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TOWER HAMLETS

eastendlife

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In this month's walk, **Graham Barker** discovers the spirit of old riverside London among the cobbled streets of Wapping. Photos by **Mike Askew**.

# Tales from the riverbank

**NEW Year's 'get healthy' resolutions can be hard to sustain. Yet a brisk walk can be a great way to incorporate a mini workout into your weekend. So put on your winter woollies and head out to explore the garrisons and gardens, docks and canals of Wapping.**

Before you set out from Tower Hill Underground station, make a brief visit to the giant sundial (1) on the mound above. There's a good view of the Tower of London and a circular London timeline around the sundial's base.

Now head down the large flight of steps beside the main Tube entrance. On the left there are glimpses of Roman London (2) – an impressive section of the former city wall and a bronze statue of Emperor Trajan.

Continue through the underpass, where fiery murals depict the colourful history of the Tower, its jewels, ravens and monarchs. As you emerge to face the Tower (3), follow the path to the right, keeping on the lower level and skirting round to the entrance gate. Along the way, can you spot the metal archers poised within the Tower's turrets? At the bottom of the sloping cobbled piazza you'll find plaques giving historical notes.

Beside the gate, you might browse in the Tower shop or have your photo taken with a friendly Beefeater. And Tower Hamlets residents get a very special deal: entrance is only £1 (normally £17 for adults) if you present your Idea Store card.

Follow the cobbled roadway along the riverside. There are fine views of Tower Bridge and on your left is Traitor's Gate – the river entrance for the soon-to-be-beheaded. Continue through the arch under Tower Bridge and immediately turn right, past Dead Man's Hole – where corpses once washed up – and back to the riverside.

Head for the Girl with a Dolphin fountain and continue on to a giant silver sundial. Here you cross the wooden footbridge towards the Dockmaster's House (4).

Follow the dockside as it curves to the right – signed to the Dickens Inn – but before you reach the inn, turn right at a red phone box to join the red brick roadway of St Katharine's Way. Follow this road all the way round to the left, past old warehouses and a silver arch at Tower Bridge Wharf, and you'll soon join Wapping High Street.

Take the Thames Path through the Hermitage Riverside Memorial Garden (5) on your right. It's dominated by Wendy Taylor's cut-out dove commemorating east London civilians who died in World War II. Stick with the Thames path, as it leaves the garden and passes another of Taylor's sculptures – Voyager, a sliced and twisted bronze ring based on a ship's propeller – and soon it brings you back onto Wapping High Street.

Head right and you'll arrive at Wapping Pierhead (6) – two facing terraces of imposing Georgian houses built for dock officials. The Town of Ramsgate pub is just beyond. Squeeze down the adjacent Wapping Old Stairs – one of several old river landings on this stretch – and if the tide is out, you can even step down to the shore.

Opposite the pub, cross over and head through St John's graveyard towards the Turk's Head Café – a popular stopping place if you're in need of refreshment.

As you stroll, look across to the figures of two children recessed into the façade of the old parish school (7).

Beside the Turk's Head, walk on down Green Bank and turn left into Wapping Gardens. Follow the main tarmac track through the park, heading for the opposite gate. You emerge into Watts Street, facing a high wall. Turn right and on the next corner read the board on Turner's Old Star pub (8) – the romantic landscape painter JMW Turner is rumoured to have bought it for Sophia Booth, one of his several mistresses.

Circle around the green and heading for the bus stop. Then continue left up Wapping Lane and cross over to St Peter's London Docks (9), a little-known East End delight. Go through the courtyard and inside the church – it's open daily for

prayers and quiet reflection. Inside, you'll see ornate stained glass windows and decorative brickwork.

Back out on Wapping Lane, cross over and continue right, past Raine Street and Reardon Street until you reach the Wapping Wood Canal. Turn left down a few steps to join the canal, and follow it towards St Katharine's Docks as it snakes first to the left, and then to the right.

En route you should spot a bust of civil engineer John Rennie (10) across the water above the old dock wall. As the canal makes its final twist left, passing under a small road bridge, look out for the inscribed Roman numerals marking the water depth of the old Western Dock, up to XXIV (24) feet deep. Go up the steps ahead, towards a coiled rope sculpture and emerge in Hermitage Basin (11).

Stay on the level but walk back on yourself slightly, to reach the road bridge. Then follow the blue signs to St Katharine's Docks: firstly to the left, then left again into Stockholm Way, right into Thomas More Street and, at the end of the first block, left along Mews Street.

As you reach the dockside, follow the path round to the right, circling anti-clockwise. There's plenty to see here including expensive yachts, chunky black capstans and waterfowl in the dock. At the mini roundabout by Ivory House (12) continue straight ahead, following the wooden boardwalk beside Commodity Quay. If you're feeling peckish, you might fancy a snack at one of the restaurants by the dock corner. Otherwise, return to Tower Hill by following the path right, beside a glass-fronted office block, then left through a white lit tunnel, back to the underpass and steps up to the Tube.

**Thanks to John Wills and Hildi Kappelhoff for trialling this walk.**

**To find out more about Walk Tower Hamlets programmes and routes, visit [www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/walking](http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/walking) or call Rachel Maile on 7364 6940 or email [walking@towerhamlets.gov.uk](mailto:walking@towerhamlets.gov.uk)**



The Girl with a Dolphin sculpture by David Wynne, gives the illusion of the figures flying unsupported



The view across the river from St Katharine's Dock



Wapping Pierhead, Georgian houses built for dock officials



The facade of an old parish school