

## Walk Through London's Docks New and Old

Those who were able to join us on Tuesday the 27th of April were treated to an excellent virtual walking tour of the London Docks both old and new.

The tour began at St Katherine's Dock, an area which started life in the 1100's as a medieval church and hospital next to the Tower of London. The buildings were demolished and replaced with the dock in the 1820's, making it one of the later docks, which was used as a hub for high value items. Today in the heart of the dock, surrounded by water, sits a small chapel, linking the site to its previous life, which is now a Starbucks!

From there we were taken to Tobacco Dock with its replica pirate ships placed in situ in the 1980's as part of the redevelopment plans of the area in an attempt to make it the Covent Gardens of East London. Tempting people out of central London was an ambitious plan and the dock is now a residential and trade show venue. Also at Tobacco Dock is a statue of a tiger with a huge paw celebrating a reference back to 1851 and a businessman called Charles Jamrak. Jamrack, who lived in Limehouse, inherited a shop from his father and legend has it a Bengal Tiger escaped from the shop and was approached by an entranced young boy called John Wade. The tiger attacked John Wade but Jamrack saved the boy by throwing himself between them. The tiger was then sold to an animal collector called George Woomwell who exhibited the tiger for the rest of its life.

From Tobacco Dock we were taken to Wapping, an area steeped in history with strong links to its maritime past and wonderful alleyways leading down to the River Thames. The area was devastated from the 1960's through to the 1980's after the dock closed with unemployment in the area rising to 30%! The long-standing Turks Head pub was due to be one of the casualties of the time but a group of local female residents, who became known as the Wild Women of Wapping, successfully campaigned against it being demolished and it still stands today as a cafe.

Overlooking St John's Churchyard in Wapping was the site of the first Blue Coat Charity School set up in the 1760's. The schools were opened for orphan children who could be cared for and trained in the skills they would need to work in domestic service. The blue uniforms were given to them for free and the colour blue was used because this was the cheapest colour dye at the time.

Wapping is well known for its pubs, many of which date back hundreds of years. The Captain Kidd, situated in a Grade II listed building, was named after the seventeenth century pirate William Kidd. The pub has a nautical theme and retells the story of Captain Kidd who was known as both a privateer working for the British government and a pirate. Captain Kidd had the authority of the British government and fable has it he buried treasure around the Indian Ocean but was brought back to London from New York where he was executed in 1701 at execution dock. The rope around Kidd's neck broke so he was tied back up again as was tradition at the time he was left hanging until three tides of the River Thames had washed over the body which served as a warning to others.

Transport links became a huge factor in the regeneration and Wapping now uses the first tunnel of London, ironically, as part of the overground service from Wapping to Rotherhithe. The tunnel was being built by Mark Brunell from the 1820's to the 1840's with the idea of having circular ramps at each end for access via horse and cart. The project ran out of money and so the tunnel was only ever used by pedestrians.

The tour then took us over to Limehouse which was the location of the first Chinatown which, in part as a result of bomb damage from WW2 as well as racism at the time, then moved to Covent Garden, where it obviously remains to this day, and lastly on to Canary Wharf.

With the closure of West India dock in the 1980's the borough of Tower Hamlets agreed a huge regeneration project which saw them give permission for several high-rise buildings, the likes of which were not seen in the City at that time. For the regeneration program to work a whopping 70% of the regeneration budget for the West India Docks went into transport infrastructure which included the Norman Foster designed Canary Wharf tube station which was commissioned to create an impressive and amazing indoor space. To make the regeneration successful large corporations were enticed to move with the lure of 0% corporation tax guaranteed for 10 years. In order not to be left behind the City of London granted permission for taller and taller buildings and so the building boom began.

Today the Basquel Bridge on Wapping Wall offers a wonderful view West to the traditional City of London as well as East to the more modern second financial hub Canary Wharf.

Katy gave a wonderful and insightful tour of the London docks which are so far removed from how we see them today.

Nick ter Averst