





London Fields and Victoria Park to Hackney Wick

Notes

Bow locks to Hackney

This 8.7 km mainly pavement walk passes Bow Locks, Three Mills Island (which has London's oldest surviving tidal mill and buildings), a stretch of the Lea, optionally the Olympic Park, Victoria Park, Regents Canal, Broadway Market and London Fields.

Bow Locks

Bow Locks marks the start of the River Lea Navigation. The striking white footbridge was built in the 1930s providing industrial views in both directions

There has been a tidal control lock from at least the reign of Edward 1 (1272 -1307), when it was said that Henry de Bedyk, the prior of Halliwell, whose priory owned the Four Mills first erected it.

A report by Lord Burghley in 1588 suggests that the gates opened automatically when the level in Bow Creek exceeded the level above the lock, and were shut once the tide started to fall. This arrangement caused complaints in 1581 between millers and bargees, when neap tides did not reach a level to cause the gates to open, and the lock keeper would not open them because the water was used by the mills. As the river was important for trade, engineer John Smeaton was asked to recommend improvements in 1765. He produced a report in 1766, in which he suggested a cut from Bow Locks to Limehouse, to provide a better route to the Thames than that through the gates and Bow Creek, and so the Limehouse Cut was built, opening in its final form in 1777.

Three Mills Island

During the 16th century the three mills were reduced to two (ultimately the House Mill and the Clock Mill). The third had been a windmill. The mills were originally used to grind grain for flour, but from the 1700s grain was used to distil alcohol, the mills becoming a major supplier to the alcohol trade and gin palaces of London.

In the 1770s, the owners built the current House Mill building and the Clock Mill was constructed in 1817.

Distilling ceased after the mills sustained severe air-raid damage during the Second World War, but the site continued to be used for bottling and warehousing until the early 1990s. The majority of the island then become a dedicated centre for film and television production.

The last of the mills to be in operation was the House Mill itself, which was finally shut down in 1941. This building now has a Grade I listing. The Miller's House was rebuilt and is now the site's visitor information and education centre.

From 3 Mills Island the original Abbey Mills Pumping Station can be seen, designed by engineer Joseph Bazalgette, and built between 1865 and 1868, plus the modern replacement.

Victoria Park

The need for the park was sparked by the high local mortality rate in 1839. There followed in 1840 a petition to Queen Victoria, urging the formation of a "Royal Park". An Act of Parliament passed in 1841 made it the first to be planned in the country

specifically to meet the needs of the surrounding communities. The government bought cheaper, poor quality land that was flat, with poor soil and little water, rather than an alternative and larger site nearer the Thames.

In 1841 James Pennethorne, architect to the Commissioners of Woods and Forests, prepared an initial design that included a grand entrance, a perimeter drive with elegant housing and a parkland landscape of trees and grass.

It was an instant success, with local people using the park as early as 1843, before works were completed.

In 1847 a pagoda, which had formed the entrance to the Chinese Exhibition at Hyde Park Corner, was acquired and erected on the largest of the islands. There were rustic shelters, a cascade, fountain and boathouse.

Two of the original 14 old stone alcoves of London Bridge demolished in 1831 now stand in Victoria Park, having arrived here some time in the 1860s.

One other stands in a courtyard in the grounds of Guy's Hospital (walk 2)

The park also has Dogs of Alcibiades and a fountain donated by Burdett-Coutts .

<http://www.londongardenstrust.org/VictoriaPark.pdf>

Broadway Market is an old chartered market undergoing a revival, particularly in food, and is open on Saturdays.

London Fields started as common land used for grazing animals before moving them to Smithfield Market.