Down the Thames and down the ages

A short history of East and Southeast London, from Southwark and Greenwich along the River Thames. Prepared for IDSC 2007 conference delegates by Conrad Taylor, who lives by the river at Rotherhithe.

IT IS A PARADOX OF COMMUNICATION that something which is a thoroughfare in one direction can at the same time be a barrier to movement in a perpendicular one. The Thames is a case in point. Without the Thames and the access it gives to the sea, London would never have become Britain's leading city. But the Thames also divides London in two; Londoners tend to identify themselves as belonging to North or South (and the South is considered the poor relation).

London Bridge posed a similar paradox for over 600 years. Until 1730, this was London's *only* bridge. The first stone bridge at this location (*see right*), opened in the reign of King John in 1209 and in use until 1831, was lined with shops and houses up to seven stories high. Mounted on numerous close-set piers, the bridge posed a barrier to shipping, for which reason all of London's port activities have developed downstream from London Bridge.

Old London Bridge, as featured in a panorama of London in the 1640s. On the southern defensive gatehouse is a grisly display of the heads of executed criminals, mounted on poles. In the foreground is the Church of St Mary Overy, now Southwark Cathedral.

As a result, from London Bridge to Greenwich, on both banks of the Thames, local history has been associated with Britain's maritime heritage. This is the story I have set out to tell. Let me start by sketching the whole area and its earliest history with a few broad brush-strokes…

London and its Bridge

The Romans established the city of *Londinium* in AD 43 on the north bank of the River Thames. After a wooden bridge was built across the river near the site of today's London Bridge, settlement also started to develop on the south bank, where two great paved highways converged: Watling Street (the road to Dover), and Stane Street (the road to Chichester).

At its height in the 2nd century, Roman London had a population of about 60,000. As the Roman empire fell into decline, so did London's importance, until it was abandoned in ruins in the 5th century. But by AD 600, Anglo-Saxon settlers had created a new town a mile upstream of the ruins of the Roman city. This flourished until it was razed in 821 by Danish Vikings.

As part of his successful campaigns against the Danes, the Wessex king Alfred the Great (849–899) instituted a policy of creating fortified towns or *burghs*; and he caused *Lundenburgh* to be refounded in 886, on the former site of Roman London. After this, the more westerly Saxon settlement became known as *Ealdwīc* – 'Old Village' – from which we get the name of Aldwych, at the western end of Fleet Street.

Along the river, from Southwark to Greenwich

Alfred created another *burgh* expressly to protect the south end of London Bridge. A contemporary list of *burghs*, the 'Burghal Hidage', names this as *Suthringa Geweorc*, the defensive works of the Southerners. Thus was Southwark founded.

Much of the land surrounding the Thames at this time was low-lying and marshy. Creeks divided the land into small 'eys' or 'eyots' (islands). Below London Bridge along the south bank lay *Beormund's Ey*. Cluniac monks settled here in 1082, soon after the Norman conquest. They drained the land and embanked the riverside, and thus developed the area called 'Bermondsey'.

East of Bermondsey, the Thames takes a great turn to the south, a stretch of river called Limehouse Reach. Within the elbow of this turn is Rotherhithe, the name of which comes from the Anglo-Saxon *Hryðer-hȳð*, meaning a landing-place ('hythe') for cattle. Below Limehouse Reach the Thames turns east again, and is joined by from the south by the River Ravensbourne. From the former 'deep ford' over the Ravensbourne we get the modern name 'Deptford'; the tidal part of the river is known as Deptford Creek. From here it is not far to Greenwich – Saxon *Grenewīc* , 'The Green Village'.

The southern hinterland

South of Greenwich, the land climbs to a broad area of open heath: this is Blackheath, the 'bleak heath'. The Romans maintained a settlement here as a waystation along Watling Street. This high open land, once a haunt of highwaymen, has also been the rallying-point for a number of ill-fated revolutionary marches against London, notably the Peasants' Revolt of 1381, at which the rebel priest John Ball preached on the text: *When Adam delved and Eve span, who was then a gentleman?* The Kentish rebels led by Jack Cade also gathered at Blackheath in 1450, as did the 1497 rebellion of 10,000 Cornish miners led by Michael An Gof.

In the valley of the River Ravensbourne, to the south-west of Blackheath, another early settlement was *Leofs-hema*, the home of Leof; now it is called Lewisham. Along Watling Street between Blackheath and London Bridge lay the settlement of Hatcham, now submerged within the New Cross area.

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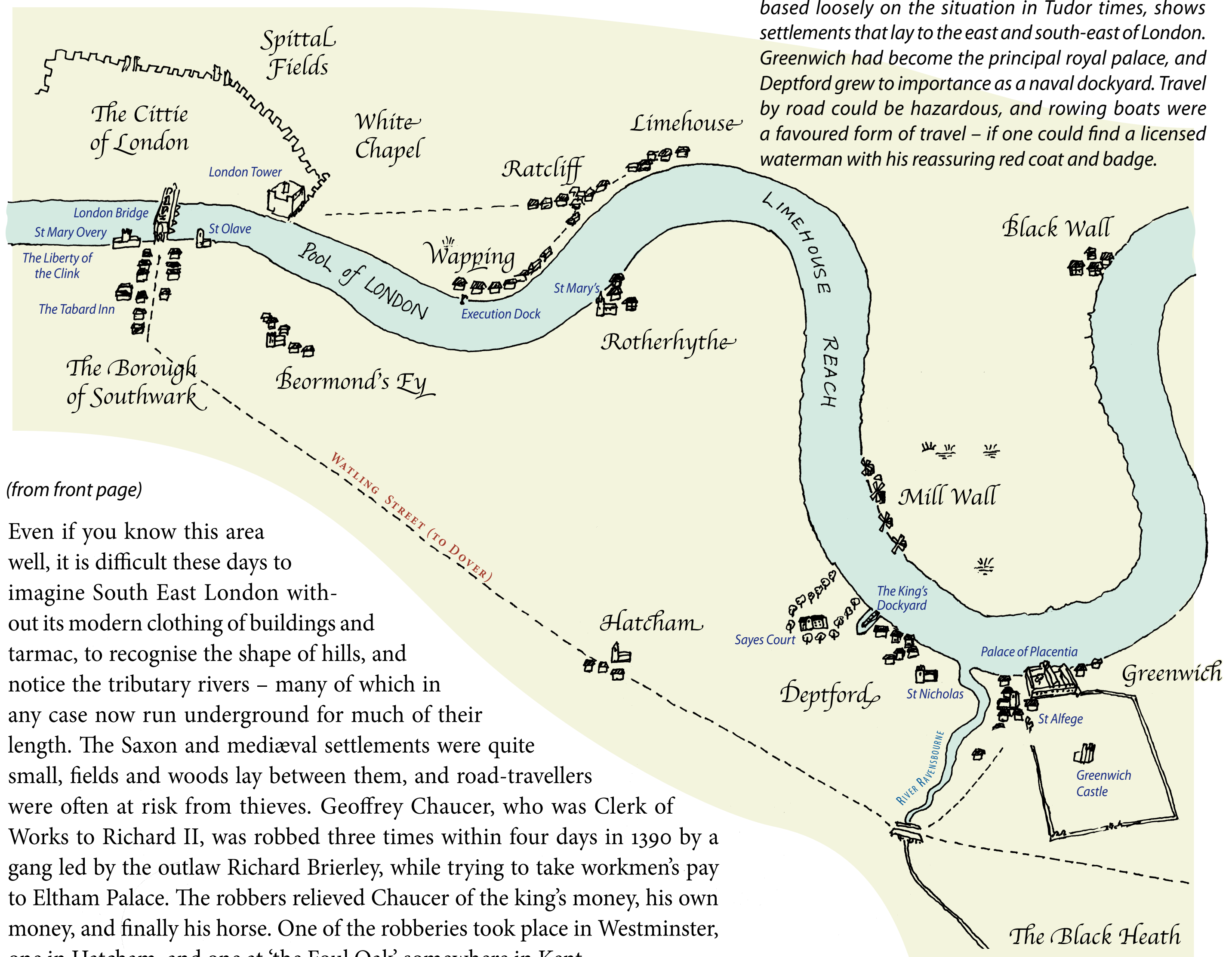


London has been called a city of villages, and this map, based loosely on the situation in Tudor times, shows settlements that lay to the east and south-east of London. Greenwich had become the principal royal palace, and Deptford grew to importance as a naval dockyard. Travel by road could be hazardous, and rowing boats were a favoured form of travel – if one could find a licensed waterman with his reassuring red coat and badge.

(from front page)

Even if you know this area well, it is difficult these days to imagine South East London without its modern clothing of buildings and tarmac, to recognise the shape of hills, and notice the tributary rivers – many of which in any case now run underground for much of their length. The Saxon and mediæval settlements were quite small, fields and woods lay between them, and road-travellers were often at risk from thieves. Geoffrey Chaucer, who was Clerk of Works to Richard II, was robbed three times within four days in 1390 by a gang led by the outlaw Richard Brierley, while trying to take workmen's pay to Eltham Palace. The robbers relieved Chaucer of the king's money, his own money, and finally his horse. One of the robberies took place in Westminster, one in Hatcham, and one at 'the Foul Oak' somewhere in Kent.

Saucy Southwark and the bishop's liberties

In the early Middle Ages, Southwark developed independently of the City of London. Manufacturers and traders in Southwark operated outside of the regulation of London's Guilds and Livery Companies, and the area also developed a reputation for wild living and criminality. Maybe that is how London's north–south rivalry originated.

An important market was established in the Borough High Street in the 13th century. Around this were a number of inns, one of which, The Tabard, is celebrated in Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* as the departure point for his pilgimage to Canterbury.

In 1550, by means of a charter of Edward VI, the City of London managed to gain control over Southwark, which became 'The Ward of Bridge Without'. However, one area remained beyond the control both of the City and of the County of Surrey, because King Stephen had granted it as a 'liberty' to his brother Henry Blois, Bishop of Winchester. 'The Liberty of the Clink' was the area around modern Bankside, around the Tate Modern Art Gallery. The ruins of the bishop's palace (it was destroyed by fire in 1814) can still be seen near Southwark Cathedral.

Due to this accident of jurisdiction and the surprisingly liberal attitude of the Church authorities, activities which were forbidden in the surrounding areas flourished in the Clink. In 1161 the Bishop of Winchester even obtained the power to license prostitutes and brothels; the ladies were known as 'Winchester Geese'.

Theatres and playhouses were also allowed within the Liberty. In 1587, a local landlord, Philip Henslowe, built Bankside's first theatre, *The Rose*. Henslowe also had interests in *Newington Butts Theatre* and *The Swan*, and in 1612 built the 'Paris Garden', used partly as a theatre but mostly for bull-baiting and bear-baiting.

The playwrights with whom Henslowe was involved included Ben Johnson, Thomas Middleton and Christopher Marlowe. William Shakespeare's plays were also put on at *The Rose*, although his name is more associated with another Bankside theatre, *The Globe*, in which he had a part share. That theatre burned down in 1613, but a modern replica, built on the instigation of Sam Wanamaker and opened in 1997, now stands on the bank of the Thames some 200 yards from the original site of Shakespeare's *Globe*.

The martyr Alfege and his Greenwich church

IN THE TIME OF KING ÆTHELRED (978–1016), Danish invaders moored their fleets off Greenwich for two years, and camped on the high ground of Blackheath. The Danes abducted Alfege, 29th Archbishop of Canterbury, and brought him to Greenwich. They demanded a huge ransom of £3,000 for him, but Alfege would not let his people pay. In April 1012 the Danes clubbed him to death at Greenwich with bones left over from their feasting. That very year, a church was built on the place of Alfege's murder.

St Alfege's Church has been rebuilt several times. The original 1012 church was replaced in around 1290. In 1710 the mediaeval structure collapsed: a storm blew the roof into the body of the church and the floor also gave way.

The people of Greenwich then petitioned Parliament for £6,000 to rebuild St Alfege's, from the remainder of the Coal Tax raised to rebuild St Paul's Cathedral after the Great Fire of 1666. This led to the creation of the Commission for Building Fifty New Churches, of which the restored St Alfege was the first.

Nicolas Hawksmoor, who had been working with Sir Christopher Wren on the Royal Naval Hospital, designed the new church, which was dedicated in 1718. Fine wood-carvings were commissioned from the outstanding local craftsman Grinling Gibbons.

German incendiary bombs destroyed St Alfege's church in 1941. The incendiaries lodged in the roof of the church causing a mass of blazing timbers and molten lead to collapse into the nave. The walls, the tower and the organ dating from 1552 survived, but Grinling Gibbons' fine wood carvings did not.

The restoration of St Alfege's was entrusted to Professor Albert Richardson, who followed Hawksmoor's architectural principles. The church was rededicated in 1953.

The Elizabethan composer Thomas Tallis (1505–1585) lived in Greenwich, and is buried in St Alfege's Church. The organ he played is displayed in the south west corner of the nave. Tallis' music is played at Evensong every 23 November.

Another local resident buried in the church is General James Wolfe, victor of the Battle of the the Plains of Abraham in 1759 during the Anglo-French 'Seven Years War' in Canada. Like his French opponent the Marquis de Montcalm, Wolfe was fatally injured in the battle. The British Government wished to give him a state funeral; but his mother wanted her son buried at St Alfege's, like his father General Edward Wolfe, and arranged a private funeral. A statue commemorating James Wolfe looks out across Greenwich Park from a plinth near the Royal Observatory.

Greenwich's royal and naval history

BY THE 13TH CENTURY, there was a royal residence at the Manor of Greenwich: in 1408, the will of King Henry IV is recorded as having been written there. His successor Henry V granted this manor to his kinsman, Thomas Beaufort.

On the death of Henry V in 1422, his son Henry was only nine months old. A regency of leading lords was formed to rule the kingdom until Henry VI came of age in 1437. Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, young Henry's uncle, acted as Protector and Defender of the Realm and the Church. On retiring as Regent, Humphrey obtained a grant of the Manor of Greenwich, and permission to built a fortified wall around the estate. On the hill where now stands the Royal Observatory, he built a tower called Greenwich Castle; down by the shore he built a palace, Bella Court.

Politics was Humphrey's downfall. In the latter years of the Hundred Years' War, when English dominions in Europe were seized by France, he favoured renewed war, but Henry VI was influenced by a party at court which advised peace. In 1445 Henry VI married the forceful 16-year-old French princess Margaret of Anjou, in a peace settlement that was seen as a sell-out by Duke Humphrey and the anti-French party.

Humphrey was outmanouvered, charged with treason, and died in captivity in 1447. The Manor of Greenwich reverted to the Crown, and Margaret of Anjou became the mistress of Bella Court, which she renamed 'the Manor of Plesaunce'.

In Tudor times, the Palace of Placentia, as it became known, was at the height of its glory. Henry VIII was born there in 1491, and baptised at St Alfege's Church. Placentia was his principal residence for most of his life, and he spent at least seventeen Christmases there. He introduced deer to the park (they remain today, in an enclosure adjacent to Blackheath), and used the parklands for such entertainments as jousting contests. Indeed he was badly injured in 1536 when jousting at Greenwich: unhorsed by his opponent, he was fallen on by his armoured steed.

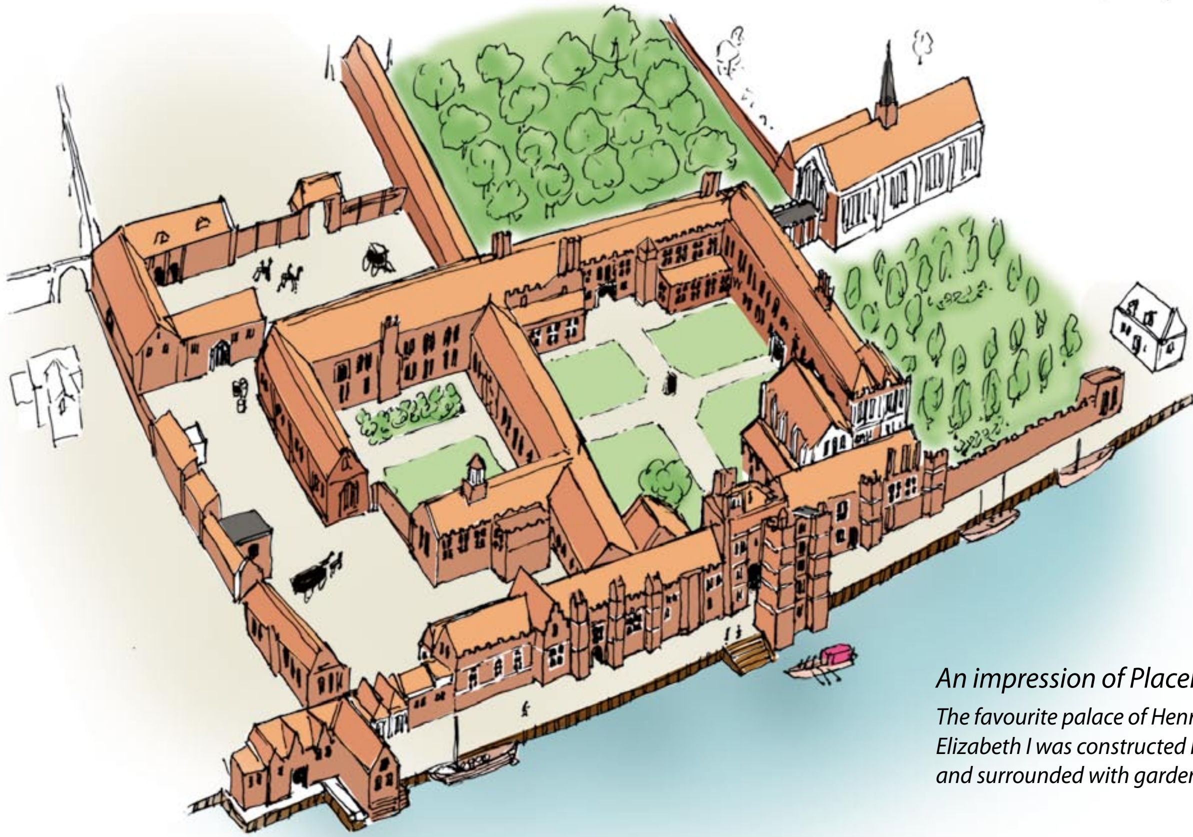
Following Henry VIII's marriage to Catherine of Aragon, Placentia became the birth-place of Mary Tudor (later Queen Mary I) in February 1516. After Henry's marriage to Anne Boleyn, Elizabeth, later Queen Elizabeth I, was born at Placentia in 1533. Elizabeth seems to have been very fond of the Greenwich palace: she too retained it as her principal residence.

Henry VIII's naval dockyards

King Henry VIII believed in the importance of naval power, and was the first English monarch to commission ships designed to fire broadsides of cannon, such as the 38.5 metre, 500 ton *Mary Rose* with her complement of 78 guns.

To increase output of fighting ships, Henry founded two large naval dockyards on the Thames in close proximity to his palace: at Woolwich in 1512, and at Deptford in 1513. The first great product of the Woolwich yard was the flagship *Henri Grace â Dieu*, a 50-metre carrack of over a thousand tons, with two gun decks, 43 heavy guns and 141 light guns, a four-deck fighting forecastle and a two-deck sterncastle.

The naval dockyard at Deptford was the site of the world's first double dry dock. About 450 naval ships were constructed at Deptford, until both it and the Woolwich yard were closed in March 1869.



An impression of Placentia

The favourite palace of Henry VIII and Elizabeth I was constructed largely of brick, and surrounded with gardens and orchards.

From the Thames to New Worlds

There are many associations between the River Thames and the exploration of the Americas. It was from Greenwich that the mariner Martin Frobisher set out on his first American voyage in 1576. Deptford was home to *The Golden Hinde*, the ship in which Francis Drake, protegé of the Plymouth slave trader John Hawkins, sailed around the world during Queen Elizabeth I's reign. *The Golden Hinde* was anchored in Greenwich Reach in 1581 when she knighted him on board. Sir Walter Raleigh also set sail from here in 1589 to explore the New World.

The East India Company was formed in 1600 and ran its first voyages to the Far East from Deptford in 1601, under the command of Sir Thomas Lancaster, a Deptford dock owner. At first it the Company used facilities borrowed from the Royal Dockyard to lay its cannon and other stores on the wharf. In 1607 the Company leased the Stone Wharf at the end of Watergate Street in Deptford Strand from the Bridge House estate, and built a timber dock in Deptford the following year.

Captain John Smith sailed from Greenwich in 1606, with the ships *Godspeed*, *Susan Constant* and *Discovery,* to found a colony in Virginia. Exploring the Chickahominy River, Smith was captured by native Americans. His life was spared when the princess Pocahontas interceded on his behalf. (Later, she married the Virginian tobacco-grower John Rolfe and travelled to England, where she died, possibly of tuberculosis.)

The *Mayflower*, the ship which transported the dissident Pilgrim Fathers to settle in America in 1620, had its home in Rotherhithe. Her master, Christopher Jones, was buried in 1622 in the churchyard of St Mary's Church, Rotherhithe, where there is a statue that commemorates him and his historic voyage.

Jacobean and Commonwealth Greenwich

The Queen's House, now incorporated into the National Maritime Museum, was commissioned by Anne of Denmark, the wife of James I. She engaged Inigo Jones as her architect, but construction work stalled, allegedly because she ran out of funds, having spent too much on masques and clothes. The house was not completed until 1635 in the reign of Charles I, under the direction of Charles' Catholic queen, Henrietta Maria, to whom he granted Greenwich Palace and its Park in July 1629.

During the English Civil War and Commonwealth, the grand structure of Placentia Palace fell into disrepair. The buildings were used by Parliamentary forces at times as a biscuit factory, at times as a prisoner-of-war camp. During the Protectorate of Oliver Cromwell, the paintings were auctioned off. At one time it was even proposed that Placentia be demolished and the timber, bricks and other materials be sold for whatever hard cash could be got for them.

However, the Queen's House was given into the command of the moderate parliamentarian Bulstrode Whitelock; though it was stripped of its furnishings, Whitelock saved it from the damage suffered by the other buildings in the palace complex.

Restoration and Science

After Charles II regained the throne in 1660, he had the old, abused brick structure of Placentia demolished. A new stone palace started to rise under the direction of John Webb, the son-in-law of Inigo Jones. The building is now known as *King Charles Court*, but at the time was simply 'The King's House'.

The reign of Charles II saw a period of flowering in English arts and letters, architecture and scientific enquiry. Months after Charles came to power, the Royal Society of London for

the Improvement of Natural Knowledge was formed. In 1662 it received its Royal Charter and appointed Robert Hooke as its Curator of Experiments. Early members included Robert Boyle, Sir Christopher Wren, Samuel Pepys and John Evelyn. Meanwhile, on the hilltop site of the former Greenwich Castle, Charles II founded the Royal Observatory in 1675–76 (*see right*).

The traumatic 1660s, as seen by Samuel Pepys

The 1660s were dramatic years for London, as we read from the diary of Samuel Pepys, who became Clerk of the Navy Board in 1660. Pepys' close connections with the royal naval dockyard at Deptford are commemorated in the name of the Pepys Estate, a social housing estate built in the 1960s on part on the former site of the naval dockyards.

When in 1965 the Great Plague hit London, Pepys evacuated the Navy Office to the King's House at Greenwich. In September 1666, the Great Fire of London devastated the congested heart of the City of London and destroyed 70,000 homes. Peyps and his friend John Evelyn both wrote detailed accounts of the disaster.

Another drama documented by Pepys was the second Anglo-Dutch War (1665–67). This was fomented by James, Duke of York and Lord High Admiral – later, King James II. James had set up the *Company of Royal Adventurers Trading to Africa*, and in 1660 this was granted a monopoly of trade with the African coast, including the slave trade. Intending that his Company should profit by driving the Dutch West India Company from Africa, in 1664 James sent Admiral Robert Holmes to capture Dutch trading posts there. The Dutch American colony of New Amsterdam was also seized, and renamed New York.

As Samuel Pepys tells us, in the ensuing naval warfare the English side was hampered by the poverty and indebtedness of Charles II's exchequer, so much so that sailors could not be paid other than with 'tickets' – promissory notes. The Dutch Republic was able to build many more heavy ships than the English, and the war culminated in the Raid on the Medway, the Royal Navy's greatest disaster, in which the Dutch destroyed the English fleet at anchor off Chatham.

From Greenwich Palace to Royal Naval Hospital

After a reign of 3 years, James II was ousted in 'the Glorious Revolution' of 1688, in which William of Orange, Stadtholder of the United Netherlands and nephew of Charles II, was invited by leading nobles to invade Britain in a *coup d'etat*. William and his consort Mary were crowned as joint sovereigns.

In 1694, Queen Mary decided to found a retirement home for invalided naval sailors at Greenwich. Many had been wounded at the Battle of La Hogue in 1692, when the allied British and Dutch fleets fought off a French attempt to restore James II to the throne. The wounded were accommodated for a while at the King's House in Greenwich.

Queen Mary engaged Sir Christopher Wren as architect for her Royal Hospital for Seamen, with Nicholas Hawksmoor as his assistant. The foundation stone was laid in 1696 by Wren and John Evelyn (as secretary to the Board of the hospital), and the building was carried out under the supervision of Sir John Vanbrugh. The split, symmetrical design is said to have been adopted so as not to block the view of the river from the Queen's House. Among the glories of the Hospital is the Painted Hall,

Flamsteed House is seen on the right, surmounted by the red ball which is dropped at one o'clock each day. The dome contains a 28-inch refracting telescope. The Observatory ceased to be used for astronomy in the late 1940s, because of problems of light pollution, and today is a museum of astronomy, time-keeping and navigation.

The Royal Observatory

In 1675, Charles II founded the Royal Observatory on the site of Greenwich Castle. The Warrant states: 'We have resolved to build a small observatory within our park at Greenwich, upon the highest ground, at or near the place where the castle stood, with lodging rooms for our astronomical observer and assistant.' The first Astronomer Royal was John Flamsteed, who moved into the Observatory in July 1676 with two servants.

Edmond Halley (1656–1742) became the second Astronomer Royal at Greenwich, and carried out a complete observation of the moon through a period of 18 years. He is best known for predicting of the return of Halley's Comet, which occurred in 1758; and for determining the distance of the Earth from the Sun.

The longitude problem

From the start the Observatory had the task of discovering means to improve navigation at sea, and in particular to solve the problem of discovering longitudinal positions. The importance of this issue was underscored in 1709 by a disaster in which a fleet commanded by Sir Cloudesley Shovel (comprising the *Association*, the *Eagle* and the *Romney*) was wrecked on the shores of the Scilly Isles, with the loss of 1,400 lives, due to a miscalculation of position.

This disaster prompted the setting up in 1714 of the Board of Longitude and the establishment of a prize of £20,000 (roughly equivalent to £2 million today), finally won sixty years later by the Yorkshire clockmaker John Harrison, whose chronometer solved the problem of keeping exact time at sea.

When John's son William sailed for the West Indies in the ship Deptford in 1761, he was able to calculate by the aid of his father's chronometer 'H4' that they were 100 miles nearer to land (near Madeira) than the navigating officer of the ship was able to judge. When the ship *Deptford* arrived in Jamaica on 19 January 1762, H4 was calculated against local time and found to have lost a mere 5.1 seconds in its entire journey.

Several of Harrison's chronometers are on public display at the Royal Observatory.

The Painted Hall is under the dome on the right, the Chapel under that on the left. The Queen's House can be seen between them.

which in 1707 Sir James Thornhill was contracted to decorate at £3 per square yard for the ceiling, and £1 per square yard for the walls. The ceiling is a fine piece of propaganda showing William and Mary in near-divine glory. (It was in the Painted Hall that the body of Lord Nelson lay in 1805, before his state funeral.)

The first naval pensioners arrived to take up residence at Greenwich in June 1705. The population built up steadily, reaching a peak of 2,710 in 1814, at the end of the Napoleonic Wars. Despite the grand façade, accommodation for the pensioners was cramped, and sanitation was poor. Meals were served in two sittings in dining halls beneath the Chapel and the Painted Hall. Regulations included punishments for swearing, lying, blasphemy, drunkenness and consorting with prostitutes, of whom there were many in Greenwich. (In truth there was not much else for the bored ex-sailors to do.)

Many of the Hospital's residents had suffered accidents and injuries through shot and shell, which in those days generally meant amputation. A tradition arose of holding cricket matches pitting a team of one-armed men against a team of one-legged. In 1796, the one-legged team won a match at Montpelier Gardens in Walworth, for a purse of £1,000 – though five wooden legs were broken in the process of a rough day's sport!

In the 19th century, long years of peace combined with the State's increasing adoption of an 'out-pensions' system meant that the number of living-in pensioners decreased. By 1869 there were merely four hundred Greenwich pensioners left. They were eased out by the out-pension policy, and the few remaining invalids were transferred elsewhere.

Greenwich: Time and Meridian

The Royal Observatory at Greenwich played an important role in the standardisation of the measurement of time and its application to problems of navigation, and it published the *Nautical Almanac* from 1766.

In 1833 the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty gave notice that a 'timeball' on Flamsteed House at the Observatory would henceforth be dropped at one o'clock in the afternoon precisely, as a signal by which chronometers could be synchronised.

Greenwich Mean Time became the standard reference time for British mariners, and the practice spread to other nations. In 1847 it was adopted by Britain's Railway Clearing House as the basis for timetabling, and from the following year all railway clocks were set to GMT rather than locally-observed time.

The Greenwich Zero Meridian was adopted internationally at a conference in Washington in 1884, attended by 25 national representatives. Over 70 per cent of the world's sea charts already used Greenwich as the Prime Meridian, and the United States had just constructed its railway timetable, spread over five time zones, based on Greenwich Mean Time.

When it came to the vote, Greenwich won its Zero Meridian status with 22 countries in favour, two abstentions (France, which had argued the case for Paris, and Brazil, which had favoured a neutral mid-ocean meridian) and one vote against (that of San Domingo).

Royal Naval College to University campus

In 1873 the Royal Naval College moved into the former hospital buildings, as a merger of the Naval College in Portsmouth, and a School of Naval Architecture and Marine Engineering in Kensington. In 1919 the Naval Staff College also opened on the site, and from 1983 the relocated Joint Services Defence College occupied much of the King Charles building.

The Navy's Department of Nuclear Science and Technology opened at Greenwich in 1959. JASON, the department's 10kW research and training nuclear reactor, was commissioned in the King William building in 1962. It operated until 1996 and was decommissioned in 1999, when 270 tonnes of radioactive waste were removed. (The existence of a nuclear reactor so close to central London had remained largely unknown.)

Meanwhile, the former Infirmary of the Royal Naval Hospital continued in service as the Dreadnought Hospital for Seamen. It took its name from an old 101-gun ship moored off Greenwich from 1831 to 1857 as a hospital hulk, later replaced in this role by the *Caledonia* until the hospital came ashore to occupy the Infirmary in 1869. The Dreadnought Hospital closed in 1986.

The Royal Navy left the College in 1998, and handed over management to new custodians, the Greenwich Foundation. The buildings were sub-let to serve as home for two academic institutions. The University of Greenwich occupies most of the site, and the old Dreadnought Hospital became its Library. Trinity College of Music is housed in King Charles' Court.

Deptford's colourful residents & visitors

A VISITOR TODAY may consider the heart of Deptford town to be its High Street, a bustling market street dominated by a range of African, Caribbean and Asian shops and eating-places, yet which also preserves a couple of old-style working-class Eel, Pie and Mash shops lined with white tiles.

However, in truth the High Street is *new* Deptford: the old centre was much closer to the shore, down by Deptford Creek. The original parish church of Deptford is St Nicholas, dating from the 14th century or earlier. The parish registers, which go back to the 15th century, show that Deptford's cosmopolitan character is nothing new: between 1719 and 1724, four Black servants or sailors were buried there.

Here too is a plaque to playwright Christopher Marlowe, a contemporary of William Shakespeare. Marlowe was stabbed to death in May 1593 in a Deptford tavern. The inquest recorded that Ingram Fraser stabbed Marlowe in self-defence, in a brawl resulting from a dispute about the division of the bill. However, it is suspected that the killing was related to Marlowe's employment as a spy in the formidable intelligence services which Lord Wolsingham ran for Queen Elizabeth. Marlowe is buried in an unmarked grave in the churchyard of St Nicholas.

The statue of Peter the Great overlooks Deptford Creek.

John Evelyn at Sayes Court

The local manor house, Sayes Court, occupied land to the rear of the Naval Dockyard. At the time of the English Civil War it had been in the family of Sir Richard Browne for many a year, together with other parts of the Manor of West Greenwich. When Parliament sequestered the manor for sale, they nonetheless confirmed Sir Richard – who was acting as their ambassador in Paris – in possession of Sayes Court and its immediate lands.

John Evelyn, who was briefly a Royalist cavalryman in the Civil War, had exiled himself in Paris to avoid trouble; there he met and married Sir Richard's daughter Mary in 1647. Following the Restoration, John and Mary Evelyn returned to Deptford in 1652, and in the following year John Evelyn bought Sayes Court from his father-in-law.

John Evelyn was a man with great interest in many branches of philosophy and science, and he was one of the founders of the Royal Society in 1660. He was known in particular for his knowledge of trees: one of the Royal Society's first publications was his book *Sylva, or a Discourse on Forest Trees*, in which he encouraged landowners to think about planting trees to meet Britain's needs for naval ship-building.

Evelyn transformed the Sayes Court gardens, laying them out in the French style with hedges and *parterres*. The manor house and its gardens have disappeared, but a part of the grounds, called 'Sayes Court Park' and entered from Evelyn Street near Deptford High Street, is a run-down public park behind the 'John Evelyn' pub. There is one very knarled old mulberry tree in the park, which may be a relic of Evelyn's sylvan experiments.

One of John Evelyn's tenants was a woodcarver of Dutch origin, Grinling Gibbons, who rented a cottage in the grounds. One evening in 1671, Evelyn came upon Gibbons carving an elaborate religious piece, and was so impressed that he described the young man's work to his friend Sir Christopher Wren. Wren engaged Gibbons to work on the choir stalls, organ case and other wooden furnishings of St Paul's Cathedral, and he also collaborated with Hawksmoor at St Alfege's church.

The visit of Peter the Great

It was to Deptford that the Russian Tsar Peter the Great, then aged 25, came to study shipbuilding for three months in 1698. The young Tsar had ambitions to wrest control of the Baltic from Sweden and the Black Sea from Turkey, and came on an extended tour of Europe with his 'Great Embassy' entourage, seeking out political alliances, and studying military and naval arts.

Peter's engagement with the study of shipbuilding at Deptford was nothing if not practical. He engaged with energy and pride in sawing, shaping and planing timbers with his own hands – as he was also later to do in a following four-month study period at the dockyards of the East India Company in Amsterdam.

Peter and his retinue were lodged at Sayes Court, the Evelyns having moved back to the family manor of Wooton in Surrey in 1694. Unfortunately the Russian tenants were a rowdy lot, and did a great deal of damage to the property and grounds when drunk – on one occasion they rammed a wheelbarrow (with Peter in it!) through a fine holly hedge. In all, the Russians did as much as £350 worth of damage, for which the government had to compensate Evelyn.

The Tsar's stay in London was recently commemorated with a whimsical bronze statue donated by the City of St Petersburg: the extraordinarily tall Tsar (he was six foot eight inches tall) looks out towards the sea from Millenium Quay, a promontory overlooking Deptford Creek.

Later developments on the Deptford shore

Adjacent to the Dockyard on land to the north, warehouses were set up on lands purchased from Sayes Court, and in 1742 these became the Admiralty Victualling Yard, where the Navy's rum supply was stored and blended. In 1858 this was renamed the Royal Victoria Yard and warehouses, a bakery, a cattleyard and abattoir were added to the rum stores. The Yard closed in 1961, and the Pepys Estate was built over it; but some of the old buildings and a decorative gate remain.

When the Royal Dockyard itself closed in 1869, part of the land was redeveloped as the Olympia Warehouse. These were the 'gutting sheds' in which girls and women worked, butchering animals from 1871 to 1914. A philanthropic organisation, set up to bring educational opportunities to Deptford's 'gut girls', later developed into Deptford's Albany project.

The Olympia Warehouse site later became Convoy's Wharf, a facility for importing and storing newsprint paper, latterly owned by News International, now empty. There are plans to redevelop the site as a residential and commercial area, to a design by Richard Rogers, once more uniting Deptford with its shoreline.

Deptford's civil engineering achievements

Ravensbourne Water Works was founded in 1701. William III granted a Royal Charter to William Yarnold and Robert Watson 'to take water from the River Ravensbourne, and to break up the roadways within the Royal Manors of Sayes Court and East Greenwich, and to lay pipes for the supply of water to the inhabitants of the said Manors for a period of 500 years.' In 1809 the Ravensbourne Water Works merged into Kent Water Works.

Deptford Railway Station is the oldest functioning station in Britain. A four-mile railway was opened between London Bridge and Deptford in 1836. The first train completed the journey in 8 minutes 'to the astonishment of the numerous parties who had never before witnessed the velocity of locomotive engines.' In 1838 the railway was extended to Greenwich, across a bridge over the Ravensbourne.

Another great Victorian infrastructure project that touched Deptford was the construction, under the direction of Sir Joseph Bazalgette, of London's enclosed sewer system. Following severe outbreaks of cholera in 1848 and 1853 – and the 'Great Stink' of 1858 which turned the Thames into a fœtid tide of floating raw sewage – Bazalgette's Metropolitan Board of Works undertook the construction of 83 miles of brick-lined main sewers and 1100 miles of tributary street sewers to intercept London's sewage and transport it so far out along the Thames Estuary that, when dumped into the river, it would be carried out on the tide.

The system necessitated the building of four mighty pumping stations, one of which was located at Deptford (or more accurately, on the Greenwich side of Deptford Creek) where it still operates today. Needless to say, the raw sewage is no longer dumped into the Thames estuary, but is treated in sewage farms on the North Kent coast.

Rotherhithe's pioneering tunnel

French-born engineer Marc Brunel (1769–1849), father of the more famous Isambard Kingdom Brunel, was a pioneer of mass production techniques, and engaged in many projects, the greatest being the Thames Tunnel from Rotherhithe to Wapping. This was the first tunnel crossing of a major river. A start was made in 1825, but the river broke through the roof in 1827 and again in 1828. The work was discontinued and was not restarted until 1835. The tunnel finally opened in 1843.

Key to the success of this project was the invention of the 'Tunnelling Shield' – a moving framework which protected workers from tunnel collapses when working in water-bearing ground. It was designed by his son Isambard Kingdom Brunel who also worked on the project. This method has been used many times since, for example to construct the Channel Tunnel a century and a half later.

The Rotherhithe Tunnel is 400 metres long. It was originally designed for foot and horse traffic, but is now part of the East London Line within the London Underground Limited (LUL) 'tube' system.

The Cutty Sark

Greenwich is home to the old clipper-ship Cutty Sark. Launched in Dumbarton, Scotland in 1869, she worked in the tea trade for a while – one of a class of fast square-rigged sailing ships which raced to be the first to bring each new year's tea crop from Asia to Europe and so command the highest prices.

In 1879, the Cutty Sark turned with greater business success to the Australian wool trade. In 1922 Captain W.H. Dowman restored her as a training ship at Falmouth; and on his death in 1936, his widow presented the ship to the Thames Nautical Training College.

In 1952 the Cutty Sark was threatened with the breaker's yard, and the Cutty Sark Preservation Society, was formed to acquire the vessel for preservation. She was placed in a special dry dock at Greenwich in June 1953 and has become an important tourist attraction. However, in 2007 she has once again had her masts removed; essential restoration work that may take two years or more has commenced, until which she is hidden behind hoardings. This photo was taken in 2005.

The rise, fall and redevelopment of the London Docklands

LONDON'S SHIPPING originally tied up at riverside wharves, or moored out in the deeper water just downstream of London Bridge, called the Pool of London. Cargoes were transferred to 'lighters' and thus brought to shore. These arrangements were inconvenient, and vulnerable to thieving by river-pirates. This problem was addressed from the 17th century onwards by the digging out of enclosed docks, radically transforming the landscape of the Isle of Dogs and the Rotherhithe Peninsula.

Rotherhithe and Surrey Docks

The Rotherhithe Peninsula was originally sparsely populated wet marshland alongside the river, largely unsuitable for farming. In 1696 the Howland Great Wet Dock (named after the family who owned the land) was dug out to form the largest commercial dock of its time, able to accommodate 120 sailing ships. In 1763, the dock become a base for Arctic whalers, and was renamed as Greenland Dock.

By the 19th century an influx of commercial traffic from Scandinavia and the Baltic (principally timber) and Canada (foodstuffs for London's population) led to the Greenland Dock being greatly expanded, and other connecting docks being dug to accommodate the increasing number of vessels.

Eventually, 85% of the peninsula, an area of 460 acres (1.9 square km), was covered by a system of nine docks, six timber ponds and a canal. Several of the docks were named after the origins of their customers' cargos – hence Canada Dock, Quebec Pond, Norway Dock and Russia Dock. The Grand Surrey Canal opened in 1807 to link the docks with inland destinations, but proved a commercial failure: only 3.5 miles of it were ever built.

The 'Surrey Docks' evolved a distinctive working culture. A characteristic sight of these docks were the 'deal porters', dockworkers who specialised in carrying huge baulks of deal (timber) across their shoulders. They wore special leather headgear to protect their heads from the rough wood.

The Isle of Dogs

The Isle of Dogs is the name given to the promontory enclosed to the west, south and east by a great loop in the River Thames. The origin of the name is unclear: one theory is that it is a corruption of 'isle of docks' – but as the name first appears on maps in 1588 before any docks were built, the alternative theory may be true: that it was here that Henry VIII's dogs were kennelled.

The peninsula was low-lying marshland until it was drained in the 13th century for agriculture and bounded by river-walls or embankments. However, in 1488 a catastrophic breach of the river defences occurred and returned the land to its former marshy condition. It was not again drained until the 17th century, with the aid of Dutch engineers.

The eastern shore opposite Deptford Dockyard became known as Millwall, because of the rows of windmills on the river wall which used the power of the prevailing westerly wind to grind the corn that was landed there.

The West India Docks were constructed across the north of the peninsula between 1800 and 1802. A leading proponent of this development was Robert Milligan, a Jamaican-born sugar plantation owner and shipper infuriated by the delays and thefts from London's small riverside wharves.

The original development consisted of two linked docks: an Import Dock and an Export Dock. With access channels, lock-gates and basins, the complex cut right across the Isle of Dogs, literally turning it into an island. Ships entered from the eastern side (Blackwall), and lighters entered from the west. The docks could berth 600 ships at once. The Import Dock was surrounded by five-story warehouses, and the whole system by a 20-foot wall to keep out thieves.

The Regent's Canal Dock (1820), now known as Limehouse Basin, connected the Thames to the canal system. Cargoes were transferred from larger ships to shallow-draught canal boats that made their way through North London (Camden Town, Regents Park) and out to Birmingham.

As the volume of trade inceased and ships became larger, new docks were constructed to the east: first the East India Docks, then the Royal Albert Dock, Royal Victoria Dock and King George V Dock. The three 'Royal Docks' together formed the largest enclosed docks in the world, with a water area of nearly 1 km² and an overall estate of 4 km², and specialised in foodstuffs, with huge granaries and refrigerated meat warehouses.

The Great Eastern story

Isambard Kingdom Brunel chose Millwall as the site for the building of his great steam-ship, the *Great Eastern*. This was the first ship constructed entirely of metal: the hull was made up of 30,000 plates, held together by three million rivets. The ship pioneered double-hull construction, which was unused for the next 100 years but is now mandatory for safety reasons.

So large was the *Great Eastern* that she was to be launched sideways into the river on 3 November 1857. However, the first attempt, witnessed by crowds of 100,000, led to a fatal accident when a chain broke, and there were ten weeks of problems trying to get her down the slipway. She set out on its first voyage in September 1859; Brunel died ten days later.

The *Great Eastern* was originally designed for the long route to Australia around the Cape, but since she was the only ship capable of carrying the 22,500 tons of cable required to span the Atlantic, she was diverted to the laying of transatlantic telegraphy cables between 1865 and 1869.

The death and redevelopment of the docks

During World War II, the London's docks were a prime target for German bombing. 'The Blitz' started on 7 September 1940, and the docks were bombed on every night but one for eight weeks thereafter. 380,000 tons of timber were destroyed in the Surrey Docks in a single night. The Blitz continued until May 1941, killing 43,000 and destroying a million homes nationwide.

During the war, two of the London docks were pumped dry and used for the construction of concrete caissons which made up the floating Mulberry Harbours that were used in the D-Day invasion of Europe.

One Canada Square remains the tallest structure on the Isle of Dogs, but in the last 17 years has been joined by several other tall office buildings.

The docks recovered after the war and indeed enjoyed a renewed prosperity in the 1950s, but their end was not long in coming. Shippers were keen to avoid dependency on labour-intensive unloading processes, and the entrenched systems of pay and conditions that had been negotiated by the trades unions. The existing docks were also unable to deal with the growing trend towards roll-on-roll-off lorry transport and container traffic, and they finally closed for lack of business in 1969. Today, London's port is Tilbury, many miles downstream.

Between 1961 and 1971, almost 83,000 jobs were lost in the Docklands boroughs: Greenwich, Lewisham, Newham, Tower Hamlets and Southwark. High unemployment was accompanied by population decline: the Tower Hamlets population declined by 18%, and Southwark's by 16%.

For a decade, the docklands lay derelict. Then in 1981, the London Docklands Development Corporation was founded by the Secretary of State for the Environment, Michael Heseltine. The LDDC was given comprehensive and often controversial powers, and charged with redeveloping the docklands areas both north and south of the river.

The modern developments at Canary Wharf began in 1988. The property developers Olympia and York agreed to meet half the cost of the Jubilee Line tube line extension, seen as vital to the long-term viability of the project. When topped out in 1990, 'One Canada Square' became the UK's tallest building and a powerful symbol of the regeneration of Docklands. Once it stood alone; as the photo above shows, now it is but one of a number of tall office blocks forming the heart of London's new financial district, surrounded by residential developments. Further east, the LDDC constructed London City Airport on the site of the former Royal Docks. Its single runway is designed for STOL (short take-off and landing) airliners, and it opened for business in 1989.

On the southern side of the Thames, the Rotherhithe peninsula was developed as a largely low-rise residential area with a wooded park, Russia Dock Woodlands, at its centre. Greenland Dock was retained as a water sports recreation area, and the South Dock next door is London's largest marina.

Law enforcement on the river

It was the job of the Navy to deal with crimes carried out on water, and from the early 15th century until 1830 they maintained a place of execution on the foreshore at Wapping, called Execution Dock, for pirates convicted by the Admiralty Court and condemned to hang. The gallows was enclosed within an iron cage near the low water mark, and the body of the executed man would not be removed until tides had covered it three times.

The most infamous victim of Execution Dock was William Kidd, convicted in 1701 of murder and piracy. After his execution, his corpse was hung in chains for two years as a warning to other miscreants. Ironically, Kidd was a privateer licensed to raid French shipping, financed by some of the richest men in England. He lost the best part of his crew to a Royal Navy ship which pressed them into Navy service – and dumped on him by way of compensation a mutinous bunch of rascals whom he was scarecely able to control. Kidd's backers never came to his aid, and he stood trial without representation.

River police

In 1798, Magistrate Patrick Colquhoun and Master Mariner John Harriot formed a force called the Marine Police Establishment to crack down on theft and looting in the Port of London area. This was the first ever police force in England. The government provided about a fifth of the funds, and the rest was paid for by the West India Merchants' and Planters' Company. The offices of the Marine Police were set up on the present site of Wapping Police Station.

In 1831 the Marine Police were merged with the Metropolitan Police Force which had been established ten years before by Sir Robert Peel, and they became its 'Thames Division'. Today it is called the Marine Support Unit and, still based on the river at Wapping, patrols the river in fast launches and RIBs (Rigid Inflatable Boats).

Industry, deprivation and immigration in the East End

THE MYTHOLOGY of 'north versus south London' should not obscure the fact that East London and Southeast London have much in common, especially those parts close to the Thames. During the late 18th and early 19th nineteenth centuries, a number of factors conspired to drag both regions of London into the kind of squalor, deprivation and even criminality which we think of as 'Dickensian'.

As sea-trade increased and the great docks were created, so too there developed in the hinterland of the docks various industries based on the processing of imported raw materials: slaughtering and leather-tanning, fish-smoking, brewing, the manufacture of vinegar, biscuits and other processed foods, cloth-fulling, bleaching and chemical industries.

The wages were poor and the industrial effluent degraded the environment, compounded by Britain's westerly winds – which, as coal became the main source of house-heating, ensured that the eastern side of most cities could be guaranteed to be the least salubrious. London began to experience 'pea-soup' smog.

As if in reaction, the political and cultural centre of London moved upwind to Westminster and Buckingham Palace, where John Nash had developed the fashionable West End from 1810 onwards. When the railways came, the middle class increasingly fled to the newly-developing suburbs.

By the 1880s, the term 'East End' had come into use – with a strong connotation of slum squalor and low life, where the working class of London had been stranded, and where immigrant populations were constantly arriving. This legacy remains with London to this day.

Wapping

Along the northern shore of the Thames downstream of the City and the Tower of London, the mediæval settlements of Wapping, Ratcliff and Limehouse had developed organically to service the needs of shipping on the Thames.

Opposite Bermondsey and Rotherhithe, Wapping has existed since Saxon times. However, until Wapping Marsh was drained, settlement was confined to a narrow strip along the river bank Many ships used to anchor in this stretch of the river, known as the Lower Pool. From the 16th century and onwards we have accounts of the trades practiced along Wapping High Street, and in Narrow Street in Ratcliff which lay immediately to the east: chandlers, ships' victuallers, mastmakers, blockmakers and instrument makers, and suppliers of just about everything that a ship and its crew might require.

The 'Prospect of Whitby' claims to be the oldest Thames-side pub still trading. On the foreshore is a replica of the old gallows at Execution Dock, though the actual site of execution (*see previous page*) was a little further west.

In 1986, Rupert Murdoch's News International (*The Times*, *News of the World* etc) built a £80m printing and publishing works in Wapping, and moved there from Fleet Street. Because of the new technology introduced in this plant, over 5,000 print workers were sacked, leading to the seige of 'Fortress Wapping' by round-the-clock pickets and blockades.

Ratcliff's early Black and Asian immigrants

One historic area now erased almost without trace is Ratcliff, once centred on Butcher Row and Ratcliff Highway. The first wharf was built there in 1348, making it the first active riverside trading area east of the city.

In the 1780s, Asian sailors were a common sight in Ratcliff. Hired in Gujerat or Bengal by the East India Company to make up for English sailors who had died on the outward voyage, these 'Lascars' were often abandoned in London. When the law compelled the Company to take responsibility for these men, it established a hostel for 1,000 Asian seamen on Ratcliff Highway, but kept them on meagre rations. Another lodging for Asian sailors was the Strangers' Home, in West India Dock Road.

At about the same time, there was an influx of into Ratcliff and Limehouse of African-American ex-soldiers from the British Army, about 14,000 of whom had been evacuated in 1784 from Savannah, Charleston and New York when the British lost the American War of Independence.

Limehouse and Old Chinatown

Limehouse gets its name from the lime kilns in which limestone was burned from the 14th century onwards to provide the raw materials for bricklayer's mortar and pottery. Another 'fragrant' early industry here was the smoking of fish.

Chinese sailors started to settle in Limehouse from about 1860 onwards, chiefly along a small street called Pennyfields, between West India Dock Road and Limehouse Causeway. Businesses favoured by the Chinese included tobacconists, confectioners, grocery stores and laundries.

Limehouse was known for opium dens in the late 19th century. Opium could be bought over the counter, and was smoked fairly openly until an Act of Parliament in 1908 aimed at restricting its availability. An image of Limehouse as a den of vice often featured in fiction, for example Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes* stories, Oscar Wilde's *The Portrait of Dorian Gray*, and the pulp fiction novels of Sax Rohmer, creator of the sinister Chinese criminal mastermind Fu Manchu.

Until the middle of the 20th century there were almost no first-generation Chinese women in Limehouse: Annie Lai, an English woman married to a Cantonese man called Yuen Lai, could remember only three Chinese women there in the 1930s. Chinese men, on the whole hard-working and abstemious, were however attractive to English girls.

Before the First World War there was a population of about 4,000 Chinese around Limehouse, but following anti-Chinese riots in the East End in 1919 there was a tendency to crack down hard on Chinese accused of even relatively minor offences: a sentence of hard labour would be followed by deportation. As a result, many English wives and children of Chinese men were left behind, and the Chinese population was forced down to a few hundred.

Limehouse Chinatown suffered both from bombing in the Second World War, and the postwar developments of Pennyfields

and Poplar High Street. Limehouse Causeway, once thriving with Chinese restaurants, laundries and shops, was finally swept away in the development of the Limehouse Link road system feeding traffic towards Canary Wharf.

Spitalfields and the Huguenots

A mile north of Wapping is the area of Spitalfields ('Hospital Fields'), which takes its name from the Priory and Hospital of St Mary, founded in the 12th century with a charnel house and cemetery. The abolition of the Priory in 1539 by Henry VIII in 1539 opened the way for commercial and residential development of the area – a prime site right next to the City of London.

An estimated 50,000 French and Flemish Protestants of Calvinist persuasion (the Huguenots) fled to Britain when King Louis XIV renewed persecution of them in 1685. Many settled around Spitalfields, bringing with them their craft of weaving, particularly in silk. This location just outside the City of London put them beyond Guild regulation, and gave them access to open ground for the 'tentering' of new cloth (stretching it out to dry 'on tenter hooks' after washing it with fuller's earth).

The Huguenot presence established Spitalfields as the centre of East London's garment industry, reflected in such local names as Fashion Street and Petticoat Lane. By the early 19th century, the Flemish weaver community had dispersed (the trade was hit by imports from India and by mechanisation) and their Tenter-ground was developed for housing. However, as a legacy of their presence the area is still a focus for clothes manufacturing.

The Huguenots also brought to England a new kind of beer brewed with hops, which was made popular by the Truman 'Black Eagle' brewery in Spitalfields' Brick Lane. Built in the 1720s, this became Britain's largest brewery, employing about one thousand. The firm had a reputation for taking good care of its workers and paying for their children's education.

Whitechapel: poverty, preaching, politics, crime

South and east of Spitalfields is Whitechapel, where from the end of the 16th century there developed a number of industries such as tanneries, breweries, slaughterhouses and foundries. This development co-incided with increasing rural poverty, due to large landowners' practices of enclosing common land, and evicting tenant farmers to make way for sheep. Many of the destitute flocked to London and took up residence in the East End, in the midst of the industries which offered them employment.

The acceleration of this process in the 19th century turned Whitechapel into a byword for squalor, grinding poverty, degradation and crime. Thinking people responded to this in various ways: William Booth founded the Salvation Army here in 1878, George Bernard Shaw's Fabian Society met regularly in Whitechapel, and Vladimir Ilyich Lenin led rallies in Whitechapel during exile from Russia. Charlotte Wilson and Peter Kropotkin founded the anarchist publishing house Freedom Press in 1886, and it still operates from 84b Whitechapel High Street.

Whitechapel was also the scene of serial killings of prostitutes in the autumn of 1888 by the mysterious killer dubbed 'Jack the Ripper'. Though very far from being the worst case of serial killing in English history, the case continues to exert a ghoulish fascination, and 'Ripper' walking tours are regularly conducted, starting from the Ten Bells pub in Spitalfields.

The Whitechapel Bell Foundry is Britain's oldest manufacturing company, founded in 1570. Their production methods have remained virtually unchanged since the first bellfounders set up shop in the area in 1420, and their primary business is church bells and their fittings. This foundry cast the bells for Liverpool Cathedral, Westminster Abbey, and the US National Cathedral in Washington DC. The largest bell they ever cast was the 13½-ton 'Big Ben' which strikes the hour in the Palace of Westminster. The photo shows a set of bells in the foundry yard. There is a small museum display and gift shop on the premises, a Grade 2 listed building.

Another infamous local crime scene is the Blind Beggar pub in Whitechapel High Street, where George Cornell was shot dead in 1966 by Ronnie Kray. The Kray twins, Reggie and Ronnie, were gangsters who specialised in extortion, protection racketeering, arson and armed robbery. Their acquisition of nightclubs brought them a measure of fame in the 1960s; they mixed with film stars and were photographed by David Bailey. They were arrested in 1968 and sentenced to life imprisonment.

The changing face of the East End

From the middle of the 19th century, the population of the East End was swelled by new waves of immigrants from abroad, chiefly Irish and Jewish. In the 1850s, Dutch Jews started to settle in the formerly Huguenot districts, and from the 1880s there was a much larger Jewish influx caused by persecutions in Russia, Ukraine and Eastern Europe. Jewish culture pervaded Spitalfields and Whitechapel before and after the First World War, with many synagogues (some of them converted from Huguenot churches), and a couple of Yiddish Theatres.

It was Jewish traders who started the popular street markets in Brick Lane and Petticoat Lane that survive to this day. It was in these markets that the Tesco brand was born – Jack Cohen, who sold groceries from market stalls starting in 1919, bought a large amount of tea from TE Stockwell in 1924, and made up labels incorporating the first three letters of the supplier's name (TES) and the first two of his (CO).

After the Second World War, the Jewish community moved away from the East End to North London, and their place was taken by immigrants from Bangladesh, particularly from Sylhet. As a consequence, many streets in Whitechapel and Spitalfields now have street-names written in Bengali script as well as in English, and Brick Lane is popularly known as 'Banglatown'.