

## Visit to Billingsgate Market: April 2022

Before the pandemic, your alarm clock going off at 4am usually meant you were catching an early flight to somewhere warm and inviting. However, when this happened on Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> April it was the early morning call to get up for the u3a visit to Billingsgate Market!

The early alarm was necessary as we had to be at the Market by 5.45am and, at that time of day, driving was the only option.



A sleepy group of eight gathered outside the Billingsgate Seafood School which overlooks the Market floor. While we were introduced to our guide, we enjoyed much needed teas and coffees.

Our guide for the day was C J Jackson who is the Creative Consultant to Billingsgate Seafood School, having formerly been its CEO. CJ (as everyone calls her) is one of the UK seafood industry's foremost fish experts. She has trained everyone from Michelin Starred Chefs to school children and families. In addition, she has written several books including Leith's Fish Bible and the Billingsgate Market Fish & Shellfish Cookbook as well as appearing on TV cookery shows such as Sunday Brunch. We were obviously in very good hands.



*CJ Jackson*

For the first part of our tour, we watched the Market floor from the gallery. From the outside or on television, Billingsgate looks enormous but in reality, the Market floor is quite modest.



CJ introduced us to Nick who was responsible for overseeing the unloading of the fish as it arrives at the Market. Nick explained that he and his team generally worked from 8pm to 6am and that overnight before our visit, they had unloaded 47 tonnes of fish from around the world. Fish comes by road from all over the UK and is also flown, frozen, from overseas via Heathrow. Believe it or not, Billingsgate's nearest fishing port is Boulogne, only 95 miles away and comes through the Channel Tunnel. Nick stressed that the poor fishermen in Scotland with their 500-mile journey were really at a disadvantage. When asked what the impact Brexit had been Nick replied that it generally worked well, but when it went wrong it went catastrophically wrong!

After this informative chat, we split into two groups and explored the market for ourselves. It was a surprise that the market is open to the public although some stall holders will only sell to trade customers as they are not willing to split crates of fish. It was quite chilly which was probably a good thing, any warmer and the aroma of fish may have been a bit overpowering.

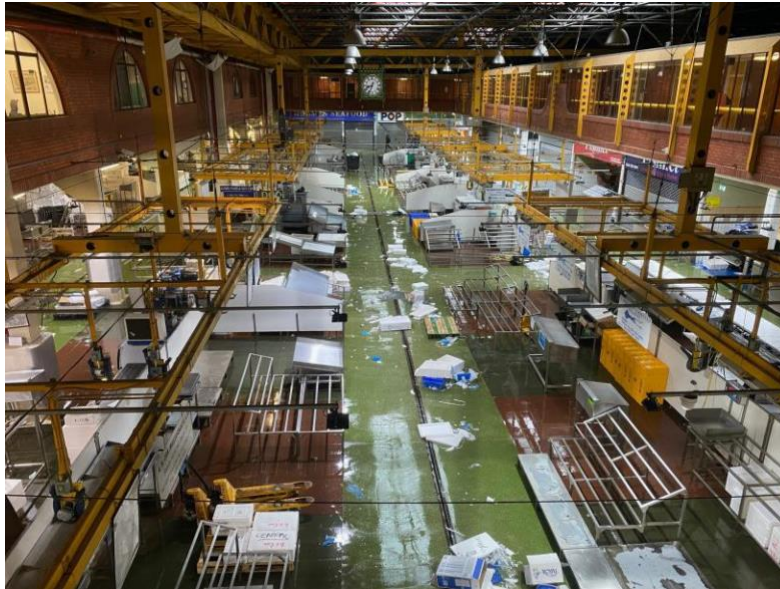
After twenty minutes we met up again with CJ who guided us around the market and demonstrated her encyclopaedic knowledge of fish. Until you see the incredible variety of fish species it is difficult to comprehend how many there are. Some were quite ugly, others, such as these colourful Parrot Fish were spectacular. We are now all experts at being able to identify what qualities the freshest fish will display.



There is very little fish wastage (under 1%) and what does occur is "recycled" as an ingredient for fertiliser. It is not allowed to re-enter the food chain. The other major waste product is the polystyrene used for the fish crates. There is a significant amount of this but surprisingly it can all

be compacted, reformed into blocks, and then eventually resold to companies such as Nike for use in trainers, or processed into park benches or decking!

Our visit finished with a breakfast of a delicious smoked salmon and cream cheese bagel with more tea and coffee. As we left, the market floor was deserted, ready to be cleaned and prepared for the next day.



This was a very interesting experience and well worth the early morning start!