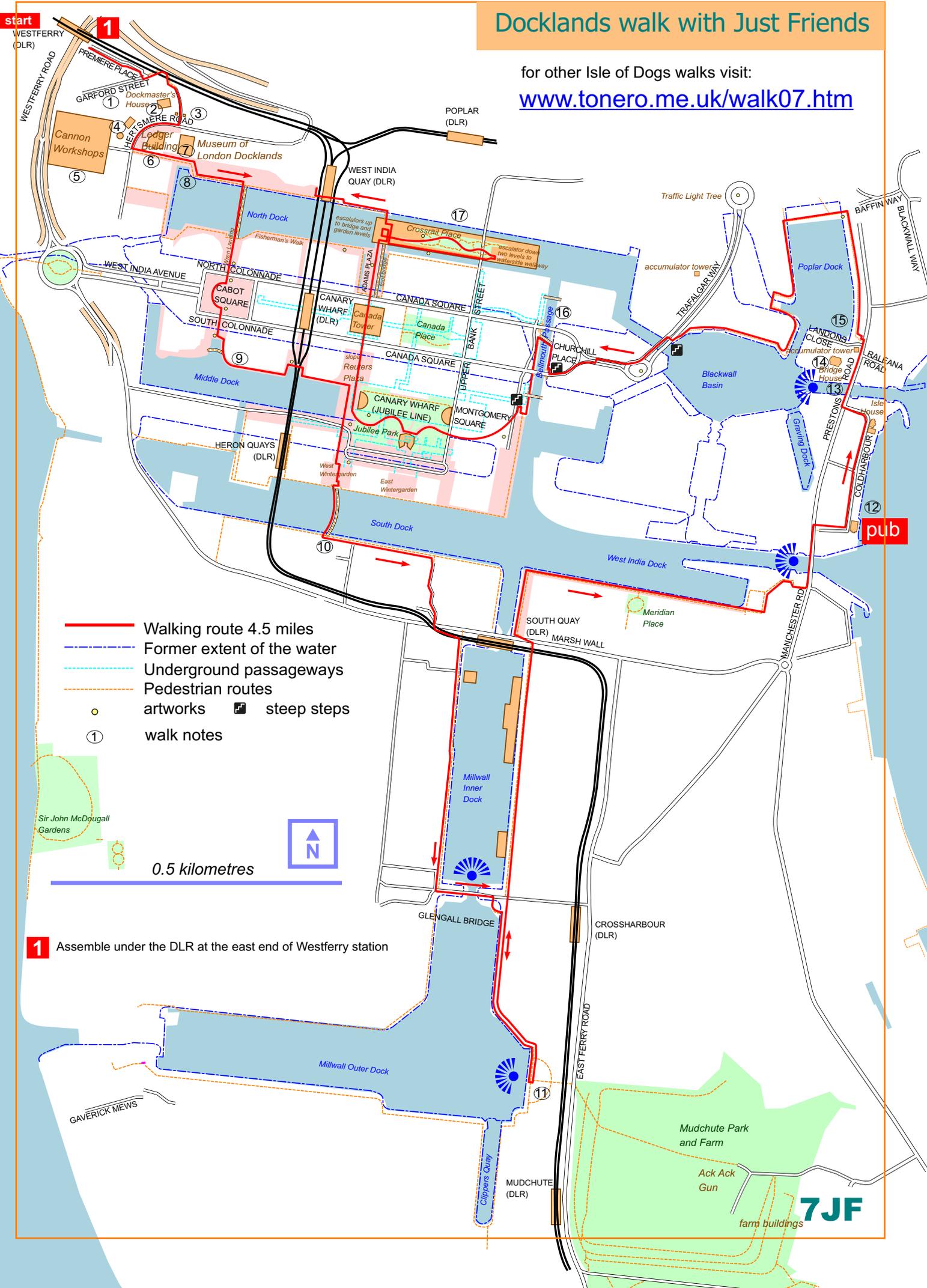


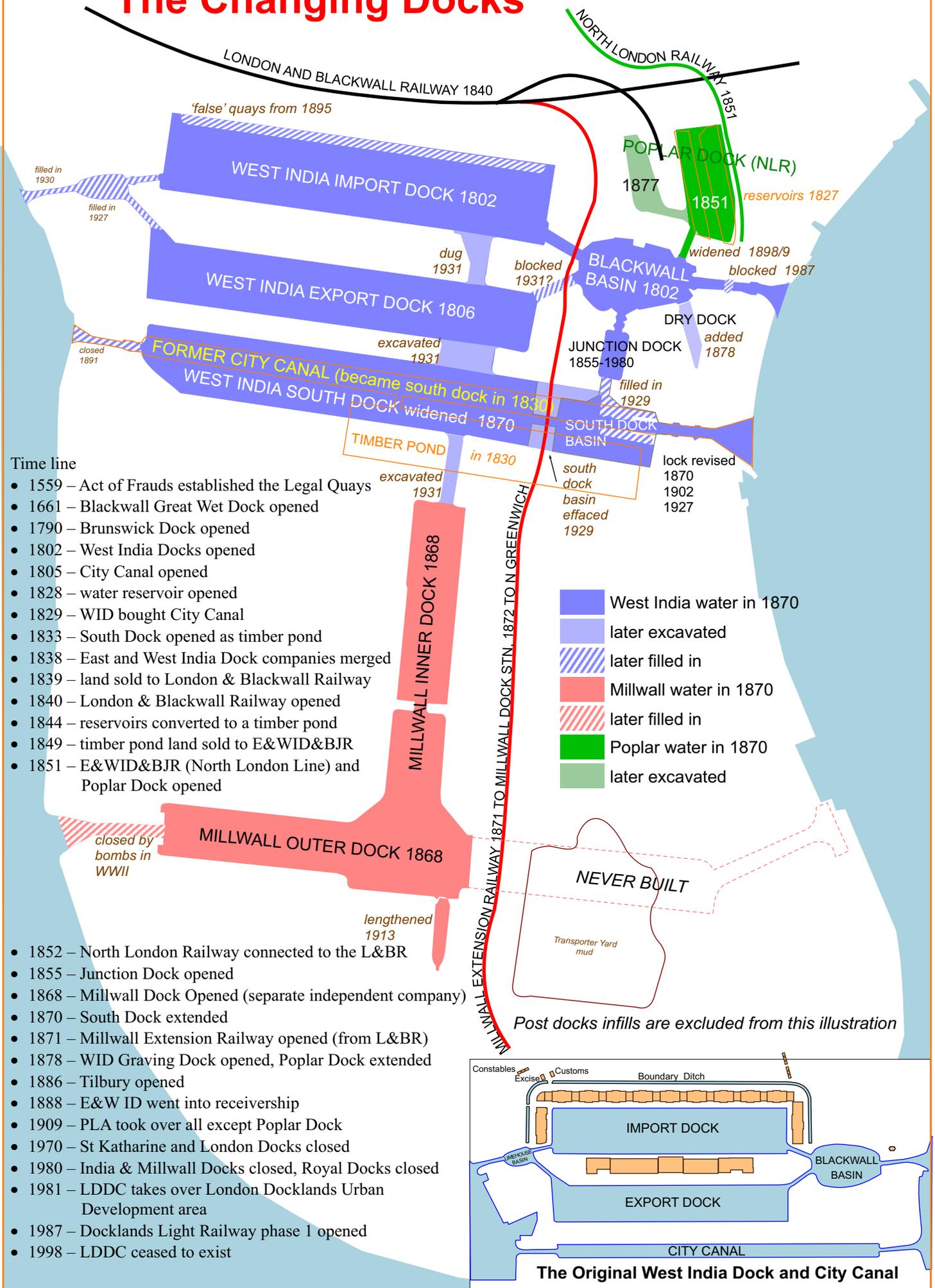
Docklands walk with Just Friends

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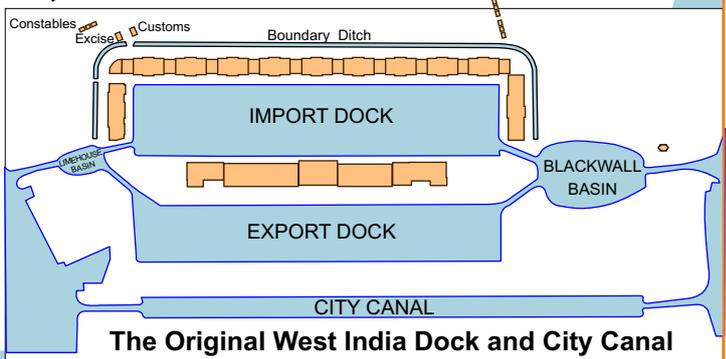
The Changing Docks



Time line

- 1559 – Act of Frauds established the Legal Quays
- 1661 – Blackwall Great Wet Dock opened
- 1790 – Brunswick Dock opened
- 1802 – West India Docks opened
- 1805 – City Canal opened
- 1828 – water reservoir opened
- 1829 – WID bought City Canal
- 1833 – South Dock opened as timber pond
- 1838 – East and West India Dock companies merged
- 1839 – land sold to London & Blackwall Railway
- 1840 – London & Blackwall Railway opened
- 1844 – reservoirs converted to a timber pond
- 1849 – timber pond land sold to E&WID&BJR
- 1851 – E&WID&BJR (North London Line) and Poplar Dock opened
- 1852 – North London Railway connected to the L&BR
- 1855 – Junction Dock opened
- 1868 – Millwall Dock Opened (separate independent company)
- 1870 – South Dock extended
- 1871 – Millwall Extension Railway opened (from L&BR)
- 1878 – WID Graving Dock opened, Poplar Dock extended
- 1886 – Tilbury opened
- 1888 – E&W ID went into receivership
- 1909 – PLA took over all except Poplar Dock
- 1970 – St Katharine and London Docks closed
- 1980 – India & Millwall Docks closed, Royal Docks closed
- 1981 – LDDC takes over London Docklands Urban Development area
- 1987 – Docklands Light Railway phase 1 opened
- 1998 – LDDC ceased to exist

Post docks infills are excluded from this illustration



The Original West India Dock and City Canal

The Evolution of the Docks

Introduction

Seeing much of her income from import and export duties lost through fraud, Queen Elizabeth I brought in (through parliament) the Act of Frauds, making it illegal to land or load dutiable goods anywhere on the Thames except at authorised *Legal Quays*, on the north bank between London Bridge and the Tower of London.

As trade picked up in the 1700s, the congestion and the pilfering grew steadily worse, and lower value goods were permitted to land elsewhere at Sufferance wharves.

In the 1790s, to solve the increasing congestion/pilfering problem, William Vaughan, supported by Robert Milligan, a former Jamaican planter, campaigned for the construction of wet docks, as was happening in Liverpool. Up until then, wet docks on the Thames (The Great Wet Dock 1661 and Brunswick Dock 1790 at Blackwall, and the Howland Great Wet Dock 1700) were for shipbuilding, repairs and passengers.

The House of Commons set up a committee in 1796 and there was much wrangling over the optimum site. In the event, the Isle of Dogs scheme (West India) hit the statute book in 1799 and the Wapping scheme (London) in 1800. The East India docks for the East India Company and other docks would soon follow. We are only concerned with the three commercial concerns on the Isle of Dogs, all of which were started for different purposes.

The West India Docks

The Act for Rendering more Commodious and for Better Regulating the Port of London, which received the Royal Assent in July 1799, set out the framework for constructing docks for the West India company and a separate canal for the City of London. The City was to purchase the land (within strictly defined limits to protect existing properties in Limehouse, Poplar and Blackwall). The land needed for the docks, but not the canal, would then be sold on to the West India Dock joint stock company.

To help financially, all vessels arriving with cargoes from the West Indies (except tobacco) would be required by law to use the new West India Docks for the next 21 years.

The import dock and its warehouses were to be surrounded by a wall, 30ft high, outside which there would be a ditch at least 12ft wide and containing 6ft of water, (see map on previous page). No buildings were to be erected within 300ft of the outside of the wall.

The Board of Excise had permitted exports to be included, but only in a separate dock. Both docks were to have independent communications with the Thames on both sides of the Isle of Dogs. So one dock had to be north of the other, and the canal had to be located further south. There was an entry basin down-river for the ships (Blackwall Basin) and a smaller entry basin up-river for the lighters (Limehouse Basin). [See plan, previous page] The Import dock opened in 1802 and the Export dock four years later.

Business boomed in the early years; sugar imports increased steadily, rum and coffee imports dramatically and the company's monopoly status brought it huge profits. Thereafter, decline set in with a downturn in the trade cycle.

The City Canal proved a dismal failure and was up for sale by 1829. Despite its own straitened circumstances,

the West India Dock Company bought it, largely to prevent it from falling into other hands.

The company widened its range of cargo and became increasingly dependent on timber. It had always handled Caribbean hardwoods, but now lower value Baltic softwood was floated in the South Dock (the old canal), and this was extended in 1833 with the addition of a timber pond to the south.

A lack of warehousing at the neighbouring East India Docks neatly dovetailed surplus warehouse space at the West India Docks and an agreement was sealed in 1838 to unite the two companies.

During the 1840s and early 1850s shipping and tonnage handled at the docks increased dramatically, and regular dividends were paid. Less valuable bulk goods accounted for much of the increase.

An accident at the Blackwall entrance in the 1850s highlighted the vulnerability of a dock system dependent on one entrance, and a Junction Dock was constructed between the Blackwall and South basins.

The increasing number of large ships demanded a larger entrance and deeper water and the South Dock was rebuilt, with an enlarged east entrance lock, deep-water quays, and new warehouses, opened in 1870.

Many competing docks had the advantage of ship repairing facilities so in 1874 the East and West India Dock Company gained the repeal of the prohibition on the repair of ships in its docks and built the West India Dock Graving Dock, under lease, and opened in 1878.

The curved walls of the original docks prevented ships of deep draught from mooring alongside, and with time the dock fell into disuse. So in 1895 an open, or 'false', quay, 20ft wide was added, running along the north side of the Import dock. Being straight-sided this increased the depth of water alongside from 16ft to 23ft 6in. It was replaced in 1912 by the Port of London Authority (PLA) with a more robust structure. Other 'false' keys were added.

Poplar Dock

The London to Blackwall Railway had opened in 1840 connecting Blackwall Docks to Minories. However, the first line to transfer goods to and from the docks to the North of England was the East and West India Docks and Birmingham Junction Railway, better known as the North London Railway. As its name suggests, goods were transferred around London to link up with the London and Birmingham Railway (later, L&NWR) at Willesden. Barges and lighters transferred goods directly between the West India dock and a new railside dock, Poplar Dock, which opened in 1851 to immediate success.

The site, immediately to the north of the West India Docks' Blackwall Basin, had originally been developed by the West India Dock Company as reservoirs, then timber ponds. In 1850 it was bought by the railway company and converted into a railway dock. The dock, used primarily for coal and export goods traffic, was extended westward with a new barge dock in 1876 to provide depots for other railway companies (GWR, L&NWR). The Midland then moved out east to a separate Poplar dock, built over the former Blackwall dock. The buildings north, east and south were destroyed by bombs in 1940. Trade declined in the 1960s and 70s and operation ceased in 1981 when the neighbouring docks were closed. It was never part of the PLA but British Railways sold the site to

walk notes cont'd

the London Docklands Development Corporation (LDDC) in 1983. The dock extension was filled in and the dock shortened to make way for roads. Poplar Dock Marina opened in 1999.

Millwall Dock

Millwall Dock was built for a different purpose. Millwall oil merchant and wharfinger Nathaniel Fenner appreciated the difficulties in landing goods at low water and the advantage of enclosed non-tidal docks. Recognizing the potential of the empty land behind his wharf, he asked Robert Fairlie to draw up plans for its development. The intention was not to build on the wharves, but to let plots on building leases, for manufacturing, repairs and small businesses.

The proposal submitted to Parliament involved a 'Millwall canal' across the Isle of Dogs, with an entrance lock at each end, and a central arm extending north towards the South Dock of the West India Docks. Up to six graving docks would be built off the canal, when demand dictated.

A concession required by the Glengall Estate, (that was providing some land) was for Glengall Road to be bridged over the northern arm of the docks.

The Act incorporating *The Millwall Canal, Wharfs and Graving Docks Company* received the Royal Assent in July 1864. In the event, only the western half of the 'canal' was built and only one graving dock.

The scheme had assumed that manufacturing in London, particularly shipbuilding, would continue to expand.

However, shipbuilding on the Isle of Dogs was badly affected by the crash of 1866. Luckily, West India Docks' South Dock closed for rebuilding, enabling the Millwall Docks to benefit from its offloaded grain and timber businesses. Further timber trade was enticed away from the overcrowded Surrey Docks, but the greatest success was with grain.

From 1876 the company developed innovative methods of handling grain; appliances for rapid discharge, with bucket elevators put on board ships, and evolving to crane dolphins and specially built railway trucks.

Duckham's grain-handling system, acclaimed as unrivalled in its efficiency, was designed for flexible distribution, by barge, rail or road. Increasing amounts of grain were landed rather than simply transshipped. By 1882 the company's profits came almost exclusively from grain, as Duckham's machinery brought large savings on labour costs. A large area of the Glengall estate, east of Alpha Street and north of Mellish Street was developed as a depot for grain trucks.

The Millwall Docks became the centre of the European grain trade and handled ever-greater quantities with the introduction from 1892 of Duckham's novel pneumatic elevating machinery.

Tilbury

The opening of the London and St Katharine Dock Company's Royal Victoria Dock Extension (Royal Albert Dock) in 1880, brought gloom to the East and West India Dock Company, as the West India Docks were unable to accommodate the largest ships using the river; the insufficiently enlarged South Dock entrance was obsolescent within a decade of its opening, and its shipping transferred itself to the Royal Albert Dock. This prompted the East and West India Dock Company to build a dock at Tilbury, opened in 1886. It cost twice the estimate; peripheral properties at the East and West India

Docks were sold to offset some of the overspend but the company went into receivership in March 1888, but avoided liquidation, and continued its dock business.

Amalgamation, PLA

In 1907 the government proposed a scheme for a self-sustaining public authority under the control of the Board of Trade, and the Port of London Bill was steered through in 1908 first by David Lloyd-George and then Winston Churchill. The government bought the docks, and the new Port of London Authority (PLA) assumed control in 1909. The PLA created five dock groups, the West India, East India and Millwall Docks forming one of them, known as the India and Millwall Docks. The Poplar Dock was not taken over by the PLA.

The London Docklands Development Corporation

As the docks declined terminally, the Government commissioned a study by consultants Travers Morgan who came up with five options. The proposals were all rejected by the Joint Docklands Action Group, led by Labour Party activists and trades unionists who felt the locals hadn't been consulted enough. The government then set up the Docklands Joint Committee representing local borough councils who came up with a new plan. It had few powers, and was thus not effective. So in 1980, Michael Heseltine set up the LDDC to oversee 8½ square miles of dockland, financed by government grants and revenues generated by the sale of land. It had far-reaching powers of compulsory purchase and took over the planning powers of the local authorities within its borders. Infilling of docks was stopped, home ownership was expanded and an enterprise zone was established on the Isle of Dogs. Developers got a rate-free period of 10 years, no development land tax and 100% capital allowance for new commercial buildings to be set against corporation and income tax, together with minimal planning restraints. A key item in its success was the Dockland Light Railway, on former railway tracks previously mentioned.

Banker Michael Von Clemm, as Chairman of Roux restaurants, visited in the early 1980s, looking for a site for a food processing plant, these docks seeming to be a sensible location. Billingsgate Market had already moved there, the site was well linked with transport, land was relatively cheap and the enterprise zone incentives were available. While having a meal with LDDC Chief Executive Reg Ward (on a barge by a wharf on the south quay of the Import dock, built for Fruit Lines Ltd's Canary Islands trade and named Canary Wharf), Von Clemm recognised the potential of the early warehouses, similar to those in Boston which had been converted into shops, restaurants and flats – as well as office developments. Von Clemm decided that a better use for the site would be as a back office for his bank, Credit Suisse First Boston. By the time he discussed this with his board, the idea had developed into putting the front office of the bank there and creating a second financial services district in London. Canadian-based Olympia & York, developers of the World Financial Center, New York, were approached to develop the 83 acre site, to be known as the Canary Wharf development, with Clemm's bank both backing the scheme financially, and as one of the first tenants to move in. O&Y's Reichmann brothers employed Peter Wade, former chairman of the AIC to act as a focus for community issues, to everyone's advantage.

The LDDC ceased its operations in 1998

walk notes *cont'd*

The Walk by Numbers

1. Garford Street 10-18

On Garford Street are the cottages where the Dock Constables lived, just inside the West India boundary. Thought to be constructed by John Rennie in 1819, for the sergeant, detached, and his deputies on either side.

2. Dockmaster's House

This was the Excise Building, located just outside the gates and moat. The Customs and Excise offices, by Thomas Morris, resident engineer, were built opposite each other in 1807–9 by Howkins & Co and were mirror images of each other, with identical facades, bowed south ends and the bays on the north fronts arranged in the ratio of 1:3:1. The Excise Office, which survives on the west side of the road as 'Dockmaster's House, had ceased to be used as such by 1825. It was refitted and used for Customs until 1830, when it was given up as surplus to requirements and its officers were accommodated back in the basement of the Customs House and on the Rum Quay. The dock company used the building to house its own staff, although excise permit writers returned in 1841, after construction of the London and Blackwall Railway viaduct had caused the north-east corner of the Customs House to be demolished.

3. Entrance Gate Piers

The main entrance to the docks, it was here that workers were taken on. The wall has gone, and the moat filled in.

4. Guard House

The perimeter walls and armed security forces failed to eradicate all theft at the docks. In 1803 it was agreed that a 'Watch House' was needed in which to detain suspected thieves before handing them over to the magistrates. Two domed lodges were built just outside the moat, architect George Gwilt. This sole remaining northern one was an armoury for 120 muskets. The southern was the lock-up. Both buildings doubled as guard houses for the dock company constables. They both subsequently had a variety of uses and were refurbished. Panelled brick with band courses, plinth, eaves cornice and blocking course. Copper covered domed roof with stone panelled chimney. Round arched windows, some blank.

[Initially, the docks had a military guard of 13 men, subsequently they hired their own Peace Officers; messing facilities, sentry boxes etc were elsewhere.]

5. Cannon Workshops

From 1800 to 1980 the area west of the Import Dock, outside the former boundary ditch, was the West India Docks works yard, the quadrangle of survives as Cannon Workshops, taking its name from a cannon that stood there. Cooperage, Workshops and Stores were located there. Cooperage was a key activity.

6. Ledger Building

The ledger building was built as a curved office building west of the North Quay Warehouses fitting the north-west corner of the inner perimeter wall. It was erected in 1804 by John Fentiman & Co to plans by George Gwilt & son. The Doric portico is in keeping with Rennie's work elsewhere, as at Bridge House, so may have been added by him. A remodelling in 1827 brought the books of all the departments at the docks to the building, which then included the General Office in a large east room, the Dock Superintendent's office in the small room west of the south entrance, the Board or Committee Room to its west, and a Stationery Office to the north-west. The building was remodelled several times and in 1927 the

Superintendent moved to the Dockmaster's House. The building is now a Wetherspoon's pub.

7. Museum of London Docklands/Warehouse 1

The warehouses and general offices at the western end of North Quay, originally formed part of a range of nine warehouses divided by single-storey link buildings, over half a mile in length and built 1800-4. The original scheme had a 'low warehouse' at west and east ends and in the centre, with 'high warehouses' in between; the 'low warehouses' were raised two storeys in 1827 by John Rennie, bringing their cornices in line with those of the high warehouses. Nos 1 and 2 Warehouses are the only survivors; the rest was destroyed by bombing in World War II. The architects of the scheme were George Gwilt & Son. The first warehouses to be built, which included No. 1 Warehouse, were pressed into service when the Import Dock opened in 1802. The rest were completed by 1804. Writing in 1955, S. H. Kessels observed that at twice the length of the Palace of Versailles, the development outreached 'all the palaces and great houses of Europe', whilst the buildings are described by the Survey of London as 'one of the great monuments of European Commercial Power'. Warehouse 1 now houses the Museum of London Docklands.

8. Import Dock

The import dock was the first to be completed, in 1802. Some of the original wall is visible but the north quay was widened in 1895 when the curvature of the wall prevented deeper ships from mooring alongside. This treatment was subsequently applied to many of the other quays (including south quay, where Canary Wharf, Fruit Lines Ltd's Canary Islands trade, was located). The dock was much wider than today, as the south side has been filled in to accommodate North Colonnade. The DLR truncates it; the old railway originally went around the east end of the docks, but DLR was routed west to Canary Wharf, the easternmost of two routes considered.

9. Middle Dock

This was the original Export Dock, completed four years later. It was constructed to the same size as the import dock but as you can see, it has been severely truncated to make way for the entrance to the Jubilee Line and the park above, as well as being narrowed to accommodate South Colonnade.

10. South Dock

South Dock started off as the City Canal, built as a short cut for vessels navigating up and down the river. Never profitable, the City sold it to the West India Company as additional dock space. A timber pond was constructed south of it and eventually a new dock of similar size to the other two was constructed. It was later extended, as you can see. Although the dock was deep, the lock was less so, although changed three times, and a serious problem as ships got larger.

11. Millwall Dock

The Millwall Dock was a separate concern and not originally envisaged as a trading business, although it diversified that way, into timber and grain. Duckham's own grain-handling system, unrivalled in its efficiency, was hugely profitable and located west of the inner dock.

We also passed Glengall Bridge. Required by the Glengall estate (to extend Glengall Road to the other side of the dock) as a condition of allowing the docks, there

walk notes cont'd

have been six bridges, starting with an Armstrong rolling drawbridge, then a concrete-filled barge as a pontoon stop-gap(!), to a trunnion bridge with a glass enclosed pedestrian walkway, a temporary steel footbridge, to the current Dutch style bridge in 1990.

Only half of the now named outer dock (originally named the Millwall Canal) was constructed. The other half would have been behind us. The land proved useful for dumping dredgings from the docks, hence Mudchute.

12. Coldharbour

Coldharbour was originally the path on top of the medieval Thames embankment connecting Blackwall Stairs to somewhere near the present entrance to the south dock of the West India Docks.

The first buildings appeared by the second decade of the seventeenth century, probably as part of the activities spreading on the Thames riverfront after the opening of the East India Company's shipbuilding yard at Blackwall in 1614. The development south along the river is shown on this copy of Joel Gascoyne's map of 1703, comprising "dwelling houses, public houses, storehouses and warehouses ... interspersed with wharves, yards and even gardens. The area is said to be the sole remaining fragment of the old hamlet of Blackwall.

The opening of the West India Docks (1802) and the City Canal (1805) cut Coldharbour off from the rest of the riverside road, with traffic being diverted to a newly built Bridge Road (later New Road, now Preston's Road) in 1817.

Isle House, 1 Coldharbour, was built in 1825/6 by the West India Dock Company and used as a dock master's residence until the 1880s. It was built with two storeys raised above a tall basement and full-height bow-windows on the east and north fronts to give clear views of the Thames and the Blackwall entrance to the Docks.

There has been a pub on the site of The Gun since at least 1720, although most of the current building is 19th century. It is said that Lord Nelson was once a regular drinker in The Gun, frequenting it whenever he visited the area to inspect the nearby docks. Rumour has it that Lord Nelson often arranged secret assignments with Lady Emma Hamilton in an upstairs room.

Several other buildings on Coldharbour, dating mostly to the late 18th and early 19th century, have listed status, namely 3, 5, 7, 15 and 19 Coldharbour.

13. Blackwall Basin

The Blackwall Basin was the entry basin for the original two West India docks. Subsequently connections were made for the Junction Dock, Poplar Dock and the dry dock, which is now permanently wet. It largely retains its original shape.

14. Bridge House

Bridge House was built in 1819–20 for the West India Dock Company's Principal Dockmaster, or Superintendent. A strategic site on the north side of the bridge over the Blackwall entrance was chosen to give the Superintendent uninterrupted views of the river and the docks. To make the most of these vantage points, Rennie designed Bridge House with its principal rooms on a raised ground floor with large full-height bows facing the docks and the river. The three-storey box symmetrically arranged under a pyramidal roof follows eighteenth-century Thameside villas in type, but the stuccoed distyle-in-antis Greek Doric porch is unmistakably early nineteenth-century. The conversion of Bridge House to

two dwellings, for a dockmaster and his assistant, was carried out in 1895. It was divided into east and west halves, with new northeast entrances and a new staircase in the spine corridor. A north-east block was added in 1900, providing an extra room on each storey. By 1938 the house was regarded as old and expensive to maintain and its demolition was proposed, but this had not been done by the outbreak of the Second World War, when it was requisitioned by the War Department for the National Fire Service. It is now offices.

15. Poplar Dock

Poplar Dock was London's first railway dock when it opened in 1851. It was constructed by the East and West India Docks and Birmingham Junction Railway Company (The North London railway) to take goods to and from the docks by lighterships and on by rail northward via the L&NWR, who would become owners. It was built cheaply with timber lined walls which lasted until the end of the war. Its key commodities were coal, beer and iron. Soon it was used by all the main railway companies. British Railways sold the site to the LDDC in 1982/3. The dock extension was filled in and the dock shortened to make way for roads. Poplar Dock Marina opened in 1999.

The dock retains some of its original timber wharf walling. Two of the Stothert & Pitt 6-ton electric travelling cranes supplied in 1960 remain on the west quay. The passage linking Poplar Dock to the West India Docks remains as built in 1851 and enlarged in 1899. The brick wall along the Preston's Road side of the site stands as built in 1829 and raised in 1850. A remote accumulator tower of 1878, remains on Preston's Road, unused but listed.

16. Bellmouth Passage (and others)

These passages added later to connect the four main docks. This, the most northerly, had a bell mouth to enable ships to turn. The bellmouth was removed when the land was extended northwards over Import Dock.

17. Crossrail Place

The garden at Crossrail Place is described as 'a tropical oasis hidden beneath a distinctive, timber latticed roof'. The Crossrail Place Roof Garden is a 300-metre enclosed garden with an abundance of plants and trees which references both the history and geography of Canary Wharf. Drawing on the area's heritage as a trading hub, many of the plants are native to countries visited by ships of the West India Dock Company who unloaded their wares in this very location 200 years ago. Crossrail Place sits almost exactly on the Meridian line and the planting is arranged according to which hemisphere they are from with Asian plants such as bamboos to the east, and plants such as ferns from the Americas to the west.

Previous Glengall Bridges

