



Introduction

The history of London is often recorded in terms of waves of new arrivals and their impact on the city. Nowhere in the capital is this more evident than in East London. With its docks and a long tradition of welcoming immigrant populations from all over the world, Tower Hamlets' shifting populations have always reflected changes in national and global politics.

Black people have been a feature of East London life since Roman times. Their presence throughout successive eras serves as a reminder of Britain's slave trade, the nation's maritime history and the origins and resilience of one of Britain's earliest visible minority communities.

The walks in this leaflet bring us into contact with the full spectrum of these experiences – from poets to parlour-maids, from revolutionary writers to runaways. We will follow in the footsteps of individuals who made history and of those forgotten by it.



Walk 4

Tower Hill to Museum in Docklands *Sailors, Scribes and Slaves*



Starting point	Tower Hill tube station
Finishing point	Museum in Docklands
Estimate time	2.5 hours

Start at Tower Hill tube station. Turn right as you leave the tube station into a green park, which is **Trinity Square Gardens (1)**. In Trinity Square Gardens is a memorial to the merchant seamen who lost their lives in World War Two. Many African

sailors' names can be found on the memorial. As you look to your left you can see the Tower of London, one of the most historic buildings in England and a one time Royal Palace. The Tower contains the British Crown Jewels, one of the finest collections of jewels in the world. In 1692 a 16-year-old black slave of Thomas Dymock, the Lion Keeper at the Tower's menagerie, fled from captivity taking with him £10 in silver and one guinea. What became of him is not known.

CLRO 'Sessions Papers' ref:
LSP 1691/2 [22 & 24 Feb]

ON the 30th of December last, Run away from Mr. Thomas Dymock at the Lyon Office in the Tower, a black Boy, with about 10 l. in Silver, and one Guinea; he is aged about 16, wore three coloured Coats, two grey, his uppermost Cinamon colour, lined with black, black Shaag Facings on the Sleeves, grey Stockings, a Silver Collar about his Neck, Bagraven, Thomas Dymock at the Lyon Office. Whoever shall apprehend him, and bring him to the Lyon Office in the Tower, shall have two Guinea's Reward, and Charges born. He speaks but bad English, and hath holes in both his Ears.

Beyond the Tower is the River Thames and, more specifically, the Pool of London. At the height of the British Empire this area was the busiest port in the world. Many of the goods would have been brought in from the Caribbean, often from slave plantations. This stretch of water appears in the opening shots of the 1936 Paul Robeson musical *Song of Freedom*, the first film to highlight the multi-ethnic population of the docks.

This part of the river has historically been both a point of arrival and departure – forced and voluntary – for black and other immigrant groups. East London's visible minority populations increased significantly during the period of transatlantic slavery. Most black immigrants got their first view of London from the Thames, some were brought here as 'slave-servants', others found work as sailors or dock workers and settled along the riverside.

Retrace your steps past Tower Hill tube station and the remains of the roman wall until you get to the traffic lights. Cross with Tower Gateway DLR station on your left and go straight up Shorter Street and on the right you will see Tower Bridge. You now enter **Royal Mint Street (2)**. This street used to be known as Rosemary Lane and was one of the worst slums in London. This neighbourhood was the home of the Chartist agitator David Anthony Duffy who was described as walking about 'without shoe or stocking'. He was arrested in April 1848 as one of the organisers of a Chartist demonstration in Kennington which ended in a riot.



Head up Royal Mint Street to its junction with Dock Street. A little way down Dock Street, on the left side of the road, you will see a plaque on a building commemorating the '**Battle of Cable Street**' (3) on 4th October 1936 when groups of Jews, dockers of all ethnic groups, communists and ex-servicemen successfully prevented the Blackshirt followers of Sir Oswald Mosley (the leader of the British Union of Fascists) from marching into the East End to attack the Jews.

Cross over Dock Street and keep walking straight ahead. The street becomes **Cable Street** (4), which gave its name to the infamous battle.



This area has had a history of black settlement for the last three centuries. The neighbouring street of East Smithfield was the site of *The Shovel* public house where on 29th June 1787 local constables were beaten and 'turned out' of the pub by over 40 black drinkers. In 1919 Cable Street was the scene of one of the race riots which erupted across Britain and the United States of America. In Britain, white colonial soldiers were prominent in these riots, often attacking local black communities which had grown up in the port cities and established greater social and economic independence than was possible in the colonies. In Cable Street racists objected to white women fraternising with black men living in the street. A café in the street was set alight and gunshots fired. This wave of violence took place as the Paris Peace conference rejected the Racial Equality Proposal put forward by Japan. It also contributed to the development of independence movements in Africa and the Caribbean and the rapid evolution of Marcus Garvey's pan-african Universal Negro Improvement Association.

By the 1950s so many black residents had settled in this district that the area around Golding Street, Greenfield Street and Cable Street was known as 'the Harlem of London'.



Walk down the street and take the first road to your right, Ensign Street. Then turn into the first small alley on your left, Grace's Alley. After a few steps you come to a rather dilapidated building called **Wiltons** (5). In the 19th century it was one of the most famous music halls in London seating audiences of 3,000 people. In common with similar Victorian institutions it helped to popularise the 'minstrel' phenomenon with white performers such as Messrs Duriah and

Davis in 1865. The Methodist East End mission took it over in 1888 and the famous (or infamous) mahogany bar was converted into a coffee house for around 1,000 people. It had beds for 30 people and there were always black sailors seeking accommodation here.

It closed in 1956 and there were plans to demolish it. However, protestors led by the poet laureate Sir John Betjeman objected and it was taken over by Broomhill Opera which staged the first all-black *Carmen*, the South African mystery plays and a black version of *The Beggar's Opera*. HRH The Prince of Wales has recently become Wilton's first Patron and the trust is now raising funds for an extensive refurbishment of this Grade II listed building.



Continue along Grace Alley to Wellclose Square, turn first left up Fletcher Street into Cable Street again and then turn right. On a site opposite **74-87 Noble Court (6)** was the house (now demolished) lived in by Bandele 'Tex' Ajetunmobi, the photographer, whose photographs were 'rediscovered' in an exhibition at the Spitz Gallery in October 2002.

Continue walking along Cable Street until you get to Cannon Street Road. Up the street to the left is what used to be called **Bigland Street School (7)** and is now called Mulberry Girls School. This is one of the schools where the Guyanese writer ER Braithwaite taught. Braithwaite was an engineer who, despite having served as a bomber pilot in the Royal Air Force in WWII, could not get a job because of his colour. He then trained as a teacher. His experiences of teaching were set out in the book *To Sir With Love*. This book was later turned into a film starring Sidney Poitier. This area was also the focus of James Greenwood's 1874 article *A Visit to Tiger Bay* which documented the black and Asian presence in this area.

Go right down Cannon Street Road until you come to the magnificent baroque church **St. George in the East (8)**, one of three churches in the borough designed by Nicholas Hawksmoor, Christopher Wren's assistant. Many black baptisms took place here including that of a 15-year-old slave, Anne Clossen. She promptly left her master and negotiated very well-paid employment (£7 per annum) with a local surgeon.

As you go up the steps of the church look to your right and look for the rigging of sailing ships. This is Tobacco Dock, a Grade 1 listed warehouse designed by the engineer John Rennie in the early 1800s. It is sobering to think that at the

time it was opened the tobacco was brought in from slave plantations in Virginia, America. If you look to the left as you go up the steps you will see the now abandoned **St. George in the East School (9)** behind 206 Cable Street. This school was the first school in the East End where the Guyanese author ER Braithwaite taught.

Go to the right, around the church and into the churchyard at the rear. Head diagonally across to the left and you will come to a neo-classical building called **St. George's Town Hall (10)**, which served as the Town Hall for this area for many years. You will see a large and colourful **mural (11)** on the west wall commemorating the Battle of Cable Street. There is only one black protester featured on the mural, just above the banner reading 'They Shall not Pass'. The mural was first painted by David Binnington in 1979. It was vandalized by right-wingers in 1982 and repainted by the artist Ray Walker in 1982-83. He relied a great deal on contemporary photos in painting it.

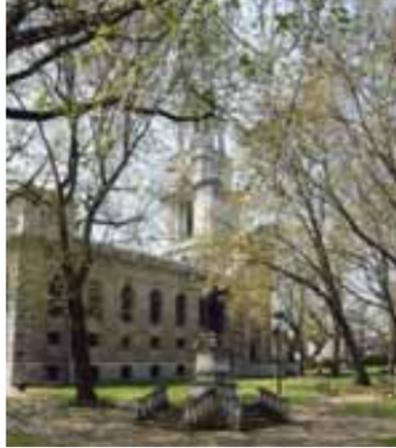
Take a long walk now, right to the end of Cable Street. On your way you'll pass by an interesting variety of housing, including a selection of large warehouses now converted into artists' studios. From the left hand side of Cable Street carefully cross Butcher Row using the traffic island. Turn right, then left into a small park. Go through the park, across the footbridge and left into Horseferry Road. Follow the road around to the right and turn left into Narrow Street, crossing the entrance to Limehouse Basin, another of the East End's historically busy dock areas. In 1827, Thomas De Quincey described the area in his work *On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts* as "a

most chaotic quarter of eastern or nautical London...Every third man at the last might be set down as a foreigner. Lascars, Chinese, Moors, Negroes, were met at every step."



Walk along Narrow Street and at the statue of the Herring Gull turn left into Ropemaker's Fields. Turn left across the fields, cross over the canal bridge to Island Row, continue to Commercial Road, which was built by the East India and West India Companies to facilitate the transportation of goods from the colonies into London.

Keep walking on eastwards and fairly soon on your left, on the corner of Salmon Lane, you will see an impressive building (now a block of apartments) known as **The Mission (13)**. It was originally known as the Empire Memorial Hostel and was opened in 1924. Every day of the year 2-3,000 seamen with no homes to go to arrived in the port of London, with its 32 miles of docks. These men would earn no more money until they were signed to another ship. The British Sailors' Society was chief among those organisations tasked with catering for the urgent needs of these men. In 1917, presiding over the Ladies' Guild of the Society, the Dowager Lady Dimsdale inaugurated the scheme to build the Empire Memorial Hostel as a memorial from the whole Empire to the 12,000 merchant seaman of all races across the British Empire who died in the First World War. It was felt that the most appropriate way of honouring the dead would be through looking after their living descendants and companions.



Contributions flooded in from across the globe, from the dominions and the colonies and according to *Syren and Shipping*, 22nd May 1929, it was "admirably equipped and most efficiently maintained with sleeping accommodation for 205 men, each in a separate, clean airy cabin."

Syren and Shipping's 1929 account also gives us an indication of the Hostel's popularity and standing at the time: "Since the Empire Memorial Hostel was opened in Commercial Road in 1924, it has provided accommodation for very nearly one million men." They reported that "letters are constantly being received from all over the world containing requests for the reservation of rooms for men expecting to arrive in London."

Following the closure of the docks in the 1960s and 1970s, the Hostel lost its seamen and finally closed in 1979. The Hostel was sold, briefly became a 'home' for the homeless but then closed in 1985. In 1994, it was sold to a property developer who converted it into 50 private flats and gave it a new name 'The Mission'.

Go past the old Limehouse Town Hall until you come to the church of **St. Anne's Limehouse (14)**, another church by the great baroque architect Nicholas Hawksmoor.



Curve right along the West India Dock Road. On the corner is the **Passmore Edwards Sailors' Palace (15)** – the British and Foreign Sailors Society. The carving over the doorway includes Africa in the countries and continents listed. Today, this building is made up of modern flats.



Shortly afterwards, on your left, is Limehouse Police Station. To the right of the police station is a block of flats called West India House, opened in 1946 by Clement Attlee. It was originally the site of the Strangers Home for Asians, Africans and South Sea Islanders which was established in 1857.

Walk on across Westferry Road. As you turn right into Hertsmere Road you pass the site of the former Charlie Brown's pub which was much frequented by sailors from the Caribbean. Sadly it was demolished when the Limehouse Link was built in

the early 1990s. Walk past the Dockmasters House with the cinema on your left. In front of you will see the rear of the **Museum in Docklands (16)**. Bear right past the building and turn left past the Ledger pub. Just before you turn left you will see a large memorial plaque on the wall commemorating the opening of the West India Docks in 1802. The names on the plaque include many City financiers who owned large slave plantations in the Caribbean. The docks were specifically created to guarantee the safe handling of their sugar, rum, coffee and timber. Only a third of the warehouses were left after the bombing in WWII. One of the warehouses has been turned into the Museum in Docklands, which depicts the history of the docklands including an overview of the transatlantic slave trade.

If you stand with your back to the entrance of the museum, to the south west you will see a reconstructed arch, crowned by a ship called *The Hibbert*, which was first erected in 1807 in memory of George Hibbert, an alderman and plantation owner who was instrumental in establishing the docks. In the same year the bill abolishing the slave trade throughout the British Empire was passed.



Museum in Docklands

The Museum in Docklands charts the history of the area from the Roman Thameside trading post through to the Canary Wharf Development in the 1980s and 1990s. Opened in 2003, this former rum, coffee, cotton and sugar warehouse with its atmospheric exposed brickwork and timber floors, is now home to a fascinating exploration of the area's 2000 year history. Archaeological finds, models, photographs, testimonials and re-creations explore the lives of those who built and shaped the port's long riverfront, from yesterday's gentleman pirates to today's city workers.

Through touchscreen interactives visitors are led by Time Team's Tony Robinson to explore the early ports of London, from the Saxon settlement in Covent Garden to the medieval port at Billingsgate. Enormous whale-bones mark one of the uses of the early wet docks at Rotherhithe in the 18th century, when London was at the centre of the world whaling trade, while a gibbet cage set at the end of a re-creation of a legal quay reveals the fate of those engaged in piracy and is particularly popular with the Museum's younger visitors!

In 'Sailortown', wander through 19th century alleyways, when ships jostled to unload their wares, the air was suffused with the smells of exotic goods, and the sound of different languages echoed along the wharves. In 'London, Sugar and Slavery' discover the capital's untold involvement in the transatlantic slave trade and be touched by the real objects and personal stories that have left their legacy on the city today.

Museum in Docklands also has a children's section called 'Mudlarks' which enables under 11s to explore aspects of the area through interactive play. There is also an on-going programme of events, study days, courses and workshops on a variety of topics, for adults and children.

Museum in Docklands

History walkers can get two full-price admission tickets for the price of one until 31st March 2008. Just show this guide at the ticket desk when you visit Museum In Docklands. Annual ticket £5 (you can visit as many times as you like in a year). Concessions £3. NUS cardholders and children under 16 FREE.

Museum in Docklands is located at West India Quay, London E14 4AL
Tel: 0870 444 3857
Opening hours:
daily 10am – 6pm
www.museumindocklands.org.uk



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