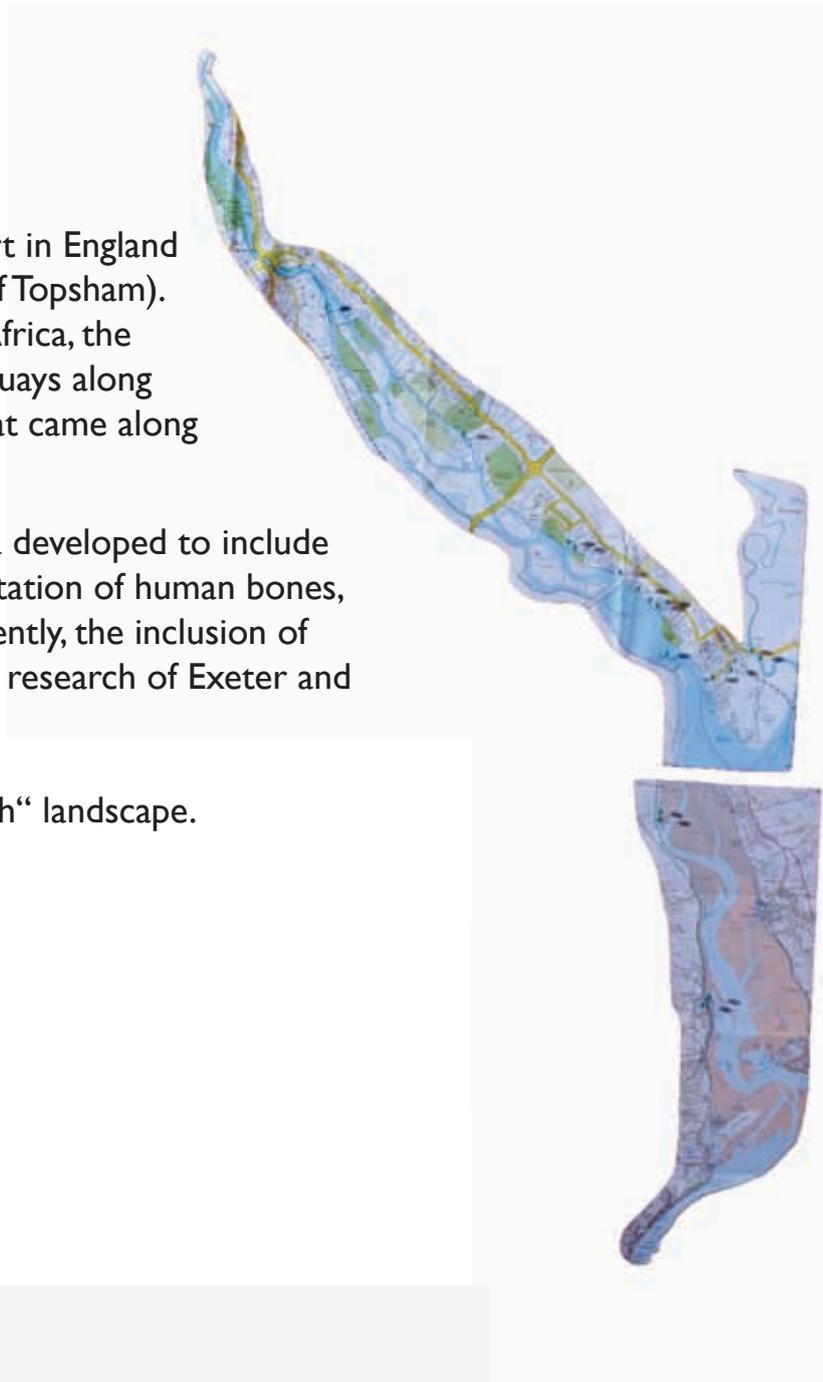
Although ballast flora grows throughout the city of Liverpool, it has become remote from its intimate connection with shipping and therefore the history of the city. The intention of the project for Liverpool was to re-establish these modest but complex ballast histories by examining the apparent randomness of these plants sprouting by roadsides, through cracks in the pavement and in the concrete seams of waste ground.

# Exeter / Topsham 2004

Exeter, at one time was the fourth largest port in England (and eventually subsumed the nearby port of Topsham). Ships from Exeter and Topsham traded with Africa, the Americas, Asia and continental Europe. The quays along the ports served as entry points for seeds that came along with cargo and ballast.

What began as an investigation of ballast flora developed to include cargo as a result of the mention of the importation of human bones, rendered into fertilizer for gardens. Consequently, the inclusion of the individual in history became urgent in the research of Exeter and Topsham.

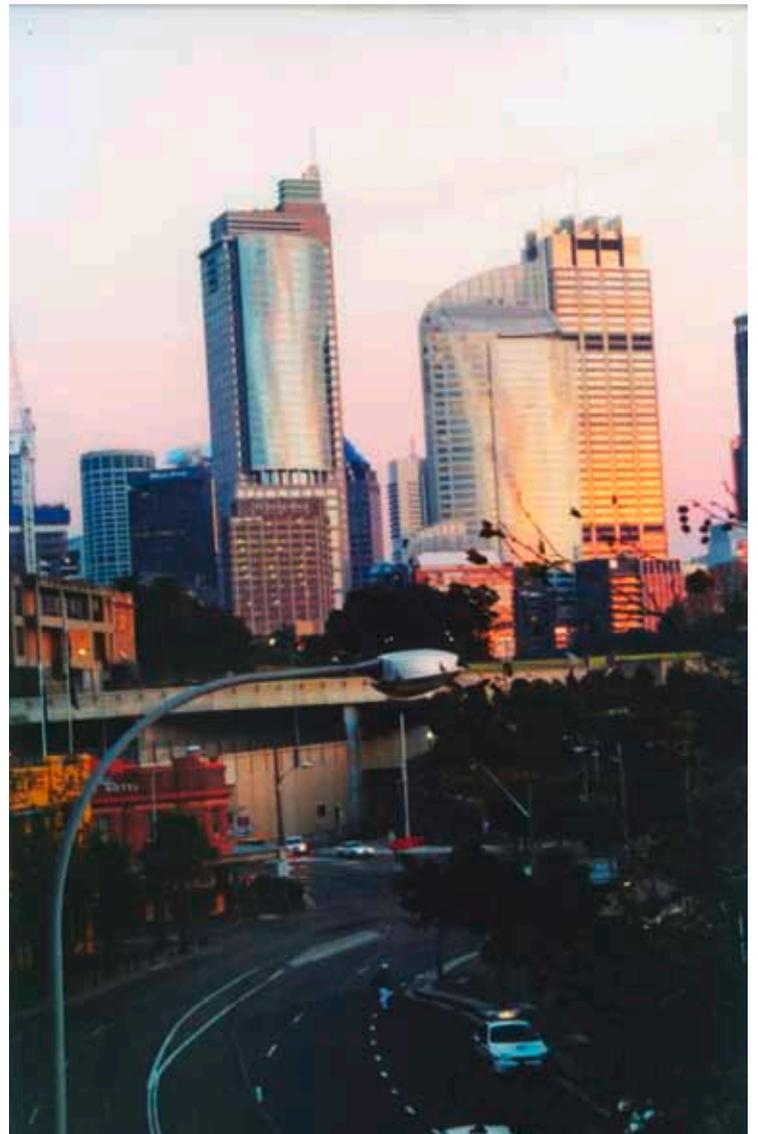
Ship trade changed and re-defined the „English“ landscape.



# Human Bones



Oldham's Manure and Chemical Company imported bones, guano and manure to be used as garden fertilizer.



Cheryl Buchanan, aboriginal leader in Australia said:

„Maybe they are our bones as England would want to be getting rid of evidences of massacres committed against us.“

## Sugar (chocolate, coffee and tobacco)



Tobacco and cotton were grown on farms by Cherokees in the Carolinas before colonization. All of this was taken away forcibly. Samuel Buttal, owner of the Sugar Factory in Topsham had an estate in Carolina.

A homeless Cherokee.



Ladislau by his cacao tree. He was expelled from a squatted farm by gunmen from a powerful landlord. Made his way up to the Amazon where he heard land was free.

A dozen members of a local indigenous tribe hunted by white farmers all have bullets embedded in their flesh. Ladislau says: „Now, I can drink milk everyday.“

## Gold (Trade Route: Brazil and Mexico via Portugal and Spain)

Most gold in Brazil came from the state Mato Grosso.

Tupã-Y, an indigenous leader organizing for the recognition of tribal lands, stands on the limits of present land demarcation and points towards a mountain, where tribal land originally extended.

Tupã-Y was anxious that the local white landowner, who had stolen tribal lands, would kill him before he was able to accomplish the demarcation of the tribal lands.



Tupã-Y was assassinated before he was able to get tribal lands official recognized.

# Dunkirk 2005

By the 14th century, Dunkirk was trading with Gouda, Delft and Weide in Holland, also Bremen, the Nordic countries and England.

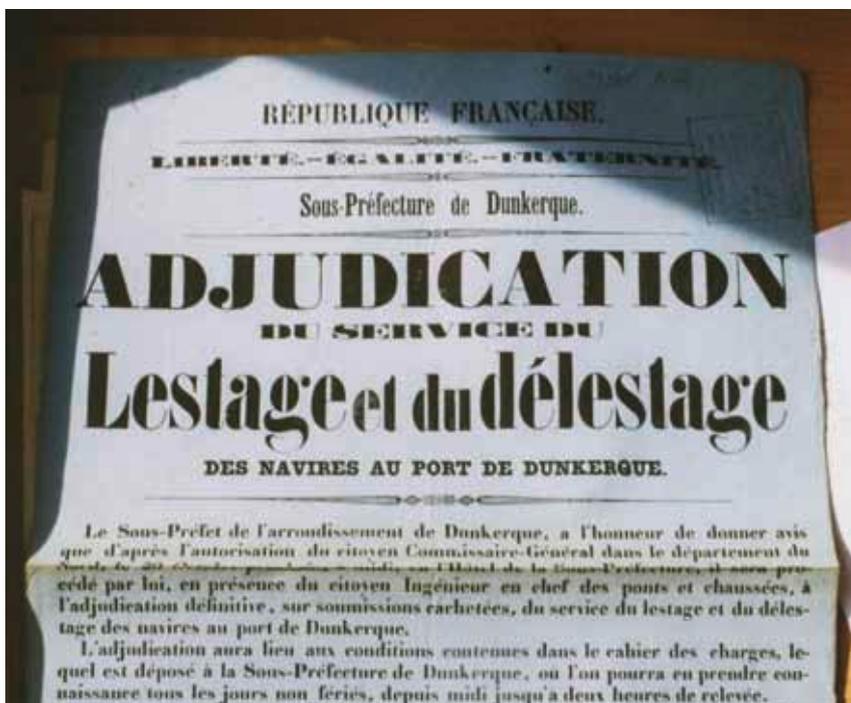
Although a conventional history of Dunkirk does cite trade with England, Dunkirk received ships from over 50 ports in Britain, including ports in Scotland and Ireland. Further study would be necessary to determine the port of origin of the ships that arrived in these British ports and therefore their possible influence on the ballast flora in Dunkirk.

Later Dunkirk expanded its trade to include the Mediterranean, the Americas, the Caribbean, Asia, Africa, Australia, New Zealand and Oceania.

And the possibilities of the origin of ballast used in ships sailing to Dunkirk were to become even more intricate since trade with Spain would also include the 32 countries in its empire which could have also contributed to the arrival of ballast seeds in Dunkirk.

Even countries without a port, such as Austria could possibly influence ballast flora in Dunkirk when in the mid 18th century it ruled over areas with shipping trade such as Ypres, Furnes, Nieuwport, Ostend, Bruges, and Ghent. And then there are the canals that link Dunkirk to the south of France and to neighbouring regions in the west and also Belgium in the east. These canals also serve to spread ballast, seeds and their history much further than the original point of introduction.

In the late 1800's the botanist Dr. Bouly de Lesdain documented "non-native" plants in the Dunkirk that originally come from Asia, Africa, Australia, the USA, India, tropical Africa, the tropical zone of the Mediterranean, tropical America and extra-tropical South America. Some of these plants continue to grow there.





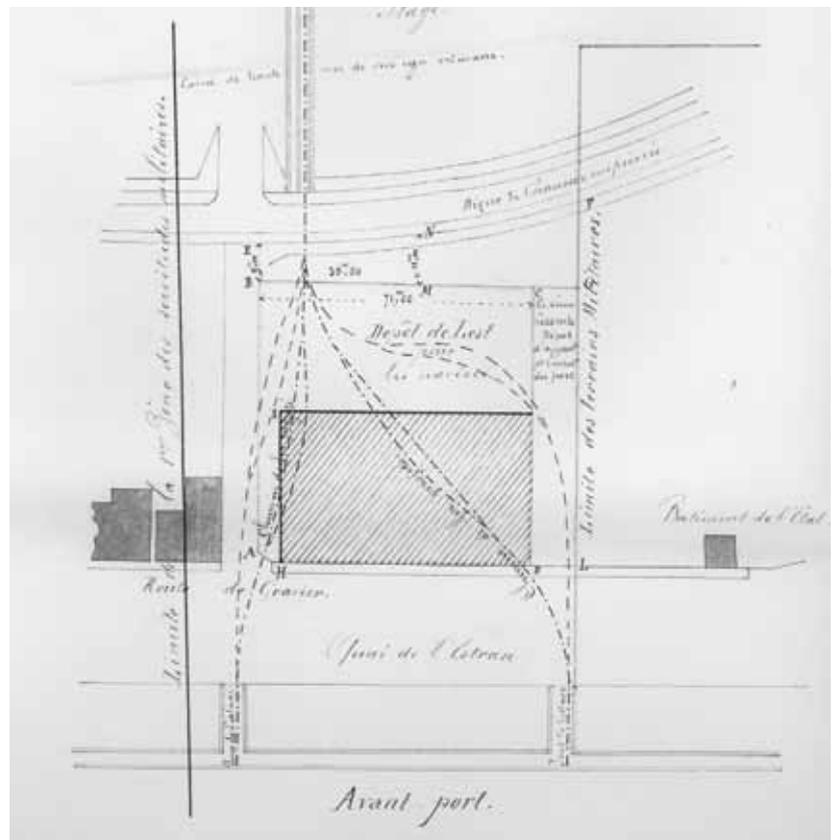
ballast sites located in the Port of Dunkirk

The first mention of a ballast depot in the archives is in the Bassin du Commerce a which was on the dock of the town between the Carenage pontoon and the construction yard.

Today the former ballast depot is located between Rue Faulconnier and Rue du Marechal French on the Quai des Hollandais.



The Bureau du lestage et du delestage, the major ballast depot of the Port of Dunkirk, was located in the Avant Port between the Quai d'Estran and the dike, just behind the Huitriere building.



Today it is more or less in the working area of local fishermen, Quai d'Armement Nord on Port Plaisance. But most of the area was removed for the building of Port Plaisance.



On Dock I, wine in wooden barrels were imported from North Africa while sugar was unloaded from the Antilles and Cuba.



Botanist Jean Claude Brunell pointed out two non-native plants growing across from Dock I, one from South Africa and the other from India.

How did their histories become connected with sugar and wine?





Just outside the Museu Portraire, which was formerly a warehouse for tobacco imported from the colony of Virginia, a trench was opened for new pipes on the Quai de Citadelle. Guano was also imported and unloaded on this quay. Birds eat lots of seeds. Soil samples were taken in the trench. Soil and therefore seeds was imported through England from the fertile island of Androlan in the Mediterranean.



Ballast was used as landfill for the foundation of the Chantier de France, a navel shipyard, now demolished, and where a school and public housing will be constructed.

For Seeds of Change Project for Dunkirk, Maria Thereza Alves proposed that a park would be built that would be open to receive not only samples of piles of materials that are being removed from the city but also for samples of materials that are being introduced into the city. These samples gathered in the park would be available for future studies of the history of Dunkirk - the history of its earth.



# Bristol 2007

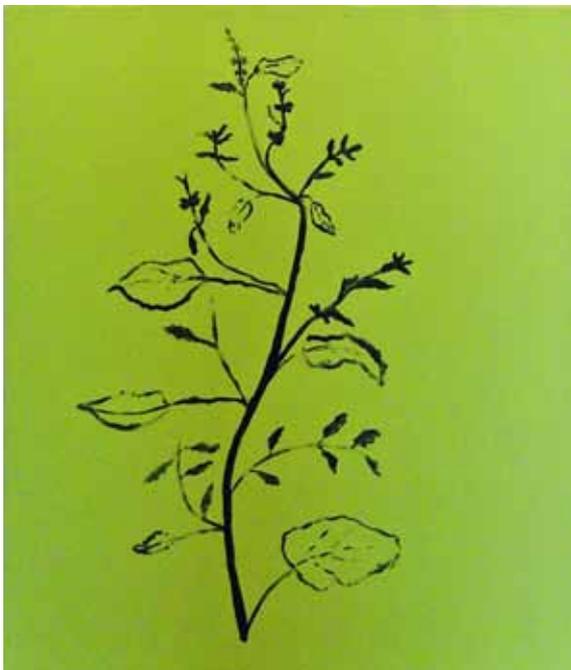
*"...at the end of the last Ice Age, the British Isles were home to only a handful of plants... The majority of these introductions [the plants that came later] occurred over two centuries between 1735-1935."*

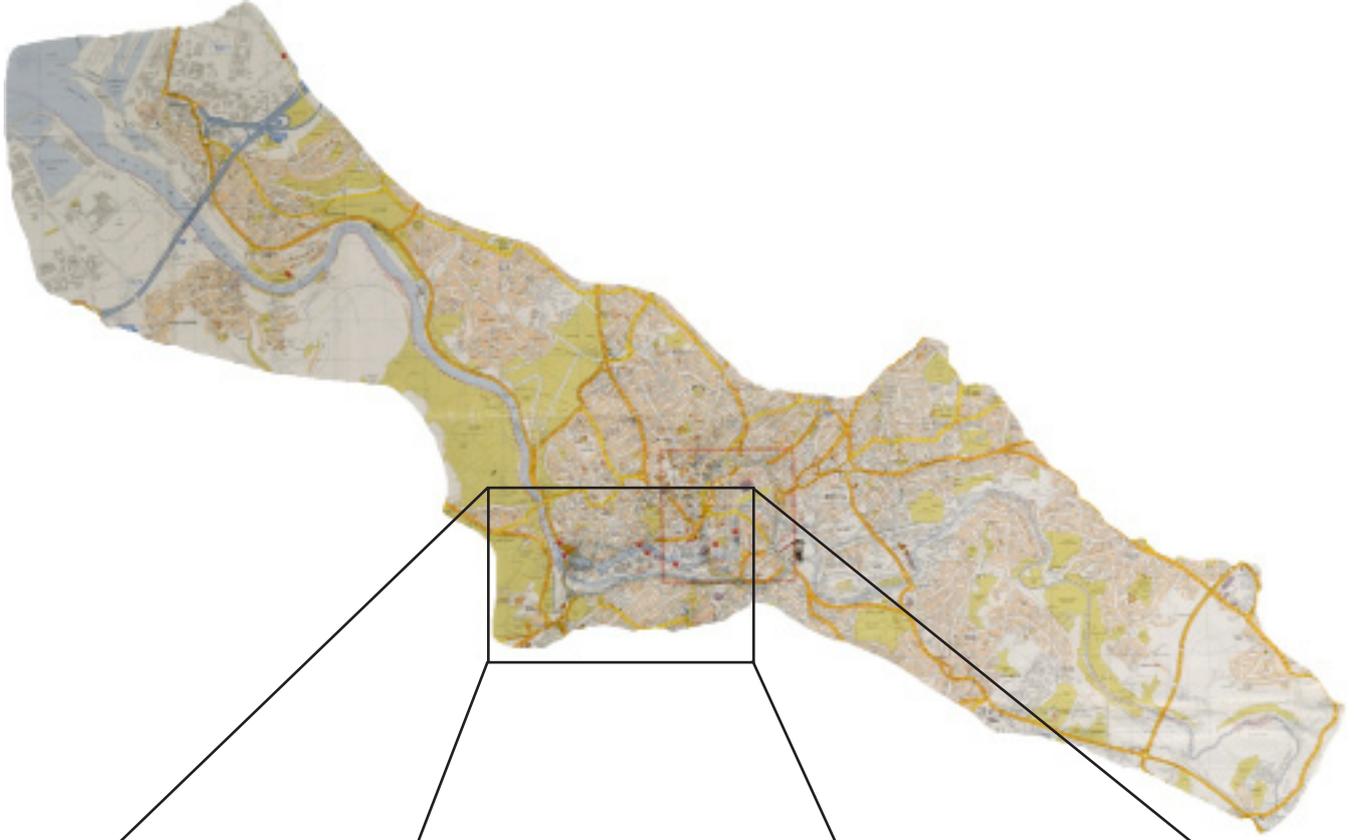
*Sue Shepard, Seeds of Fortune*

Ballast flora is a category of plants that has become part of the English landscape as it was coming into being during the 18th to early 20th century just at a time when ballast was most used in mercantile shipping and when the British Empire extended across the world.

Bristol's economic wealth is based on slave trade and contrary to our ideas of mercantile shipping practices of the Atlantic triangle trade, it was more profitable to return in ballast than wait for sugar, rum etc. as this freed up the ships to sail to Africa more quickly and pick up more slaves as the profit of this 'cargo' was the equivalent of 4-6 ships of colonial goods.

Ballast flora therefore uncovers the comprehensive history of a place. A history that must of necessity expand to include what I call 'borderless history' which must also consider the origins and specific histories of the slaves and natives working in the colonies who might also contribute to the complexity of ballast flora.







Hung Road: The office of Ballast Master at Hung Road was created in 1700. The Ballast Master, Henry West, writes in 1761, of seeing the Widow Bowen throwing ballast into the river. There are several citations by the botanist, Evans, of non-native flora growing on ballast at Hung Road.



The location of Cumberland Basin Lock is a possible ballast site.





Wapping Quay has several citations by botanists of non-native flora growing on ballast.

Dry Dock: Regulations from 1920 charged dues and rates for ships coming in ballasted here.



Redcliff: Among the water baliff's fees in 1788 was a charge of 1s6d if a vessel came in loaded with ballast.



The earth samples collected at Bristol's ballast sites grew in the homes of members of different community groups, some recent immigrants.

