EXPLORE
Situated on the banks of the River Thames, just outside the City of London, Wapping has a history dating back thousands of years. The Romans built The Highway, but it was the Saxons who first settled here. Over time, the village of Wapping grew; wharves and houses spread along the riverfront.

With the expansion and dominance of English power on the sea, Wapping’s boat building and fishing industries thrived, and by the 18th Century it was firmly established as an area for maritime trades.
A number of historic figures have chosen to make Wapping their home over the centuries, including explorer and cartographer James Cook, captain of the famous Endeavour. Cook lived in Wapping during the 1750s and ’60s, before he became the first European to chart the east coast of Australia.

Wapping has always been a popular location for writers. Samuel Pepys frequently visited the area, and Charles Dickens was often inspired by the docks whilst visiting his godfather in nearby Limehouse; many of Dickens’ novels feature scenes of the docks and riverside, including Oliver Twist and Great Expectations.

Wapping was also popular with artists, including renowned British artist J.M.W. Turner, who it is believed inherited a pub now known as Turner’s Old Star.
Tea is famously known as the most popular drink in Britain, but back in the 18th Century it was unaffordable for most people. It first made its way from China to Europe during the 17th Century, but at this time the trade in tea was solely monopolised by the East India Company. No other company was legally allowed to import goods from the East Indies, and this lack of competition meant company ships were built to provide storage space rather than for speed. The journey from China to Britain could sometimes take up to a year.

In 1834 the East India Company’s monopoly was lifted, as was the ban on foreign ships in 1849, increasing competition between American and British vessels, which would race each other across the sea from China to Britain.

The clipper races became famous, with one particular race in 1866 inspiring excitement across the nation. After the 99 day journey, two ships were amazingly still neck-and-neck as they entered the River Thames, and the race was declared a dead heat.

In 1869 the opening of the Suez Canal provided a faster route between Europe and Asia for steam ships, and the clipper races came to an end. One of the last tea clippers to be constructed, the Cutty Sark, continued to transport tea until 1877. Today, it is the only surviving tea clipper in the world, docked in Greenwich.
The building of the London Docks at Wapping transformed a small riverside village into one of the busiest docks in London.

By the late 18th Century London had become one of the busiest ports in the world, with the bustling maritime industry limited to quays and wharves along the River Thames. Records show that it could take up to a month for a ship to unload its cargo. The threat of theft from ships saw the loss of vast sums of goods. In fact, thieving was so bad that the first police force – Thames Police – was created in 1798 to combat the problem. A revolution was needed to improve how shipping and trading was undertaken and new enclosed docks were the answer.

The idea of secure enclosed docks was proposed in the 1790s, and the first specific plans were for West India Docks on the Isle of Dogs, and London Docks at Wapping. Plans were drawn up for the London Dock Company, established by a group of merchants, shippers and bankers in January 1796.

The London Dock Company negotiated a 21 year monopoly to manage all vessels carrying rice, tobacco, wine and brandy (except those from the East and West Indies), and the docks continued to thrive.
Daniel Alexander was officially appointed as surveyor for the London Docks in July 1800, with responsibility for most of the designs for warehouses and buildings at the London Docks. His work has been described as ‘classical’, with the Pierhead houses and the Pennington Street Warehouse as the best surviving examples. Whilst Alexander was in charge of the designs, the overall construction was overseen by celebrated engineer John Rennie, who was responsible for a number of bridges and docks during the 19th Century and was once described as ‘the greatest living engineer’.

BUILDING LONDON DOCKS
The development and construction of the London Docks was an enormous undertaking, one which historian Dan Cruickshank described as ‘a stupendous achievement of civil engineering’. The London Dock officially opened on 30 January 1805, with The London Packet sailing in from Portugal. The docks were linked to the River Thames by three connecting locked basins: Hermitage, to the south west; Wapping, directly south; and Shadwell – the only basin to have been retained – to the east.

When completed, the entire site encompassed 90 acres, including 35 acres of water, 50 acres of warehouse space, 2.5 miles of quays and jetties and 7 acres of wine vaults. It has been estimated that the London Dock was able to accommodate up to as many as 500 ships and store over 200,000 tons of goods.

The London Docks dealt with a vast array of goods, and along with brandy, wine and rice, there was everything from fruit, spices and sugar to coffee, cocoa and nuts. Two of the largest products held at the London Docks were wool and tobacco. Up to 25,000 bales of wool were sold every week and the ‘Great Wool Floor’ was renowned for its weekly sales. However, the trade in tobacco was so large that an entirely separate warehouse covering five acres was required.

TOBACCO DOCK
Tobacco Dock was designed by Daniel Alexander and built by John Rennie, and today is Grade I listed, with distinctive iron columns which allowed for greater floor space and a large parallel glazed roof. The warehouse was later used to store furs and skins, until the 1990s when it was converted into a shopping centre. Today, it is used for conferences and events.
The Grade II listed Pennington Street Warehouse is one of the few surviving early buildings by Daniel Alexander at London Docks. Built between 1804 and 1806, the two-storey warehouse was primarily used for the storage of goods held in bond, but at times also housed liquor, wool and skins.

During the Second World War, sections of the warehouse were destroyed by bombs, with only the outer wall and vaults surviving. In 1979, after the closure of the docks, the northern section of the site was acquired by News International. The Pennington Street Warehouse was converted to office space and print works, including the newsroom for The Sunday Times.

**THE VAULTS**

The Pennington Street Warehouse has been referred to as ‘one of London’s most majestic ranges of cellilage...’ Through interconnecting sections, the warehouse linked with the vaults beneath the rest of the London Docks, covering an area of over 20 acres.

The vaults were not only a secure space to store liquor at a stable temperature, but they were also specifically created to offer an area for hospitality. Merchants would invite customers, friends and family to sample the product, tasting permits were given out and the liquor was tasted freely within the cathedral-like surroundings. Today, only four acres of vaults survive.

**GAUGING GROUND**

The open space to the south west of the vaults was formerly used for checking the barrels of spirits and wine entering London Docks. It became known as the Gauging Ground, where ‘Gaugers’ would gauge or measure the quantity of each barrel in order to calculate the duty to be paid. It was also the first area reached upon entering London Docks by road through the main gates, which can still be seen on the corner of East Smithfield Street and Thomas More Street.
St Katharine Docks has changed dramatically over the centuries. The first official record of the site dates back to the 10th Century, when the land was granted to 13 Knights by Anglo-Saxon King Edgar.

Initially just a small religious settlement, the booming industry and trade that provoked the creation of London Docks inspired a similar transformation at St Katharine Docks; from medieval monastery to another enclosed dock.

Renowned engineer Thomas Telford, responsible for a great number of canals and bridges across the country, was tasked with designing the new dock.

Telford’s design featured a unique layout, with western and eastern docks and a small central basin. Unlike most former docks, which had transit sheds between the ships and the warehouse, St Katharine Docks was designed with warehouses right on the edge of the water.

The foundation stone was laid on 3 May 1827 and by October of the following year, the first ship sailed into the new dock.

Like the London Docks, St Katharine Docks handled an enormous variety of goods, particularly luxury goods. This included sugar, wine, perfumes, ivory and spices, as well as tortoiseshell, ostrich feathers and mohair. Two of the largest quantities of goods were wool and tea, and it has been said that St Katharine Docks and the London Docks combined dealt with around 40% of the nation’s wool trade.

St Katharine Docks closed in 1968 and the only surviving dock building, Ivory House, was converted into apartments and shops. Today, St Katharine Docks has been transformed from a working dock to a marina, with apartments, offices, restaurants and cafés.
TOWER OF LONDON

The Tower of London, officially named ‘Her Majesty’s Royal Palace and Fortress’, is one of the world’s most recognisable historic landmarks. Almost a thousand years old, today it is a World Heritage Site.

The Tower of London was first established after the conquest of William the Conqueror in 1066, as a defensive tower against troublesome Londoners. Construction on the core central tower, which has come to be known as the White Tower, began in 1078 and was completed in 1100.

Almost immediately after completing the White Tower, the Tower of London was used as a prison. It operated as a prison until 1952, with the last prisoners being notorious East End gangsters Ronnie and Reggie Kray. Other well-known prisoners have included the Princes in the Tower, Edward V and Richard, Duke of York in 1483, who are commonly believed to have been murdered by their uncle, the future Richard III.

Most executions were held outside the walls on Tower Hill, but there were a number of famous executions inside, including Anne Boleyn in 1536 and Lady Jane Grey in 1554.

The Tower of London has also been used as the home of the Royal Mint, as a treasury, a menagerie, an armoury and the home of the Crown Jewels.

The famous Yeoman Warders, known as ‘Beefeaters’, were first established there by Henry VIII in 1485. Their name is believed to have originated from the French ‘buffetiers’, who were responsible for guarding the food of the King of France, although another explanation states it was because they used to be paid in portions of beef.

Today, the Tower of London is one of London’s most popular tourist attractions, with around 2.5 million visitors every year.
Tower Bridge is one of the world’s most iconic bridges. It officially opened in June 1894 and since that time has stood as a London landmark, not only as a picturesque feature of London’s panorama, but also as an impressive monument to the ingenuity of Victorian engineering.

Before Tower Bridge was constructed, London Bridge was the only river crossing in East London and congestion was said to be so bad that it would take hours to cross from one side to the other. Part of the reason for the lack of bridges was that this area was at the heart of the British shipping industry. Known as the ‘Pool of London’, it was the busiest and largest ports in the world, which created one of the biggest engineering challenges: to build a bridge that would allow road and foot traffic, while still allowing tall ships to sail up the River Thames to unload cargo.

In 1876 a public competition was held to design a new bridge. Over 50 designs were submitted and the winning design, by Sir Horace Jones, featured a unique combination of three different styles of bridge in one. The first was the central bascule (from the French word for see-saw) bridge, rising to allow tall ships to pass underneath. The second was a girder bridge with walkways running along the top, and finally, a suspension bridge formed the side sections.

Work began on the new bridge in 1886 and was completed 8 years later in 1894. The new Tower Bridge was a great success, allowing both road and foot traffic across the River Thames, whilst still giving access to tall ships sailing to the wharves in the Pool of London.

In the first year the bascules were raised 6,160 times. Today, they still rise around 1,000 times a year.

Having played a key role in London celebrations including the Diamond Jubilee Pageant and the London Olympics in 2012, Tower Bridge remains an important piece of London culture and is undeniably one of London’s most iconic structures.
WILTON’S MUSIC HALL

Wilton’s Music Hall, the oldest surviving music hall in the world, is described by The Theatres Trust as “the most important surviving early music hall to be seen anywhere... it is of outstanding architectural and archaeological significance”.

The beauty and mystery of Wilton’s Music Hall is accentuated by its exterior, which is disguised behind an old terrace of 18th Century houses. Behind the old worn-out door, it opens out to reveal an exquisite old Victorian music hall.

Wilton’s has had a diverse history, beginning in the early 1740s as a pub called The Prince of Denmark Tavern, which still sits at the front of the theatre. In 1839, a concert room was built at the rear of the pub, however it was in the 1850s that it was transformed into the magnificent ‘Wilton’s Music Hall’. The hall opened to the public in March 1859 and was an instant success, with opera, ballet and circus performers, as well as popular music hall singers and entertainers.

In 1888, Wilton’s Music Hall was completely transformed from a lively theatre into a hall for the East London Methodist Mission. The hall continued to be used by the mission for the next 70 years, but it had closed by the 1960s. At this time Wilton’s was threatened with demolition, but through the efforts of locals, as well as celebrities including Sir John Betjeman, Peter Sellars and Spike Milligan, it survived and was Grade II listed in 1971. It first reopened as a theatre in 1997 and today it continues as a special arts venue, holding performances from classical music to cabaret.
CHANGES & A NEW ERA

By the 1930s, improvements in shipping, as well as road systems and storage, meant that the once thriving London Docks were needed less and less.

Sailing ships were replaced by larger steam ships and far fewer vessels could fit in the old dock or navigate the narrow locks. In 1969, after the rise in use of container ships, the London Docks closed.
Today, it is still possible to glimpse elements of the original London Docks, including the southern section of Western Dock retained as a small canal. Shadwell Basin was retained and today is a popular recreational area, while Eastern Dock was filled in and is now Wapping Wood. Wapping Basin has been transformed into a sports ground, although the Wapping entrance can still be seen along Wapping High Street. Fortunately, some sections of the old Georgian and Victorian dock buildings have survived, including the Grade II listed Pennington Street Warehouse, as well as Tobacco Dock and sections of the exterior walls and entrances.

It is alongside this legacy that the site of the London Docks will see another transformation for the 21st Century.
Discover London Dock – a hidden treasure at the heart of the capital.

London Dock is the most anticipated new development by leading London developer, St George. Situated moments from Tower Bridge, the Tower of London, St Katharine Docks and the City, this exciting new destination offers a range of exclusive apartments and penthouses with hotel-style residents’ facilities, as well as beautifully landscaped open spaces, shops, bars and restaurants.

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