

A Voyage Through Time takes a group of young people from NewVic College in Custom House on a journey of discovery of local history. Visiting archives, attending walking tours, and speaking with locals both past and present, the group have uncovered the story of Harland & Wolff, shipbuilders and repairers based in the Royal Docks for half a century. Having undertaken research the group have co-designed this zine to showcase and share what they have found out. This project is funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and supported by the Royal Docks Team, the London Borough of Newham, and Eastside Community Heritage.



1800s

North Woolwich

Until the mid-19th Century North Woolwich was little more than uninhabited marshland to the south of East Ham Level marshes.

However, with the growth of British Imperialism and expansion of trade, the old inner London docks were in chaos. The increasing number of ships during the early 1800s caused the Thames to come to a gridlock; with some ships waiting days to unload their cargo. As well as rising in number, ships were also getting bigger. A technological revolution was needed.

The solution? Build bigger, deeper docks further upstream.

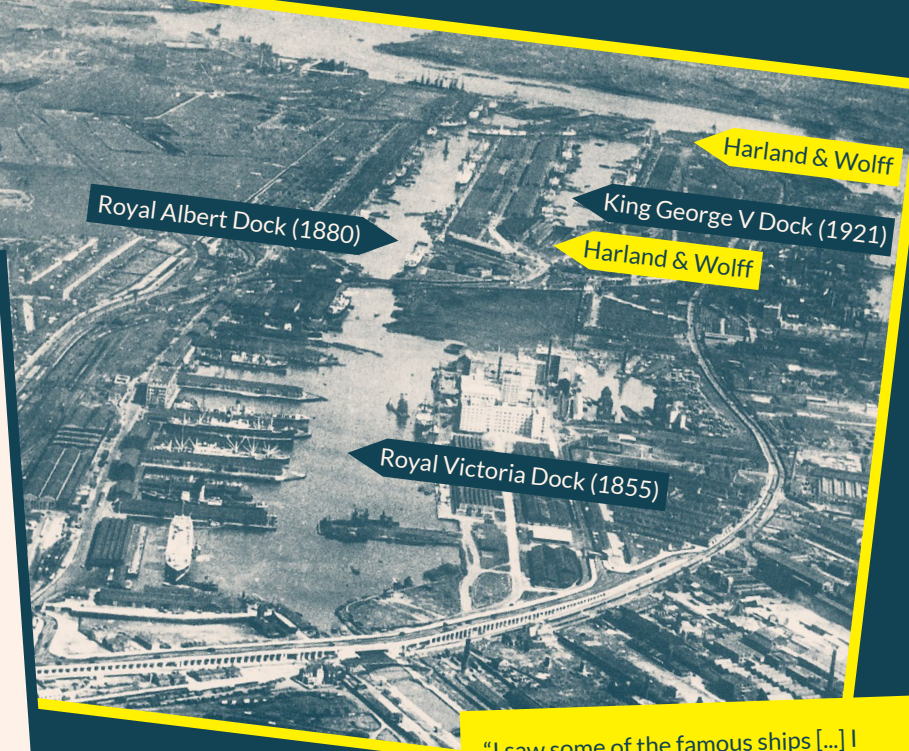
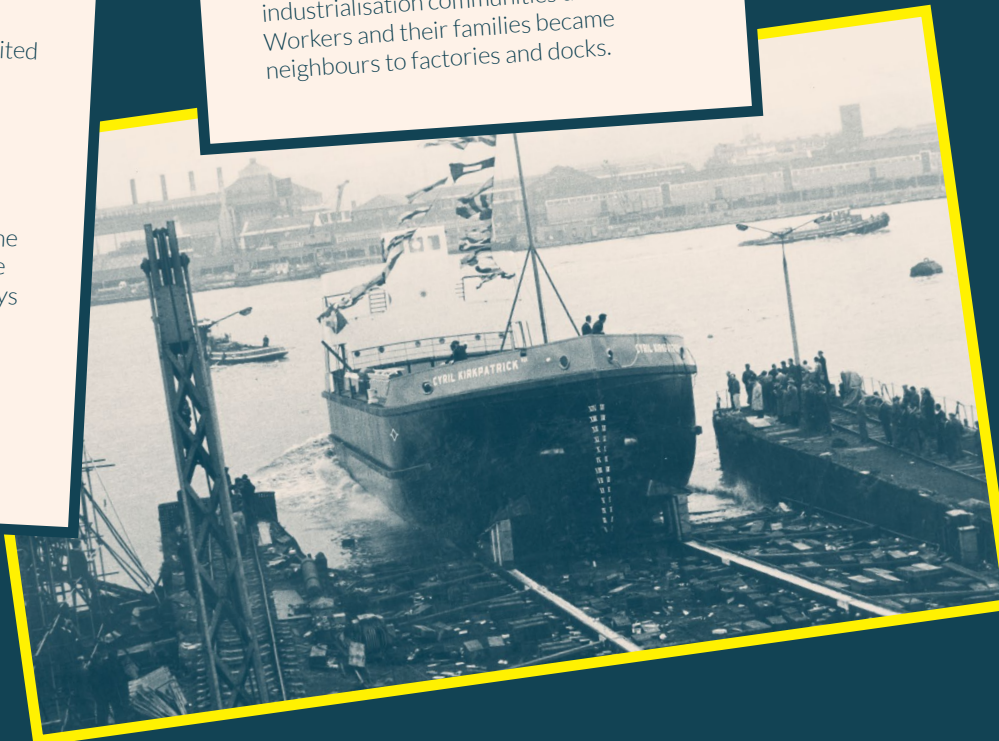


1855-1921

The Royal Docks

The Royal Docks, as they eventually became known, formed the largest enclosed dock system in the world, featuring technological innovations including hydraulic cranes, electric lighting, and refrigeration. Gigantic in size, they covered an area of 1,100 acres (the same as 625 football pitches!) with some measuring 13 meters deep.

The creation of the Royal Docks brought with it new factories, allowing the ship's cargo to be turned into products straight from the yard. Alongside this industrialisation communities developed. Workers and their families became neighbours to factories and docks.



"I saw some of the famous ships [...] I really couldn't believe the size of 'em. They had like a cinema on it."

Len Taphouse



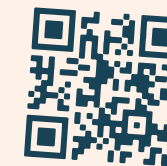
1920s

Harland & Wolff

In the early 1920s Harland & Wolff, the famous Belfast shipbuilders and repairers, set up a yard in North Woolwich.

Their legacy did not lie just in building the Titanic, they also had an important impact on the London docklands landscape.

Harland & Wolff produced passenger vessels, narrowboats, steamships, and even warships. It would take many skilled workers to build these magnificent vessels, a job done wrong, and the entire ship could be in peril. With long days, physical labour, and working in all weather, life on the yard wasn't always easy.



"Gran was a cook, her daughter was a cook, my mother-in-law worked in there [...] first day of the bombing in London, my husband said him and his sister were crying, because they didn't know if his family were going to come home."

June Patterson

1939-1945

World War II

London and the rest of the UK depended on the docks and their surrounding factories, leading them to be heavily targeted during the Second World War. Black Saturday, the first day of the Blitz in London, put Harland & Wolff and its workers in the direct line of fire.



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Newham Archives
Eastside Community Heritage
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The Yard
Eastside Community Heritage
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1950s

Life at the yard

At their peak, Harland & Wolff employed thousands of people in their London yard, many of whom had followed in their family's footsteps. Comradery was prominent with many local firms having sports teams, dances, and social gatherings. A lot of these gatherings happened at the pubs. There used to be 13 of them on Albert Road alone! They even held special licenses so that people coming off the night shifts could get a beer.

Although the ship builders, factory workers and dockers were bringing in a massive revenue to the country they lived on a precarious wage. Strikes were common, in aid for fairer pay and better working conditions.



You might think of London being noisy now but living so close to the docks could have its drawbacks.

"You had the trains [...] you had the boats [...] you had the generators going all the time."

Fred Bowyer



Len Goodman, before his ballroom days was an apprentice at Harland & Wolff. He thinks of his time there as

"One of the happiest times of my life... because there was so many characters and so much fun. It wasn't like a job really."

1960s

A special education

The docks didn't just play a massive role in the docker's lives but brought the whole community celebrations, joy, and a special insight into the rest of the world.

However, living in such proximity to heavy industry had its drawbacks. Living here was an attack on the senses from the constant clanging and banging of metal being turned into ships, to the pong which sometimes surfaced from the watery depths.



"Our teachers use to take us round to the Docks in the various warehouses as well, it was lovely. You got an education out of the ships; you knew where all those ships were going. Children never knew if they did not live round here."

Doreen Harvey



1970s

Decline

Technological evolution, which had brought Harland & Wolff to London, eventually brought the shipyard to a close. The introduction of shipping containers reduced the need for as many workers to load and unload ships. Furthermore, the ships required to carry these containers were too big to reach the Royal Docks, which gradually ran out of business. There was no longer a need for Harland & Wolff to be in North Woolwich.

The closure of Harland & Wolff and the wider Royal Docks resulted in unemployment and social deprivation across East London. Many people who once lived there had to leave their community behind.

"It was totally gone. I couldn't recognise where Harland & Wolff was, I couldn't recognise anything."

Len Goodman

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John Dickinson
Newham Archives
Thames Festival Trust
Newham Archives
Eastside Community Heritage
John Dickinson

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2000s

Redevelopment

Harland & Wolff's former shipyard has become a new housing development known as Galleons Point. Part of a series of government regeneration plans, the docklands area has been transformed into a busy hub of business, home and leisure.

