

Docklands Revitalisation of the Waterfront

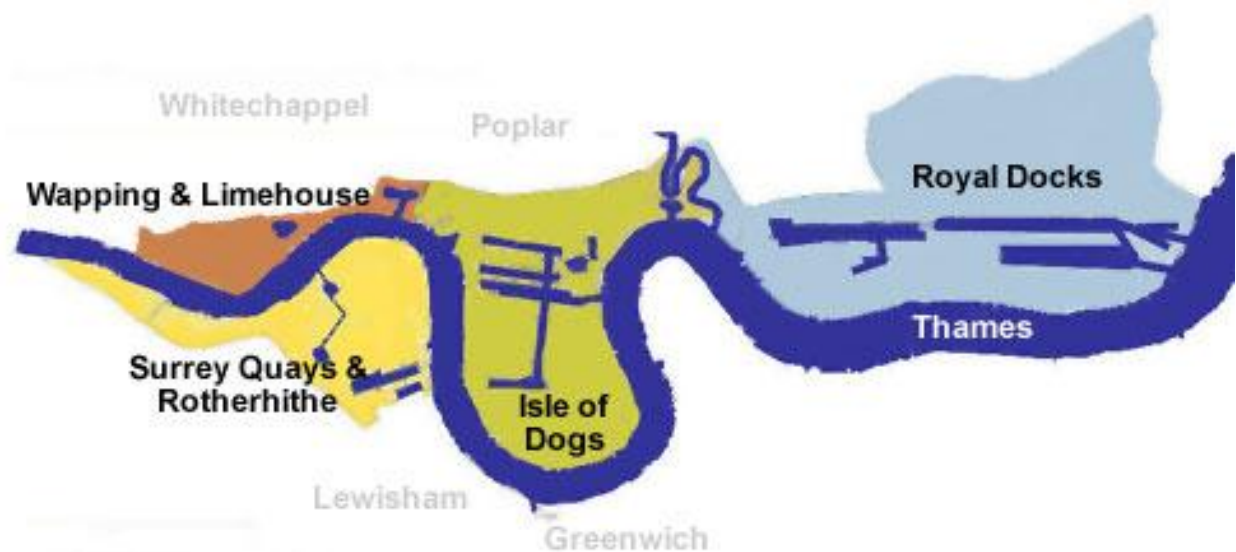
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1. Introduction

Docklands is the semi-official name for an area in east London. It is composed of parts of the boroughs of Southwark, Tower Hamlets, Newham and Greenwich.

Docklands is named after docks of the London port which had been in this area for centuries. Between 1960 and 1980, all of London's docks were closed, because of the invention of the container system of cargo transportation. For this system the docks were too small.

Consequently London had a big area of derelict land which should be used on new way. The solution was to build up a new quarter with flats, offices and shopping malls.



Map with 4 the parts of London Docklands and surrounding boroughs
(Source: Wikipedia.org)

2. The beginning of Docklands

2.1. London's first port

Within the Roman Empire which stretched from northern Africa to Scotland and from Spain to Turkey, Londinium (London) became an important centre of communication, administration and redistribution. The most goods and people that came to Britain passed through Londinium. Soon this harbour became the busiest place of whole Londinium. On the river a harbour developed where the ships from the west countries and ships from overseas met.

2.2. The medieval port

From 1398 the mayor of London was responsible for conserving the river Thames. Maintenance of the quays and construction of riverside stairs were tasks of the harbourmasters and special committees. When the port began expanding communities settled south and east of the city. Boat-builders, rope-makers and other craftspeople worked at Wapping, Limehouse, Rotherhithe and Blackwall.

All kinds of seafarers could find lodgings around the Priory of St. Katherine by the Tower breweries or many other industries located on the south bank. The craftsmen of the city formed guilds to protect their interest. The members held meetings in halls of the city and they were recognized by their colourful livery. They invented Shipwrights, Coopers, Fishmongers and Mercers which are all connected to the guilds and to the commerce of London's port. Because London was a Christian city the people ate fish instead of meat on Fridays. They caught eels, salmon and fresh water fish in the Thames. Herring was brought in from Rye and Great Yarmouth, was protected by smoke or salt.



Reconstruction of an medieval warehouse and an old warehouse where the Museum of London Docklands is situated today

(http://photos.igougo.com/images/p165550-London-Docklands_Museum.jpg)

In 1545 300, cargoes became liable for taxation. By 1550 every week twenty deep-sea vessels arrived at London. The increased activity around the port made it hard to collect

duties, a reformation was essential. The better surveillance of port activities would reduce the opportunities for smugglers to avoid taxes. From 1559 overseas shipments were responsible for a series of so called “Legal Quays” located between the Tower and the London Bridge. In 1566, a meeting hall was founded similar, to the Antwerp Bourse intended for the merchants. Meeting halls provided a forum for all kinds of business, shipping news, exchange rate or the fortunes of competition.

By the 16th century most vessels had become too big to pass London Bridge. As a solution the old landing place at Queenhithe was replaced by Billingsgate because of its deeply recessed harbour. After the great fire of London in 1666 arcade shops and stalls were located west of the harbour and at its head lay there was located an open market-square called the “Roomland”.

2.3. London’s Port through the ages

In the 17th and 18th centuries the Thames above London Bridge presented many interesting contrasts. Kingston, Twickenham, Richmond, Chelsea, Battersea and Lambeth built long-established riverside settlements including fine mansions, humbler houses, factories, working wharves, gardens, barge yards and ship-building yards.

At the riverside west, of London many big houses were located. These estates belonged to owners who made their profits by investing in London’s port trade.

At Chelsea an imposing waterworks was surrounded by pleasure and tea gardens. At Westminster there were the homes of the aristocrats, lined up and interspersed with coal and timber wharves. The building of the monumental Adelphi (1768-1772) and Somerset Houses (1775-1790) transformed much of the old riverside.

At Lambeth, across the river, there were stone wharves, timber wharves, barge yards, mills and potteries. The trade of wool and clothes brought big business to London in medieval times. High quality English wool was brought into the city to sell to Europe to reach high prices. Italian, German and Dutch merchants from London were dominating this export market in the 17th and 18th century. The amount of the exported wool had risen dramatically to 16.000 bales a year of which the Londoners traded 40 per cent. At this time the trade of wool was a very lucrative business. In 1782 a custom-house was built at the Wool Quay to weigh the wool and collect taxes.

The foundations of the custom-house were uncovered by archeologists in 1973. By 15th century London mostly imported finished clothes rather than wool because it raised the profit drastically. Great mercantile companies grew up and began to trade with the rest of the world. They reached a high strength because of royal monopolies which had been given to them. But by the late 17th century these monopolies were noticeably threatened and began to fail.

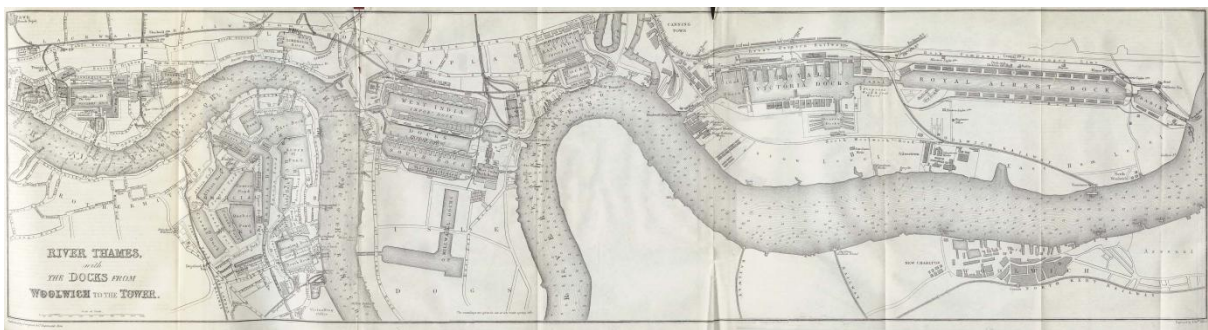


The port in the 18th century
(Source: Museum of London Docklands)

As result of that more merchants became involved in trade beside the royal monopolies. The fall of King James II in 1688 ended the era of creating royal monopolies. A number of federations or associations of merchants took his place, only a few survived the 18th century. Between 1796 and 1801 four selected Committees were convened by the government to carry out detailed enquiries into the state of the port. The second of these accepted the need for new

off-river docks and led to the passing of the West India Dock Act in 1799. Similar acts soon followed enabling the creation of the London Dock, East India Dock and a series of smaller docks on the Rotherhithe Peninsula.

The building of the new Docks in 1800 began with the work on the West India Dock. It was finally completed with the opening of the St. Katherine Dock in 1828. Funding came from random people who hoped for profits in the future paid by the dock companies. The hope was not groundless because most of the Docks were granted 21-year monopolies over certain cargoes. The companies needed more space; as a result of that and their dominance they expanded over the older Wharf into the Pool of London. Most of the new Docks had warehouses to store imported goods. They were highly organized in handling ships and cargoes. Because of this they promised a quick turn-around and with their controlled workforce and high walls they also promised high security. By the end of the 18th century they were so developed that about 50,000 pound worth of goods were stolen in the port each year.



Map of of Docklands 1882
(Source: Wikipedia)

The harbour reached its full potential with the standardized containers in 1965. Specially designed cranes transferred the containers from ship to shore, afterwards mobile straddle carriers moved the containers forward. The containers minimized the time needed to unload a ship from 12-14 days to 36 hours.

Apart from that the new technologies of the port made upriver warehousing complete.

3. The end of the harbour

With the end of the British Colonial Empire goods from the former colonies had rising prices and less people could afford them. Consequently fewer goods were capsized.

On the other hand there were investments in other ports like Rotterdam, Hamburg or Dunkirk which were much higher than the ones in port of London. Furthermore the UK coastal ports like Southampton began to siphon the trade away from London.

What is more the cargo-handling had been improved: mechanization with fork-lift trucks and palletization began to be a danger to the port of London. Most dramatically the ISO container was invented in 1955. These systems increased the speed at which cargoes were unloaded. This made the docks, wharves and warehousing unnecessary because London's docks were not able to accommodate the much larger ships which were necessary for those systems.

In the same period 7 deep-water berths were built at Tilbury downstream the Thames. In the late 1960s this port became Britain's leading harbour.

Containerization, decreasing trade and competition from other harbours and air transport were the factors which caused the closure of London's historic docks. Between 1960 and 1980, all of London's docks were closed.

The effects of the closure of London's docks were obvious and unemployment was growing in London's riverside boroughs. In the docks around 25% of jobs had been lost and as soon as the jobs disappeared local residents began to leave.

4. The Revitalisation

4.1. Development of a new quarter

The idea to redevelop the docks began almost as soon as they were closed. However it took about 20 years for the redevelopment to begin. The situation was very complicated because of a large number of big landowners with different interests: the PLA (Port of London Authority), the Greater London Council (GLC), the British Gas Corporation, five borough councils, British Rail and the Central Electricity Generating Board.

In 1981 the London Docklands Development Corporation (LDDC) was founded to manage the redevelopment of 8.5 square miles (21 km²) of land which included the former dock land and dock basins. 60% of this area lay empty. 20% of the housing were uninhabitable or in a very bad status. Furthermore former industrial areas were contaminated by chemicals.

So their goals were to:

1. Bring land and buildings into effective use.
2. Encourage development of exciting, new industries and commerce.
3. Ensure that house and social facilities are available to encourage people to live and in work in Docklands.
4. Create an attractive environment.

The LDDC invented in 1982 the "Enterprise Zone" an area in which businesses were exempt from financial incentives, including simplified planning and capital allowances. The intention was to speed up the regeneration.

This made docklands very attractive to potential developers. In fact a property boom was starting in this area. A symbol of the whole project was the ambitious idea of Canary Wharf with Britain's tallest building.

In the early time of Enterprise Zone there was a trend towards low-rise industrial parks. From 1986 large office buildings signalled a second phase of development.

The settlers who took the most advantage of Enterprise Zone concessions were from electronic and service industries. The majority of the buildings were made up of steel and reflective glass walling. But some of them were constructed with innovative materials like polyester or enamel. Those materials affect a futuristic appearance like in Heron Quays. Butler's Wharf was turned into an area with luxury apartments and restaurants.

The house prices began to rise because the developers were tempted to build high cost housing which the local people could not afford. Those people had to leave the area to find less expensive accommodation.

4.2 New Infrastructure

New infrastructure and consequently better transport was the key to the redevelopment of London's docks. According to this it was an immediate task for the LDDC to get Docklands connected to the rest of London because Docklands historically had poor transport connections.

The first step was the construction of the Docklands Light Railway. The LDDC needed a cheap public transport system for the former docks area to stimulate regeneration. Finally the LDDC chose a light-rail scheme using surviving dock railway infrastructure. This was the most inexpensive development costing only £77 million in its first phase.



The Docklands Light Railway
(Source: Wikipedia)

The initial stretch, from Tower Gateway to the southern end of the Isle of Dogs opened in 1987. In 1991 an extension of the DLR into the centre of the City was completed. Later extensions to Stratford or Lewisham helped the people living in those areas to get to their work in the City or in the docklands area easily - or those living cheaper housing in the suburbs to get to the centre.

The tube station Canary Wharf was joined to the London Underground network when the Jubilee Line was extended in September 1999.

The strategy plan for Docklands included improvements for roads in 1976. As the LDDC was not a Highway Authority the improvements had to be made in liaison with Local Authorities. The "Limehouse Link" between the city and the Isle of Docks was an element of this programme. In the 1970s the LDDC decided to construct it in the form of a tunnel which was finished 1993. The "Limehouse Link" is with a cost of over £150 million per kilometre one of the most expensive roads which was ever built.

Furthermore the London City Airport opened in October 1987 in the area of the former Royal Docks. This airport is principally used by business travellers.

5. The result

In 1988 11500 new houses were built and the Enterprise Zone affected post-modern architecture. In 1989 6.85 billion pounds were invested in the project in Docklands by companies and private persons. This had been done with only 706 million pounds of government grants. So the mechanism of Enterprise Zone had success.

Since the beginning of revitalisation the population of the Docklands has more than doubled. Canary Wharf has become one of



The contrast between old and new in the architecture of docklands

Europe's biggest skyscrapers and is a direct challenge to the financial centre in the City. Today there is a harmonious combination of old and new buildings although most of the old Dockland wharfs and warehouses have been demolished. Others have been restored and converted into flats.

It is still possible to dock in docklands but there is no commercial use any more.

Famous businesses like "The Financial Times" and "Reuters News Agency" have got their offices at East India Dock.

At the end of the transformation Docklands appears as an area with its own new lifestyle with luxury homes, spectacular offices and shopping malls. In fact Docklands became a recognised brand and a desirable place to live.

6. Criticism

At the beginning a big group of London's inhabitants didn't like the plans of the developers to build a new city in the east of London with skyscrapers.

The majority of the inhabitants didn't want to wave an area with office skyscrapers, each 850 ft. high competing with the economy in the city of London. Protests against these projects were common.

Luckily these ideas collapsed because of lack of money.

Furthermore there is a big change in the population of Docklands. Before the redevelopment began Docklands was area where many poor workers and their families lived. In the plans of the LDDC no one really cared about those people and the LDDC was rather happy when they left so that they could achieve their plans. In fact the results of the LDDC plans were high house prices which no inhabitant of the former port could afford.

For this reason lots of people were not satisfied with the plans of the LDDC. To their mind the LDDC did not act on behalf of the citizens.

7. Sources

The majority of our information is taken from the exhibition of the Museum of London Docklands (No 1 Warehouse, Thames Highway, Trade Expansion and Legal Quay, City and River, Sailortown, First Port of Empire, Warehouse of the World and New Port/New City).

Additional material was taken form: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/London_Docklands. All pictures without a source beneath are taken by us.



Protest against the Canary Wharf project

(Photo from the Museum of London Docklands)