



This is a 9.7 km walk along towpath and pavement. The route is very peaceful except for the threat of cyclists! At the end of the canal Limehouse is visited and the walk ends at Canary Wharf

The Regent's Canal

The Regent's Canal was built to link the Grand Junction Canal's Paddington Arm, which had opened in 1801, with the Thames at Limehouse. Director John Nash the architect was friendly with the Prince Regent, who allowed the use of his name. The Regent's Canal Act was passed in 1812 and the canal was opened in two stages, from Paddington to Camden (with a spur to Euston) in 1816, and the rest of the canal in 1820. The river Brent was dammed in 1835 to form the Welsh Harp reservoir to supply water.

The main centre of trade was the Regent's Canal Dock at Limehouse, a point for seaborne cargo to be unloaded onto canal boats. Cargo from abroad, including ice destined for ice stores, was unloaded there and continued its journey on barges. The most important loads however were of coal from the Midlands, building materials, and foodstuffs.

The King's Cross Coal Drops and viaduct, still there today, were built by the merchant and coal mine owner, Samuel Plimsoll, who is better remembered for the Plimsoll line.

Plimsoll's coal fed the insatiable appetite of

locomotives and London's hearths, and ensured London's streets remained well lit, courtesy of the Imperial Light and Gas. City Road Basin was the second most important traffic centre, handling incoming inland freight, to a large extent.

By the 1840s the railways were taking traffic from the canals and there were attempts to turn the canal into a railway as early as 1845. In 1929 the the Regent's Canal, the Grand Junction Canal, and the Warwick Canals, merged to form the Grand Union Canal Company.

The freezing of the Regent's Canal was to be its downfall as a commercial venture when the harsh winter of 1962-3 saw the Canal freeze so hard that no cargo could move on it for weeks. By the time the thaw came, the freight traffic had been irreversibly transferred to road.

Mile End Park/Millennium Park

There were plans for a park to replace bomb damage and dereliction from 1943 and there was some land clearance and tree planting by the LCC. By the end of the 1980s the northern section from Mile End Road to Victoria Park was landscaped into several greens and new Victorian-style gates and railings added, some of which have been incorporated into the new park.

In 1995 the outline plan for a new millennium park consisted of a series of distinct areas

linked by a winding pathway. These were, from north to south, a Play Area for performances; an Ecology Park with an Ecology Centre; an Arts Park with Art Pavilion and café and outdoor gallery space; a Green Bridge spanning Mile End Road; a Terraced 'Garden of the Senses' around a water cascade; an Adventure Park; a Sports Park with a new sports centre and swimming pool; and a Children's Park.

The new park opened in phases from 2000 onwards. In 2005 a rare orchid was found in the Ecology Park and damsel and dragon flies were found to be on the increase.

Limehouse

Limehouse gets its name from lime kilns operated by large potteries as far back as 1356. A significant port in mediaeval times it grew to service the river traffic and in its heyday shipbuilding, chandlery and ropemaking being important. As well as the Regent's Canal there is the Cut linking the River Lea to the Thames at Limehouse. Important buildings at Limehouse include St Anne's church designed by Nicholas Hawksmoor, the Limehouse Town Hall, opened in 1881 on Commercial Road (top of Newell Street) and nearby Library (1901) and the fine old buildings on Narrow Street. The area around the church is well worth visiting.

For Victoria Park notes see walk 8