

“The sun set; the dusk fell on the stream, and lights began to appear along the shore...”

This is Bermondsey, ‘the Larder of London’. For hundreds of years, ships have brought cargo up the Thames to Bermondsey. This is Jamaica Road and many of the road names echo trading days long gone. What might we trade with Jamaica? From Jamaica comes rum and sugar and bananas. It is noisy here, but we will cross the road, and make for the river, where I promise you serenity and calm. We will follow the Thames through Historic Rotherhithe to The Brunel Museum and The Mayflower pub.

Cross the road and talk at corner of Wilson Grove.

Before we head down Wilson Grove, this is Trotwood House and this is Wickfield House. There is also a Dombey House, because this is Dickens estate, and we will come across Charles Dickens on our walk.

This is Wilson Grove after Captain Henry Wilson of the East India Company. More of him later. You see the buildings at the end of the road – they are on the far side of the river. That is how close we are..

Left down Wilson Grove to the river

RIVER THAMES & CHERRY GARDENS PIER

This is one of the great river-scapes of the world. This is Cherry Gardens Pier, and for the first time we are standing above high water. Everywhere here there were islands, marshes, reed beds and sand banks. Bermondsey is a contraction of Beormond’s Island. Beormond was a local landowner.

This is Cherry Gardens Pier, where people came to picnic and enjoy a day out in the countryside. This Pier is a place to Picnic, but not everyone came here to picnic: Vikings came to Pillage. The Viking Canute cut ditches and canals through these marshes to bring his long boats around the other side of London Bridge and take the city. Invaders going *under* London Bridge were showered with terrible things. The military term for this is ‘outflanking’.

Traders brought livestock here for Pasture. We met in Bermondsey, and we walk now to Rotherhithe. Rother is the Anglo-Saxon word for cow, and ‘hythe’ means harbour. Herdsmen driving cattle into market would rest them here and fatten them up to get a better price. Driving in sheep from west of London, you would stop at Lambeth or Lambs hythe for the same reason...

Painting

JMW Turner the English Impressionist came here to paint his famous ‘Fighting Temeraire’.

HMS *Temeraire* was a 98-gun second-rate ship of the line of the Royal Navy. She fought at the Battle of Trafalgar. From here, Cherry Gardens, Turner painted the ship in flames and being towed up the river for salvage. The painting is almost lurid, and ship is being towed up the river against the setting sun, by a steam tug. We see in the picture the sun setting on the age of the sailing ship and the dawn of the age of steam. But the sun doesn’t set over there, that’s the east. It sets over here, behind Tower

Bridge. The composition of the painting is brilliant, but he has inverted some basic laws of nature. Never let the facts get in the way of a good picture.

Turner also painted *Temeraire* at the Battle of Trafalgar, where in a more conventional picture she is next astern to Nelson's flagship *Victory* which she fought to relieve. However, the original *Temeraire* was a French ship taken at the Battle of Lagos in 1759. The British custom, and a very irritating custom it must have been, was to name newly commissioned ships after recently captured enemy prizes. In this way, French sailors would ideally find themselves fighting against a better and modern ship whose name reminded them of an earlier defeat. Psychological warfare...

Pirates

TOWN OF RAMSGATE

Next to Oliver's Wharf is a small building with a burgundy sign and gold lettering. At this pub, pirates enjoyed their last grog before execution.

EXECUTION DOCK

In front of the building with a big 'E' is where the pirates were hung at low tide and left there until the river covered them three times.

The river is quiet now, but was once the busiest river in the world. In Brunel's day, the British Empire covered $\frac{1}{4}$ of the world's land surface and $\frac{1}{4}$ of the world's population were subjects of the British King or Queen. This river led to the capital city and principal port of the largest empire the world has ever known. In a very real sense the trade of the world flowed up this river.

In Brunel's day there were 3,000 ships in this river every day, and his Thames Tunnel where we finish our walk was built to move ships' cargo. Huge tall masted ships brought cargo up the river from all over the world. Every day there were 3,000 tall masted ships and 10,000 little boats, all in a chaotic jumble of masts and rigging, with just a narrow channel in the middle of the river for passage up and down. The river is so congested, they said it took longer to get stuff across the Thames than it took to get stuff across the Atlantic.

They need a way of getting cargo across the river as well as up and down the river. An ordinary bridge cannot let the tall masted ships through – but a clever bridge, like Tower Bridge can. The technical word is a bascule bridge. Bascule is the French word for see-saw, and those roadways each see-saw on a fulcrum.

Everyone knows the bridge, but what you may not know is: this a Brunel Bridge. The architect was Horace Jones, who won the competition, was knighted and died within 12 months. The bridge was built by his engineers, Sir John Wolfe Barry, in partnership with Henry Marc Brunel, consultant engineer. Henry was the son of Isambard Kingdom Brunel, and grandson of Sir Marc Brunel. Sir John was son of Charles Barry, who with a little help or hindrance – depending on your taste - from Pugin built the Houses of Parliament. No one remembers them.

We begin and end with Brunel river crossings: Tower Bridge here and Thames Tunnel in Rotherhithe down the river...

Do you see the white gangway before Tower Bridge, just before the big building marked Butlers' Wharf? Just beyond the barges and house boats there is an inlet. Some boats have trees, and some are herb gardens and cycle parks. Those are ancient

mooring rights, and the boats now have the best views in London. It was not always so.

DR ALFRED SALTER STATUE

A local MP and philanthropist, Dr Alfred Salter, who came here to help the urban poor. The area we have been walking through is, in living memory, one of the poorest parts of London. Go back further and this is an area of fabled, grinding relentless urban poverty.

Dr Salter was not the first philanthropist to come here. Charles Dickens was a social reformer as well as a writer, and he wrote to change things. He came here. By the fancy barges, is a tiny inlet, St Saviour's Dock. Charles Dickens described as "the filthiest, strangest and most extraordinary of localities hidden in London". Pirates used to prey on vessels awaiting entry to the docks and St Saviour's Dock displayed the bodies of those who were captured and hanged there.

The road along the dock is called Shad Thames, and the street that leads to it is Jacob Street. It used to be Jacob's Island, because all around here was islands and marshes, sandbanks and reedbeds. Jacob means Jew, and a community of poor Jewish people once lived there. Their most famous representative in fiction is Fagin. Dickens placed 'Oliver Twist' and the young pickpockets in that dismal muddy inlet. Bill Sykes swung there from a crane's gib, like the pirates and murderers before him from their gallows.

Henry Mayhew (1812-1887), another philanthropist and social reformer visited here, and he founded Punch magazine, the famous satirical magazine. He was educated at Westminster School but ran away to sea and joined the East India Company as a midshipman bound for Calcutta. He was a social researcher, playwright, investigative journalist and advocate of reform. He wrote a series of famous articles for the Morning Chronicle about the way the poor of London lived and worked. His articles were later published in a book called London Labour and the London Poor

Mayhew also described the same muddy inlet I pointed out to you as lined with latrines or lavatories, which emptied into the tidal ditch where children played and women went for water. He said the water had 'the colour and consistency of strong green tea'. Famously he said, 'it was not muddy water, it was more like watery mud'.

So this was one of the poorest parts of London. The area is now being regenerated, but a visitor soon realises that – historically - the rich part of town is the west end, the poor part the east end. It's the same in Paris, in Berlin, in Oslo and I suspect we could produce a long list. In western Europe most of our weather comes from the Atlantic, so if you have money you live up wind of the smelly industry. Today, the eastern end of all these cities is being regenerated because the smelly industry has left and now there are huge swathes of real estate available for development. In London the process has been hastened by preparations for the Olympics.

So many philanthropists have come here. The sculpture is called 'Dr Salter's Daydream' and this is his young daughter who died of scarlet fever. In the twentieth century, the children of middle class professionals do not die of scarlet fever. This is the unbearable story of a man and woman whose only child was sacrificed on the altar

of their good and high minded intentions, a couple whose philanthropic work in this poor part of London meant their child was taken.

But twenty paces away - and 600 hundred years - a summer palace for the king.

EDWARD III MANOR HOUSE

Set amongst the meadows and gardens of Bermondsey, with sweet and cooling river breezes. When the temperature rose in the city, and with it the plague deaths, the king and his court would withdraw to Bermondsey. This moated palace resembles Ighite Mote in Kent, a very elegant manor house. The front court was of stone, the rear of timber. We know that Edward the Black Prince had a room in the front courtyard. The black prince because of his black armour and coat of arms, this is the warrior prince and scourge of the French. This is not the black prince of Rotherhithe, from the South Pacific, whose monument we will visit later.

We know that King Edward had alterations made to his bedroom – a hole in the wall so he could sleep with his birds. When I say birds, I mean of course, his falcons. Remember all around here is marshes, sandbanks, islands and reed beds – perfect for hunting. The king came here for hunting holidays. A good hawkman sleeps with his birds, so he knows what they have eaten and how they have rested. If they eat too much today, they will be ‘fed up’ tomorrow and will not go hunt...

THE FAMOUS ANGEL PUB

Across the road, a famous pub. For as long as kings have been spending their summer holidays here, they have been selling alcohol over there. They say the pub is haunted by our infamous Hanging Judge Jeffries, who enjoyed nothing better than a pint of porter and a comfortable seat on the pub jetty, with a good view of the pirates he sentenced go to it. It seems to me that if anyone haunts the pub it should be the wretched pirates, not the rich old judge who sentenced them.

Across the river, the building with the white bay windows is another famous pub, the Captain Kidd, a famous pirate who was executed here. People seem to think all the pirates were in the Caribbean, but most of them were on the Thames.

CATHAY STREET (but we continue along the river)

The old name for China. Remember Cathay Pacific. This is the road to China, this is the way we take.

THE HEART OF DARKNESS

‘the tranquil waterway flowed sombre under an overcast sky from the heart of an immense darkness and seemed to lead to the uttermost ends of the earth’

Joseph Conrad wrote *Heart of Darkness* in 1899 and it describes appalling corruption and the carelessness the agent Kurtz has for lives he has ruined in the Congo. The story is told here. The ship has missed the tide and must wait, so they drop anchor and the crew settle for what they know will happen...

‘And this also,’ said Marlow suddenly, ‘has been one of the dark places of the earth.’ The Conrad novel inspired a film. ‘*Apocalypse Now*’, 1979 by Francis Ford Coppola, with Marlon Brando & Martin Sheen. Captain Willard (Martin Sheen) has a special mission: to find and execute Colonel Kurtz (Marlon Brando), a former member of the

United States Army Special Forces, and now running a corrupt fiefdom in the upper part of the jungle. You will remember Brando stroking his head and repeating ‘The Horror, the horror’.

Most people see ‘the heart of darkness’ is in the man’s heart, not the Congo, but if you agree that ‘the uttermost ends of the earth’, the road to Africa is that way, then he is saying it leads into ‘the heart of an immense darkness’ over there. In other words, the darkness is not in Africa, but in the merchant companies, the banking houses, the pedlars of misery in the City over there. The darkness and horror in Brando’s world is not in Cambodia, but exported from some dubious policy room in Washington.

As General Booth put it, Salvation Army Booth:

‘If there is a darkest Africa is there not also a darkest England?’

Speaking again of that muddy inlet up river:

‘...the condition of a class of people whose misery, ignorance, and vice, amidst all the immense wealth and great knowledge of “the first city in the world”, is, to say the very least, a national disgrace to us’

ROTHERHITHE STREET

The longest street in London. It snakes all the way around the peninsula. Once the busiest of streets – the gantries are not just picturesque, they are the only way to get cargo across from the wharves to the warehouses.

ELEPHANT LANE

This is Elephant Lane and refers to one time trade, and a sad and disgraceful trade. On your left **IVORY COURT** (recently painted out).

SAILOR TOWN

Bombay Court. East India Court. Ceylon Wharf. This is an old East India Company town. Welcome to Sailor Town. This part of London was multi-cultural before they invented the word. Walking down this street you would meet as many nationalities and languages as you met people. Rotherhithe is an old East India Town. The school was endowed by mariners of the East India Company, the church was restored by mariners of the East India Company.

Novelist Henry Fielding had a brother, a Justice of the Peace, who wrote in his diary: ‘When one goes to Rotherhithe, a man would suspect himself in another country. Their manner of living, speaking, acting, dressing and behaving are so peculiar to themselves. And yet they are the bravest and boldest of fellows.’ John Fielding 1776

Their ships were built here, their crew worshipped, married and were buried here. Brunel’s Thames Tunnel was built to move their cargo and the street names recall the East India Company’s past.

HOPE SUFFERANCE WHARF

East India Company trade grew so quickly the Port of London could not cope. There were not enough legal quays to handle the cargoes, so a number of unlicensed or ‘sufferance’ wharves were designated, amongst them ‘Hope Wharf’

THE OLD MORTUARY

It is unusual to find a mortuary that is not connected to a hospital. In the opening pages of *Our Mutual Friend*, Dickens has Wrayburn and Lighfoot dash by carriage

from London's glittering west end to Rotherhithe to identify a body. Often difficult because the pockets were always empty! Many victims were rich men hit over the head, robbed of purse and jewellery, and thrown into the river. They were often washed up into the sluice or 'Church Hole', just across Rotherhithe Street, and then were brought here. The Thames has strong currents that still bring the bodies here, but it is also true you used to get double the money for a corpse south of the river. River currents or market forces?

In fact if you knew the tides, you could hire a boat and pick up the man you threw in the river. In the film business this is known as 'Vertical Integration': control the writers, actors, studios and distribution

The building is now home to Time & Talents, a Settlement Association founded in 1887 to help the urban poor. Bodies are no longer brought here, but the Meeting Room still has beams with hooks from which the bodies were hung, upside down, to drain out. The stone floors still have runnels to take the liquid away. The old burial ground is now a garden.

THE WATCHHOUSE

One of the earliest staffed police stations in the country. They weren't guarding people, and they weren't guarding property, they were guarding corpses. New graves were watched because there was a thriving trade in fresh cadavers, sold by body snatchers to hospitals for dissection. There are cells beneath.

PETER HILL SCHOOLHOUSE

Founded by an East India Company captain with a small endowment 'for the education of eight sons (and later daughters) of seamen, with a salary of three pounds for the master'. On the plinths two schoolchildren in their bluecoats in Portland stone. London's oldest elementary school. Peter Hill School still exists further down river in a bigger building.

ST MARYCHURCH

THREE SHIPS

THE MAYFLOWER

The ship was moored here, part-owned and captained by a Rotherhithe man. Crewed by Rotherhithe men she sailed from here for the New World with 90 puritans seeking religious freedom. The ship called at Southampton where more adventurers joined and left with the *Speedwell* for the New World. The *Speedwell* was leaking badly and half way across the Atlantic the ships turned back and made port at Plymouth. Here they abandoned the smaller ship and the *Mayflower* sailed alone. Captain Christopher Jones, master of The Mayflower, is commemorated with a statue carrying a small child. Christopher means 'Christ carrying' and the statue refers to the old legend of a giant who carried people across a ford until he met a small child who grew heavier as he waded deeper. The child is the infant settlement in the New World'. Captain Jones is buried here.

THE FIGHTING TEMERAIRE

The communion table and Bishops Chairs are carved of oak from The Fighting Temeraire, the ship in Turner's famous painting. The eighteenth century organ by John Byfield is the best preserved in the world.

There has been a church here for seven hundred years. Designed by John James of Greenwich, a follower of Christopher Wren. This church did not get a Queen Ann grant that built the Hawksmoor Churches, and so was restored in 1714 by people of the parish. This is an upside down ship. The barrel roof bears the marks of a skilful shipwright, and the four pillars inside are actually ship masts with a plaster coat.

THE ANTELOPE & PRINCE LEE BOO'S TOMB

Captain Wilson, a Rotherhithe man and master of *The Antelope* was shipwrecked in the Pacific. The good people of the Pelau Islands (Micronesia) helped his men repair the ship and the Prince Lee Boo was so impressed by the mariners' skills, machines and carpentry that he begged his father to let him join them. Wilson adopted the boy and educated him, in grateful thanks for help offered him by his father King Abba Thule. Contemporary pictures show a very handsome, dark, young man, dressed as an 18th century gentleman. Contemporary accounts all speak of his intelligence and charm. He was the epitome of Rousseau's 'noble savage', but had left an island paradise to come to the biggest and filthiest city in the world and smallpox took him within two years. The East India Company erected the tomb with an inscription: 'Stop, Reader, Stop! Let Nature Claim a Tear, A Prince of Mine, Lee Boo lies Buried Here.'

SANDS FILMS AND PICTURE RESEARCH LIBRARY

Grice's Granary is half ship. The oak beams are from the old ships and are known as 'hanging knees'. They support the ceiling (or deck). The Granary was originally used to store dried fruit, but now houses a picture library, a film studio and a costume store. Sands Films are well known for successful productions of 'Little Dorrit', 'Tales from Beatrix Potter', 'Twelfth Night' and recently 'The Children's Midsummer Night's Dream.' Famous cast members who have used this café include Keira Knightley, Pierce Brosnan, Alec Guinness, Derek Jacobi, Miriam Margolyes, Michael Gambon...

THE MAYFLOWER PUB

There is a modern sculpture to the Pilgrim Fathers on the River Walk. The present day Inn, with its storm lanterns, exposed beams, ships prints and open air jetty onto the river, is the only building in the country licensed to sell American postage stamps. Thanksgiving dinner is celebrated in the first floor restaurant.

A plaque in the upper room commemorates a meeting of the Fellows of the Royal Society and the launch of the 'Tunnel Club' on Sir Marc Brunel's birthday in 1834.

THE BRUNEL MUSEUM

International Landmark Site.

You are standing directly above the first tunnel under a river anywhere in the world. The walk ends and begins with a Brunel crossing.