

**u3a Bike Rides
Surrey Docks
Friday 7th July 2023**

Due to industrial action by members of ASLEF, the trains to Penge East could not be relied upon and so the usual route to Waterlink Way was not available – unless of course we had tackled the hill up to Crystal Palace! A new route to Ladywell has been developed for this outing to Surrey Commercial Docks.

So it was at the Clock Café in Dulwich Park that we met, and welcomed three new members for their first outing with us. Welcome Alex, Caroline and Joyce! We set out in two groups of six.

With temperatures rising and a high of 30 degrees forecast, we headed up the hill to the Plough, then coasted downhill to Peckham Rye Park.

The route, mostly level, took us past Honor Oak Crematorium to Ladywell Fields, to pick up the Ravensbourne River and over the spiral – sorry, the helical bridge!

(Longer-serving members of the Group will recall that Peter, the first Group Convenor, was most insistent on this point. And he was right.)



Our coffee destination, the Good Hope Café at Ladywell, was busy, as would be expected on such a lovely sunny morning.... and with a teachers' strike too.

Giving up on being able to get a coffee, we supped on cold water; there is now a water fountain here.

We picked up the route of the Broxbourne River and headed to the busy junction at Lewisham, and then on to Deptford Creek

Pausing at the impressive statue of Peter the Great, as he gazed out over the Thames, we were joined by the last member of the ride group who had been delayed by the train strike.

The Thames Path upstream runs by the river as far as the Ahoy! Centre, where youngsters learn to sail on the tricky tidal waters of the river.

The first of the two Rotherhithe docks is the **South Dock** which still has a working lock and accommodates mainly small pleasure craft.



The second is the much larger **Greenland Dock** which has no direct access to the river. Ships enter and leave through the Greenland Cut that links to the South Dock. Greenland Dock is the oldest of London's riverside docks.



It had been the plan to head for the Russia Dock Woodland and climb Stave Hill for a view of the dockland area. However, the ride was shortened because of the high temperature, and so we headed for Surrey Quays Shopping Centre.

To reach this we passed under the massive structure which is the Scherzer rolling bascule bridge, one of four along this stretch of the river.

[For those who have not visited Stave Hill and seen the bronze relief map at the summit showing the layout of the original docks, here is a photo of it.]

A convenient path from the car park delivered us to Lower Road and so into Southwark Park, and the Pavilion Café.

This café was also busy, with expected waiting times of 10-15 minutes to be served. Most had brought a packed lunch and, very usefully, there was a convenient shaded seating area just outside the Park Gallery.



Here the Group indulged in one of its favourite pastimes – chattering! Some were minded to describe the scene as Socratic, philosophers one and all, in pursuit of reason and enquiry! The talk was less of sprockets, callipers and derailleurs, and more of Zoe, Tim Spector, gut biomes, processed food, and longevity!

Several options were available for the return journey; I chose to leave via the Kirby Estate and on to Bermondsey Spa Gardens, an almost traffic-free route that worked well.

At Burgess Park the ride ended and the group dispersed by their chosen preferred routes. Thanks to Andrew for leading the second group and to the back markers, Jane and Mark, for keeping everyone in good order. Nobody got left behind!

Time: about 5 hours

Distance: about 18 miles

Riders: Alex, Andrew, Caroline, Christine, Felicity, Ian, Jane, Joe, John, Joyce, Mark, Martin, Tony.

Ride leader: John Clements

Report by John; photos by John and Felicity. 9th July 2023

Acknowledgement: source material from Rotherhithe Blog and Wikipedia

Notes

South Dock is one of two surviving docks in the former Surrey Commercial Docks in Rotherhithe. It was built in 1807–1811 just south of the larger Greenland Dock, to which it is connected by a channel now known as the Greenland Cut; South Dock has a lock giving access to the River Thames. Originally named the *East Country Dock*, it was renamed in 1850 when the Surrey Commercial Dock Company purchased and enlarged it. Timber and grain were the main products imported and exported in the dock.

The dock was seriously damaged by German attacks in World War II when the area was heavily bombed by the Luftwaffe. Due to bomb damage in Greenland Dock, South Dock became the only exit from that dock. It was emptied of shipping in 1944, drained and used for the construction of concrete sections for the Mulberry Harbours used on D-Day.

Greenland Dock is the oldest of London's riverside wet docks, located in Rotherhithe in the area of the city now known as Docklands. It used to be part of the Surrey Commercial Docks, most of which have by now been filled in. Greenland Dock is now used purely for recreational purposes; it is one of only two functioning enclosed docks on the south bank of the river.

The dock was originally laid out between 1695 and 1699 on land owned by the aristocratic Russell family, the 1st Duke of Bedford, who was given the land by a wealthy landowner, John Howland, as part of a wedding dowry for his daughter Elizabeth.

They immediately set about "improving" the rural property, low marshy ground surrounded by fields, and obtained parliamentary permission to build a large dock capable of accommodating around 120 ships. It was named the Howland Great Wet Dock in honour of John Howland and designed to refit East India ships.



*View of the Howland Great Wet Dock in 1717
looking west across the Rotherhithe peninsula
(Courtesy of Wikipedia)*