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THE MERIDIAN

In the third century BC, Eratosthenes-a Greek in Alexandria-very cleverly calculated the earth's curvature and circumference. From this there developed the method of determining latitude, by measuring the seasonal elevation of the mid-day sun. Galileo suggested a system of determining longitude from the position of Jupiter's moons and this was developed further by the Cassini family in 17th century France. This was not a very robust aid to navigation however, and following the loss of an entire British fleet under Sir Cloudisley Shovell-off the Scilly Isles in 1707-the British government offered a prize for a more reliable method.

The longitude problem was finally solved by John Harrison, a self-taught clock maker, who invented an accurate marine chronometer (watch) that was unaffected by the motion of the sea. The longitude for British maps was measured from a line drawn through the Greenwich Observatory. In 1884 an International Meridian Conference held in Washington adopted the Greenwich Prime Meridian as the world standard with very little dissent. This was influenced, no doubt, by the fact that at that time the majority of the world's navigation and mapping was in British hands. (Curiously enough, the Ordnance Survey's National grid is calculated from the far south west corner of the "realm" just off the Scilly Isles, and is not particularly related to the Greenwich Meridian-perhaps this is an acknowledgement to Sir Cloudisley?)

POPLAR

Following the opening of the East India Docks in the early 1860's, Poplar developed as a ribbon of houses across the neck of the peninsula and along the road to London. It took its name from the many poplar trees planted there to drain the waterlogged soil. On a spot now adjoining the Poplar recreation ground, a chapel was opened for the East India Company and later called St Matthias. The East India Dock Road later by passed the old Poplar High Street. Phenomenal growth took place in Poplar in the 1820-60 period, the "golden age" of the clipper ships. George Green and his son Richard, rope makers and naval contractors, also endowed the local school, Hospital and congregational chapel. Much of the 19th century working class housing was destroyed in the Blitz, and more in the post-war slum clearance and re-development. The 'new' Lansbury estate was a showpiece of modern housing built for the 1951 Festival of Britain. The Christ Street Market still remains but has no doubt lost some of its vitality and source of supplies, since the closure of the docks. Limehouse, further to the west, was traditionally the home of a Chinese and Vietnamese community. Poplar has seen an expansion of its Bangladeshi community, the loss of its traditional dock-labouring jobs and the growth of the new Canary Wharf office / high-technology world on its doorstep.

THE WEST INDIA DOCKS

By the 1790's the Pool of London had become very congested and, despite much opposition from vested interests, William Vaughan launched a scheme to build new docks in the Isle of Dogs. These large docks were finally completed in 1802. In the second week of September 1940, during the Battle of Britain, intense enemy bombing produced a firestorm in the sugar and molasses warehouses, which engulfed the barges in the docks and raged on for several days, guiding fresh enemy aircraft to the scene. The decline of the London Docks in the 1970's led to the creation of the London Docklands Development Corporation and the current massive redevelopment for office and business use, with the tallest building in Europe at Canary Wharf.

THE ISLE-OF-DOGS

It is likely that this area got its curious name because the Palace of Greenwich kept their pack of hounds here - so that the constant baying of dogs did not disturb their sleep. However, for sailors navigating up the River Thames on misty winter's nights this could have been a rather eerie experience!

MILLWALL

The peninsula is low-lying, with much of it below the high-water mark, and it is bounded by a bank or levee. In the past it was drained by a number of windmills, and so got from mariners the name of Millwall. It was from a shipbuilding yard here that the first great iron ship, the "Great Eastern", was launched in 1858.

CUBITT TOWN

This was so-called because Thomas Cubitt, the famous Victorian builder, operated a factory for ceramic ware here. In 1843 Joseph d'Aguilar Samuda and his brother Joseph, opened a shipbuilding yard.

THE 'CUTTY SARK'

This was one of the last of the great clipper ships and was built in Dumbarton in 1869, unfortunately the same year that De Lesseps opened the Suez Canal, which was to make the annual race of the tea clippers around the Cape of Good Hope a thing of the past.

KEY:

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|--|-------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|--|---|
| | = Checkpoint church | | = Railway station | | = Optional tube route (for those walking 4 miles) |
| | = Route (road) | | = Tube station | | |
| | = Optional route (road) | | = Docklands Light Railway station | | |
| | = Route (tube / DLR) | | = Market | | |
| | | | = Wheelchair route | | |
| | | | = Quiz question | | |

THE MILLENNIUM

In about 500AD a monk from Central Asia called Dionysius launched the Christian calendar in Rome by putting a date and day, 25th March, to the annunciation of the birth of Jesus. We know that he was about four years out as Herod died in 4BC, however Dionysius also left out the year 0 between 1BC and 1AD. In 1857 the then Pope, Gregory XIII, reformed the calendar and fixed New Year's Day on 1st January. The Gregorian calendar was introduced into Britain in the 18th century and there were riots on the streets of London, where the poor were convinced that the government was stealing fourteen days of their lives.

THE RIVER LEA

In 895AD a Danish fleet towed their ships up the River Lea and set up a base to raid London and the surrounding countryside at their leisure. Not to be outdone, King Alfred blockaded and dammed the river, which caused the Danish Craft to be stranded and their crews to retreat overland towards the Severn - pursued by the Saxon army. The Londoners then fetched the ships and broke up all that they could not carry away.

CANNING TOWN

This area was a marshland until the early 19th century and only developed as a dockland settlement, with the Royal Docks, in the late Victorian age. About 85% of the housing in the southern part of the district was destroyed by enemy action during the War and was rebuilt in the post-war period. Since the closure of the docks there has been a high level of unemployment.

EAST INDIA DOCKS

The earliest of the docks, it was established from 1614 by the East India Company as the first wet dock off the Thames at Blackwall. The navy became an efficient fighting force in the 1650's and the 'Dreadnought' ship-of-war was launched from here. Samuel Pepys, as secretary to the navy, comments about the dock in his famous diary. The docks expanded and flourished with the fortunes of the East India Company. However, with the abolition of the Company in the 1850's, and the end of the sailing ship era, steel shipbuilding moved to the Tyne, Clyde and Belfast where labour costs were lower. Sadly much of the dock is now filled in and used as an industrial estate.

THE THAMES

Once the main thoroughfare of London, the lower Thames was occupied with a dense mass of shipping and its banks and reaches with a mass of wharves and hythes, with the larger vessels unloading into lighters. Today the picture is very different!

NORTH GREENWICH

This was a neglected peninsula with limited access for many centuries but is now changing rapidly! The Blackwall tunnel was opened at the end of the 19th century for horses and pedestrians and opened Greenwich to the north bank of the Thames. Bugsby's Hole, on the eastern side, was where the bodies of dead pirates were displayed on gibbets as a warning to 18th century mariners. A 'hole' is a deep part of the Thames where ships could moor safely. No.2 gasholder was the world's biggest when built in 1892 - but exploded in 1917. The smaller No.1 still stands. Enderby's wharf belonged to a family of whalers, Antarctic explorers and adventurers who owned a factory making rope, twine and canvas. The first telegraph cables were manufactured here in North Greenwich, and laid across the Atlantic in 1866.

Built on the site of a disused gas works, the Dome is about the same height as Nelson's Column and 320 metres in diameter. Its 100 metre high steel masts are held in place by high strength cable and support the vast Teflon roof - only 2mm thick. The millennium exhibition lasts until the end of this year. Its new owners, whoever they might be, will then use the Dome in a new role.

GREENWICH PALACE

Commanding the river approach to the capital, Greenwich takes its name from "grene wic" meaning green bay or sheltered anchorage. The palace, called Placentia, was a favourite with the Tudors and was where Henry VIII was born. It was also where Elizabeth I commissioned many voyages of world exploration, including Drake's and Raleigh's. The Queen's House, built by Inigo Jones for James I, was the first classical Palladian building in England. The Royal Observatory was designed by Sir Christopher Wren and supervised by Robert Hooke, surveyor and physicist, but named after Flamsteed, the young astronomer Royal. William and Mary dedicated the King's House as a Naval Hospital (as a counterpart to Chelsea) and this was built by several famous architects over the next 50 years, to Wren's grand design. The navy moved many of their operations out of Greenwich to bases further down-river like Chatham; in 1873 the buildings became the Royal Naval College. Currently much of the complex is being refurbished for use by Greenwich University.

GREENWICH PARK

In the Middle-ages Greenwich castle occupied the brow of the hill and was surrounded by a deer park. Charles II laid out the park in the French style and commissioned the Observatory. Because the atmosphere became polluted the Observatory moved out, first to Hurstmonceux in Sussex, then to the Canary Isles.

NOTES:

Please remember that the walk takes place whatever the weather, checkpoints are open from 9am until 6pm. If you have one, an A-Z map of the walk area is a useful addition to this map.

We advise walkers to park outside the route area and travel in by public transport.

It is possible to buy a one-day travel card (all zones - £4.70) that will cover journeys on bus, tube and Docklands Light Railway networks.

Please try and give a donation to the participating churches along the route.

If you experience difficulty whilst on the walk and need help please contact staff at the nearest checkpoint. (For emergency purposes they have a contact number for Unlatch staff).

The Cutty Sark