

**U3A Bikers**  
**To the Trinity Buoy Lighthouse**  
**Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> November 2022**

Leaving our homes we were greeted by a cold breeze and grey clouds as we made our way to the meeting point, Denmark Hill Railway Station.

For family reasons, John and Denise who had reced the ride were not able to join the ten of us.

The route to Tower Bridge is a well-established route, and so we set off along Winds Walk, and then down to St Giles Church, cutting through its little churchyard.

Crossing a corner of Burgess Park, a ride along quiet local roads brought us to East Street, and then on to Burgess Park, past the lime kiln, and across Albany Road.



From here the way followed a familiar route safely crossing the New Kent Road on pedestrian lights and into Great Dover Street. We crossed Tabard Gardens and into Manciple Street. Riding along Leathermarket Street there were reminders of this industry where 50 skin salesmen once worked in the mid-1800s.

In former times this neighbourhood would not have smelled as good because human urine was used in the tanning process!

Whites Grounds took us under the railway lines running out of London Bridge Station, on to short stretch of Tooley Street and so on to Tower Bridge. We were fortunate because there was only light traffic on the bridge.



On the north side we crossed the road at the traffic lights to join the Thames Path eastbound, diverting to view the kinetic sculpture outside the Guoman Tower Hotel, a dolphin and a girl.

Arnd so we arrived at St Katharine Dock. Opened in 1828, this Thomas Telford-designed dock was once one of the busiest ports in the UK. The port was renowned for handling luxury goods, sugar, rum spices, perfumes, wines and tea.

The Telford Bridge originally spanned the entrance to the East Dock and was built in 1830 under the direction of Thomas Telford at a cost of £447. A rare design, the two halves of this pedestrian bridge withdrew into recesses in the masonry on a rack and pinion mechanism, now preserved alongside the replacement bridge



A prominent building was the **Dickens Inn**, today with a display of national flags, appropriate at this time with the World Cup in progress. The building is an original warehouse building, probably dating from the 1700s. The docks (there are two: the east and west docks) were full of luxury boats moored in berths reputed to cost £500 plus per month to lease.



This was our coffee stop and we were able to find seating indoors at the curiously-named White Mulberries for refreshments - and to warm up.

After a suitable interval for the Chattering Cyclists, we were ready to resume the ride. But.....

Proceeding to unlock one of the bikes one rider found to her horror that the key she had did not fit the lock!! Many locks are like this – they can be locked without a key. Niesje volunteered to accompany her to London Bridge on route to home to collect the key (and she returned later to collect her bike).



After leaving St Katharine Dock, and avoiding the route along Wapping High Street with its cobbled surfaces, we turned into Hermitage Basin, descended a switch-back path leading to the Ornamental Canal and on to Tobacco Dock. Two 'Pirate Ships' are 'moored' in Tobacco Dock, but all is not what it appears to be!! After crossing the diminutive Wapping Woods, we emerged at Shadwell Basin.





At its entrance stands the **Shadwell Basin Bridge**, one of the four Scherzer rolling bascule bridges along this stretch of the Thames, all painted red, and I just had to stop to take a photo of this wonderful piece of engineering.

We crossed the swing bridge at the entrance to Limehouse Basin and this led to Narrow Street and Limehouse Causeway and on to a cycle highway that crossed busy West India Dock Road.

The cycle highway continued around the large roundabout on the Leamouth Road to lead us safely to **Trinity Buoy Wharf**, and our lunch stop at The Orchard. Someone had parked their taxi on the roof, one of the several quirky pieces of street art here.



There was time to explore the area, the light vessel resplendent in its red paint, the lighthouse. (Here is an old photo from the 1920s which shows that there were originally two lighthouses).



It is also known as the Bow Creek Lighthouse. The lower part of the River Lea is known as the Bow River.

There is also a tidal-powered lunar clock, *Alunatime*, which displays the phase of the moon, and the state of the tide.

Some curious cut-out figures are a colourful new addition to the area.



The lighthouse is occasionally open and on a previous occasion I had the opportunity to climb the stairs to see the mechanism.

Also here, a playing on a loop, is a sound recording of random music which apparently does not repeat over a 1000 year cycle. (But who checks that it's true?)

Leaving Trinity Buoy Wharf, we circled East India Dock Basin and continued on to the Virginia Settlements Monument to the first settlers of North America.

This was where Captains Christopher Newport and John Smith set sail in December 1606 – some 14 years before the Mayflower set out two miles further upstream.



Homeward bound, we continued on through the centre of Canary Wharf, where the Christmas lights were on display.



Along the Thames Path and past Limehouse Basin, then on to Cycle Superhighway CS3 which took us to a short stop to see the mural depicting the Battle of Cable Street in 1936.

This protest by the public effectively disrupted a march by the British Union of Fascists under Oswald Mosely. It has been described as "...the moment at which British fascism was decisively defeated".

From here the group divided, one part heading for London Bridge and Peckham, the other back to Brockwell Park.

Another ride enjoyed by the group to a destination few had visited previously. Thank you John and Denise for the recce of the ride. And a lesson about locks that close without a key. I now keep my lock locked when not in use!



*Acknowledgement: source material from Wikipedia and Oxford Bodleian Library*

Ride Leaders: John Clements

Report: John Clements, 1<sup>st</sup> December 2022

Group Convenor: John Clements

## NOTES

### Trinity Buoy Wharf

The original lighthouse was built by the engineer of Trinity House, James Walker in 1852, and was demolished in the late 1920s. A second lighthouse, which survives, was built in 1864–66 by James Douglass for Trinity House. The lantern at the top of the tower came from the Paris Exposition of 1867, where Trinity House had used it to demonstrate Professor Holmes's improved system of electric lighting for lighthouses. Initially it housed ('for experimental purposes') the optical equipment which had been shown at the Exposition. Michael Faraday carried out experiments there. It was later used to test lighting systems for Trinity House's lights around England and Wales. Both lighthouses were also used for training prospective lighthouse keepers



**The Dickens Inn** is an original warehouse building. As an original warehouse building, it's thought to have housed tea or to have been owned by a local brewery. It certainly existed at the turn of the 18th century and may well have been built in the 1700's. During the early years as a pub "The Tavern Bar" used to feature sawdust strewn floors and no bottled or canned beer was stocked. Diners also enjoyed candlelit meals on the balconies; this practice has been phased out due to modern fire safety regulations!

**The Shadwell Basin Bridge** on Wapping Wall is a bascule bridge and very similar to the Surrey Water bridge. As both were operated by the Port of London Authority they were probably sourced from the same manufacturer. The Shadwell Basin bridge was erected during the 1930s by the successful engineering contractors Sir William Arrol and Co which specialised in rolling lift bridges during this period.

This design of bridge is described as a single-leaf rolling lift bridge; also as a "Scherzer rolling bascule lift bridges" after the American engineer William Donald Scherzer who refined the Bascule design into the rolling lift bridge. The original Bascule design used a single large axle, whereas the rolling lift bridge has the weighted counterbalance that rolls back on a hinge with a cog rack and pinion. The design dates from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. ("Bascule" is French for see-saw, or balance.)

There is a video of a bascule bridge opening at: <https://www.mfoot.com/blog/2016/06/26/historic-remnants-1-the-bascule-bridges-of-rotherhithe-and-surrey-quays/>

**Plan of London Docks** by Henry Palmer 1831, courtesy of Oxford Bodleian Library

*Tobacco Dock and Warehouse are shown. Hermitage Basin remains but most of the docks have been filled in.*

