

Eltham Society's Summer Walk
London Bridge to Canary Wharf
Saturday 26th July 2008

A small group of intrepid explorers met our leader, Neill Trueman, at Eltham Station to catch the train to London Bridge for our journey through places that conjure the imagination – Wapping, Shadwell and Limehouse to Canary Wharf. Upon arrival at London Bridge we were met by two others to start our walk. Our first stop was on London Bridge to look across to the north side where there is Adelaide House and just to the right is the site of the original bridge.

Walking across the bridge, are the panoramic views of east London with sight of Shooters Hill through Tower Bridge. Of course, HMS Belfast lies between London Bridge and Tower Bridge, a battle cruiser that saw service in the Second World War, notably in the Normandy Landings, and in Korea until it was decommissioned in 1965.



On the north side we were close up to Adelaide House, an art deco large steel-framed office building completed in 1925 that is probably the first modern office block in London with air conditioning and internal mail system. It also has a miniature putting green on the roof.

Just downstream from this building is St Magnus the Martyr – the parish church of the Bridge Ward within and the Bridge Ward without. The churchyard formed part of the old London Bridge between 1176 and 1831.

Walking on the north side, we had views of the many wharves that have been turned into shopping, offices and flats such as Hay's Wharf (now Hay's Galleria). On the foreshore there was a great tussle between a seagull and two rooks over an eel. It looked as though the seagull was winning but we couldn't linger to find out the final outcome.

Walking past the Tower of London and Traitors Gate we came beneath Tower Bridge, which is very impressive from below.

Just past here is the first of the many sculptures that have become very interesting features along the walk. This one by St Katherine's Pier is the 1973 water sculpture by David Wynne 'Girl with a Dolphin'.

Close by was a sundial by Wendy Taylor (who also created other sculptures that we were to see) that had been commissioned by Strand Hotels. The photograph shows the sundial with Tower Bridge and City Hall in the background.





Sundial by Wendy Taylor

Girl with a Dolphin by David Wynne

We entered Thomas Telford's St Katherine's Dock, which was opened in 1823. It was devastated in World War II but renovated in the 1970s, reopening with restaurants, shops and hotel around a marina containing some fine Thames barges. We stopped here to have our lunch – some into the Dickens Inn while some ate our sandwiches on the quayside. When we had rested, we walked out of St Katherine's Dock and onto Hermitage Riverside Memorial Gardens with its sculpture by Wendy Taylor in the form of a dove to suggest hope in memory of East London civilians killed and injured in the Second World War.

Nearby, Hermitage Basin has new housing on one side with an old pump house at one end and a rope circle at the other end made out of ships hawsers, shaped and stiffened to keep their form. On walking back to the river, we came by Cinnabar Wharf where you can buy a nice flat with good views for £1-1¼ million with another sculpture "Voyager 2001", inspired by ships propeller made by Ethan Baldwin in 1850.



Rope circle, Hermitage Basin



Voyager 2001, Cinnabar Wharf

Further along Wapping High Street is the magnificent Wapping Pier Head, which date from about 1800. This was the headquarters of customs officers responsible for examining and taxing goods imported via Wapping. It is very atmospheric with cobbled street and a central garden (photo).



We turned into the small park that used to be the churchyard for St John's Church of which only the tower remains. Next to the tower is John's Old School, founded in 1695 – the present building



dates back to 1756. On the front of the building are statues of two pupils in their traditional uniforms. Boys and girls were segregated in schools until the middle of the twentieth century, and used to enter the school buildings by separate entrances.

We returned to Wapping High Street by the Town of Ramsgate, one of many riverside pubs. This one claims to be the oldest on the river from 1758. At this time there were more than 140 ale-houses in Wapping High Street, all with a doubtful reputation. The hanging judge, Judge Jeffreys was arrested here to be held in the Tower and later executed.



Further along we came by the Captain Kidd pub that looks as having been there for a long time but was converted from an old warehouse in the 1980s and close by is the Marine Police Boat Station – a modern building on a site that has a Marine Police Office since 1798. We passed by Wapping Station on the East London Line, which is closed until summer 2010 for the complete rebuilding of the Line.

Out of Wapping into Shadwell, we came upon the Prospect of Whitby, probably the most famous riverside pub, probably named after a ship that was moored nearby and not the Yorkshire town. At the rear of the pub there is the hangman's noose.

On the other side of the street is the London Hydraulic Power Company, which dates from 1890 and is now a cafe. It pumped water in underground pressure tubes that provided hydraulic power to work the cranes, capstans, bridges and lock gates in the docks. The "accumulator" was a tower that filled with water, raising a weighted plunger, which built up pressure at the base to about 700 pounds per square inch. The pumping machinery can still be seen inside the building. Tower Bridge and Shadwell Bridge, over the entrance to Shadwell Basin, were driven by

hydraulic power from here.

After a detour to see the Shadwell Bridge, we rejoined the Thames path whereupon we saw Canary Wharf looming ahead. From here we entered Limehouse, walking past the entrance to Limehouse Basin (formerly Regent's Canal Dock opened 1820). This is the main entrance to England's canal system and we were fortunate to see a vessel coming through the lock onto the river.



Past Limehouse Basin we entered Narrow Street, where the Grapes public house has stood since the 18th Century. Next the pub are old warehouses that were early conversions to houses. The last of our sculptures – the Herring Gull by Jane Ackroyd in 1994 was found here.



From here we followed the Thames Path as it begins its loop around the Isle of Dogs to Canary Wharf Pier where we finished our walk. We all congratulated Neill on a well-researched walk along the north bank of the Thames and for bringing the fine weather. The final leg of our journey was by Thames Clipper to Greenwich to catch the bus back to Eltham.

A website worth looking at for those interested in more information on the history and pictures of the area is

<http://exploringeastlondon.co.uk/index.htm>

Laurie Baker