**Woolwich Circular March 2024 ref Walk 3 Exploring the Elizabeth Line**

Several of our group (of 11) expressed pleasant surprise that there was so much to see on our parade around the ex-military grounds at Woolwich Arsenal, now a Heritage conservation area. *(Maybe a trip for the Freedom Pass Explorers?)* We started and finished in the site where foundries, factories, warehouses and buildings where ammunition, weapons and explosives were manufactured, and research undertaken for over 300 years. Cannons to the left of them, cannons to the right of us.

We began in Dial Arch Square. The Dial Square Football Team was created in 1886 by Royal Arsenal workers who took as their team name the playing area located in front of the Dial Arch. Later, when they turned professional in 1891, the club became known as Woolwich Arsenal. When the club moved to Highbury in 1913 it became Arsenal FC.

Looking back to Beresford Square you face the Royal Arsenal Gatehouse, which along with most of the rest of the square is undergoing huge refurbishment. In Dial Arch Square you see the Main Guardhouse with its imposing frontage and statute of the Greek God, Nike. It’s now a pub/restaurant. We skirted in front of Verbruggen’s Grade II listed House, built for the 2 Dutch master founder of the brass foundry. Going down Number 1 Street, the first building is the foundry.

Further down the street is Artillery Square. When I was recce-ing on a Saturday there was a thriving market. On our main visit it was quiet, but with the spectacular Roya Military Academy at the far end. It relocated to Woolwich Common in 1806. Ahead is James Clavell Square, named after the author and Japanese prisoner of war. Apart from a huge gun emplacement, the square now houses an artwork called Assembly, 16 cast-iron figures in a circle. We mused about the allegorical significance.

Up the steps to Woolwich Pier and then along the Thames Path, passing the green-domed ventilation shaft for the DLR. Broadwater Lock, now closed, was the link between the river and the Royal Arsenal Canal, built by 1816 by French prisoners & convicts. This led us into Gallions Park with its fishing lake. So from there we followed the rivulet along to Foxglove Path. Off to our left, seen between houses, rose Gallions Hill, (the highest point in Thamesmead) a mound built from the diggings of the estate. Crossing the road we began our ascent, which was a shallow spiral path leading to a viewpoint.

Descending by the same route, we walked through the children’s playground out to the Thames again and were soon retracing most of our earlier route. However we turned off at the ventilation shaft to explore more of the Heritage area, passing Cannon House and turning left past the gatehouse of the former Shell Foundry with magnificent gates and fronted by 2 captured cannons.