

District 45

A self guided walk in London's Deptford



Find out about Deptford's Victorian wealth and poverty
Visit the streets described by social reformer Charles Booth
Discover rich maritime history and today's vibrant communities
Explore how Deptford has and hasn't changed over a century

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*the stories of our landscapes
discovered through walks*







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Cover image: Section of Charles Booth's 1902 Poverty map © Charles Booth Online Archive, LSE

District 45

Travel back in time to London's Deptford 100 years ago

Greenwich, with its spectacular riverfront location and grand buildings, is associated with England's glory days as a maritime nation. But its neighbour Deptford is steeped in just as much history of the sea.

It was where ships docked and unloaded their cargoes, where foreigners came to learn the art of shipbuilding, where sailors waved farewell to England as they headed out across the empire.



Part of Charles Booth's poverty map of Deptford (1902)
© Charles Booth Online Archive, LSE

	BLACK: Lowest class. Vicious, semi-criminal.
	DARK BLUE: Very poor, casual. Chronic want.
	LIGHT BLUE: Poor. 18s. to 21s. a week for a moderate family
	PURPLE: Mixed. Some comfortable others poor
	PINK: Fairly comfortable. Good ordinary earnings.
	RED: Middle class. Well-to-do.
	YELLOW: Upper-middle and Upper classes. Wealthy.

A combination of colours - as dark blue or black, or pink and red - indicates that the street contains a fair proportion of each of the classes represented by the respective colours.

The colour coding used on the poverty maps
© Charles Booth Online Archive, LSE

This walk paints a picture of life in Deptford over a hundred years ago, when it was a working neighbourhood of bustling docks and wharves, busy streets and overcrowded houses, poverty and deprivation alongside affluence and comfort.

It uses observations recorded by the social reformer, Charles Booth, who did a survey of poverty in London. There are also insights from other writers – diarists, novelists and historians – describing the Deptford of the Victorian era.

Fast forward one hundred years and find out how some things have changed in Deptford and other things have stayed the same, ranging from the condition of the streets and housing to industry and employment.

Route overview

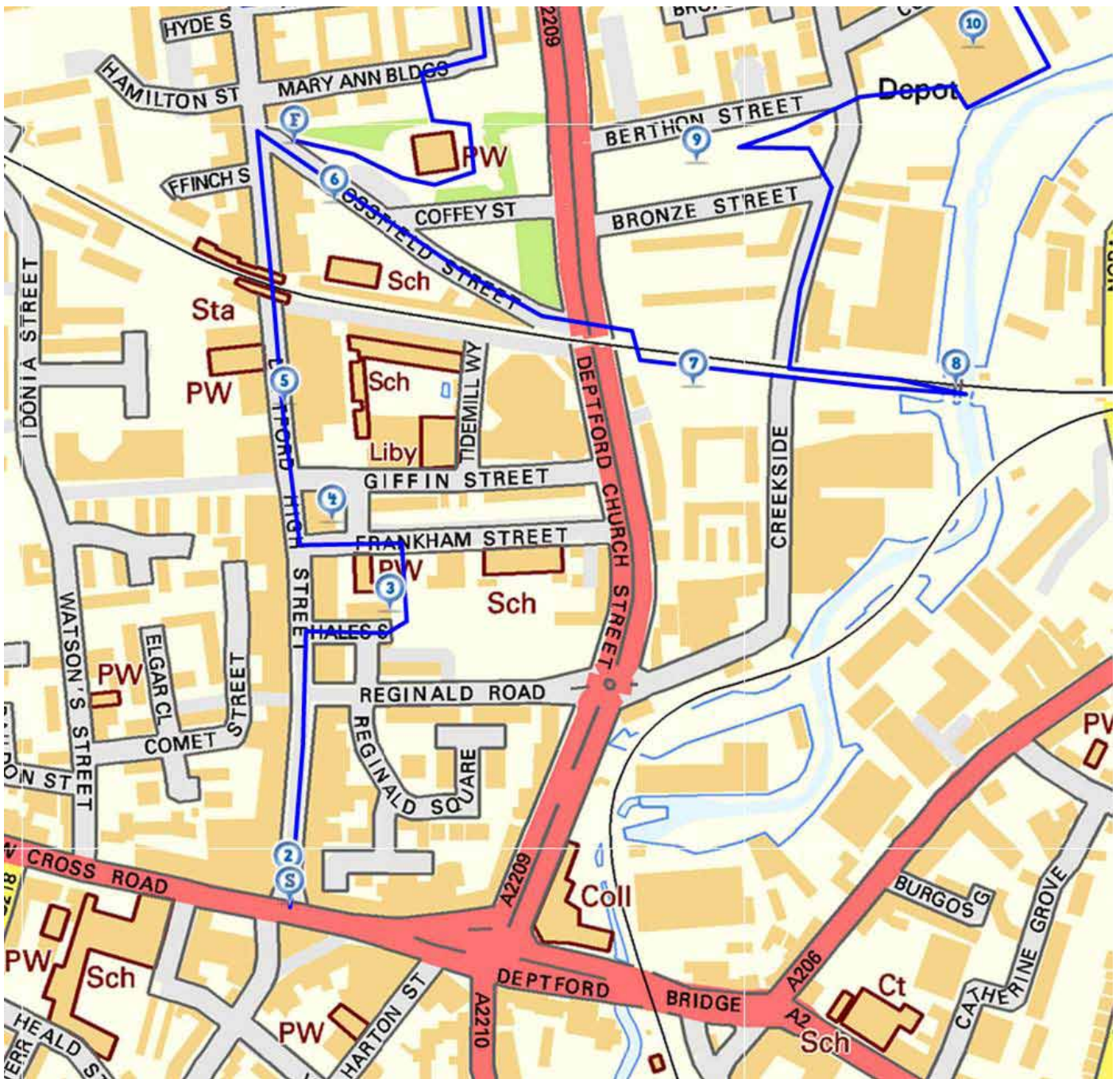


Practical information

Location	Deptford, Southeast London
Getting there	<p>Train - the nearest overground stations are Deptford and New Cross (accessible from London Bridge, Charing Cross and Waterloo East) <i>Please note Deptford train station does not currently have step-free access</i></p> <p>Underground - nearest station is Deptford Bridge (DLR)</p> <p>Bus - served by various bus routes. Those closest to the walk start include include 53 (Westminster to Plumstead), 177 (Peckham to Thamesmead) and 453 (Deptford to Marylebone)</p> <p>Bicycle - Deptford is on National Cycle Route 4, which follows the River Thames via Greenwich, Rotherhithe and Lewisham</p>
Start point	The large anchor at the end of Deptford High Street, SE8 4AD <i>Note: In 2013 the council put the anchor in storage during improvement works to the High Street; whether or not it will return is unknown</i>
Directions from railway station to start	<p><i>From Deptford train station</i> - turn right and walk along Deptford High Street for about 350 metres</p> <p><i>From Deptford Bridge DLR station</i> - walk about 200 metres along Deptford Broadway towards New Cross</p> <p><i>From New Cross train station</i> - turn left and walk about 400 metres along New Cross Road towards Greenwich</p>
Finish point	St Paul's churchyard, SE8 3DP
Onward journey	The route is almost circular. The front of St Paul's Church leads onto Deptford High Street. Turn left to return to the anchor.

Distance	2 ½ miles
Level	Gentle – A flat route on urban streets and beside Deptford Creek
Conditions	Deptford High Street can be busy especially on market days. Watch for traffic and look after your valuables. The riverside section can be chilly in winter.
Suitable for	Wheelchairs/pushchairs - a completely step-free route (though Deptford railway station does not have a lift)
Refreshments	<p>Plenty of cafes and restaurants on Deptford High Street, including the Deptford Project Cafe - located in an old train carriage beside Deptford station! (Tel: 07525 351656)</p> <p>There is also a café at the Laban Building, open Mon-Sat 8.30am-6.30pm (Tel: 020 8691 8600)</p>
Toilets	<p>- Giffin Square, halfway along Deptford High Street (between Stop 4 and 5)</p> <p>- Laban Building (Stop 10)</p>
Other info	<p>Deptford market is held on Wednesday, Friday and Saturday mornings in the High Street and nearby Douglas Way. Stalls set up from 7am with the last closing around 4pm.</p> <p>Deptford X contemporary art festival is held in July and August. Local and international artists take part, there are many free events and public artworks on display (Tel: 020 8692 4278)</p>

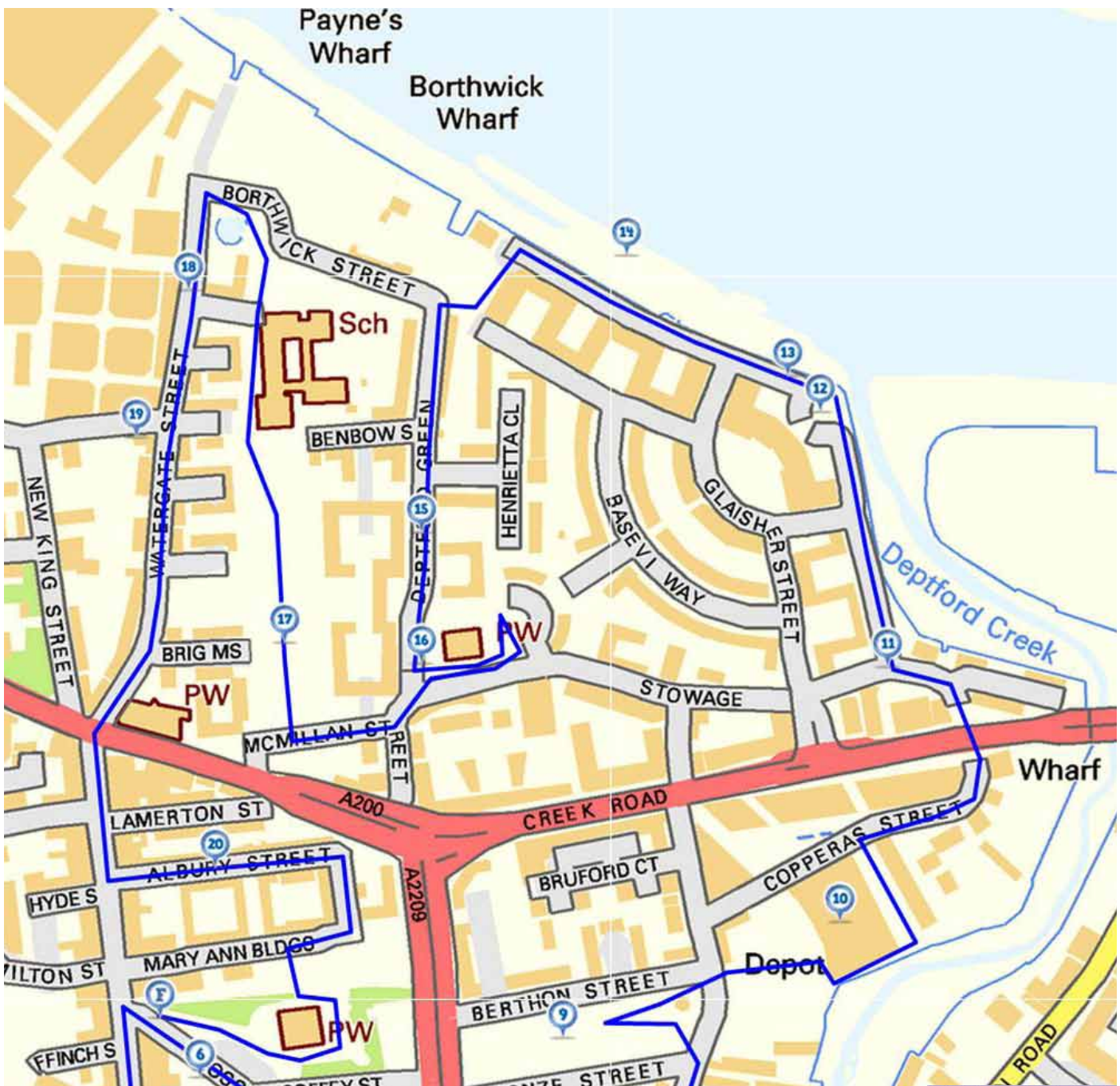
Detail of first part of the route



Stopping points

1. The big anchor, Deptford High Street
2. The big anchor, Deptford High Street
3. Corner of Hale Street and Frankham Street
4. Frankham Street
5. Deptford High Street
6. Crossfield
7. Crossfield Estate
8. Halfpenny Hatch Bridge over Deptford Creek
9. Sue Godfrey Local Nature Reserve

Detail of second part of the route



- 10.** Laban Building
- 11.** Stowage
- 12.** Peter the Great statue
- 13.** River Thames
- 14.** Abandoned riverside landing stages
- 15.** Deptford Green
- 16.** St Nicholas churchyard
- 17.** St Nicholas Green
- 18.** Corner of Watergate and Trevithick Street
- 19.** Dog and Bell pub, Prince Street
- 20.** Albury Street
- 21.** Mydidee's grave, St Paul's churchyard

1. Deep ford

The big anchor, Deptford High Street

The name Deptford is derived from Deep Ford. It was here that pilgrims would ford the river on their way along the ancient Roman Road to Canterbury, what is now the A2.

The walk takes in much of the older parts of Deptford, a district of London often neglected in favour of its more glamorous neighbour Greenwich.

Four hundred years ago, Henry VIII made it the main shipbuilding and docks area for London and, as we will see, its story since then has been the story of London and the country as a whole – a story of expansion, Empire and immigration.

Deptford is not an area with many fine buildings and monuments (although there are some surprising gems), and this is really the story of the people of Deptford, of what they did and of how they lived.



The big anchor
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain



Charles Booth (1902)
© Charles Booth Online Archive, LSE

This walk draws on notes made by the social reformer Charles Booth.

Just over one hundred years ago, he compiled a poverty map of London. Booth walked around different areas of the city with local policemen and noted down the social conditions he saw. He then divided them into seven categories and gave them colours from yellow to black.

One of the places he visited was Deptford, which was labelled as District 45 in his survey. You will be hearing exactly what he saw, at the exact locations, in the summer of 1899. There are some other readings as well from writers, diarists, novelists and historians of the time.

This walk was created by Sean Patterson, an actor and photographer with a special interest in the history and geography of London.

Directions 1

Remain at the end of the high street on the site of the big anchor.

2. A courteous welcome

The big anchor, Deptford High Street

We start our walk at the big anchor on Deptford Broadway. Let's hear how Booth was received on his first visit to Deptford:

Booth: *Called upon Superintendent Wakeford at the chief office Blackheath Road. He is a man of about 50, keen and alert, a total abstainer. Received me very courteously.*

After I had explained our purpose and obtained the promise of an interview at the end of the work, I was introduced to the local inspector S. Gummer.



Housing around the triangle of Deptford Broadway indicated in red for middle-class
© Charles Booth Online Archive, LSE

Walk with Inspector Gummer and Sergeant Goddard over district bounded by Deptford Creek, Broadway, High Street, Creek Road and The Stowage including parts of the parish of St Paul, St Nicholas and Christchurch.

Inspector Gummer is a small well-dressed portly man, jacket suit and straw hat. Has over 10 years service at Blackheath Road and knows the district well.

Started at Deptford Bridge, where Deptford Creek passing under becomes the Ravensbourne. Deptford Broadway. Triangular open space paved with cobble stones. Stand for barrows and the meeting place of the neighbourhood. Political and other meetings held here. Men standing about. Good three storied shops to High Street, slightly poorer near Church Street.

Booth showed this area as red on the map, which meant "middle class" and "well-to-do". It was the better end of town; we shall see some of the poorer areas later on our walk.

Directions 2

Walk along Deptford High Street then take the second road on the right, which is Hale Street. At the end of the cul-de-sac, go left around the corner of the building. Stop at the plaque on the wall next to a large tree.

3. Wretched, filthy, and forlorn

Corner of Hale Street and Frankham Street

In the mid 1800s, Britain was booming – it was the world’s leading industrial power and had a vast Empire. It was also a period when the country’s population grew rapidly. But in the major cities, there was overcrowding and poor living conditions for large numbers of people. Remember, in those times there was no welfare state – the government did not provide free healthcare, education, housing and other support to poorer people.

But there were charities funded by individual philanthropists or religious organisations that cared for poorer members of society by providing free services and facilities. One such type of institution was known as ‘ragged schools’, which provided free education to poor children, and this plaque marks the site of Deptford’s Ragged School.



Brook Street Ragged School, from the Illustrated London News (17 December 1853)
© The National Archives

First we’ll hear from Charles Dickens, who wrote about ragged schools in The Daily News in 1852.

“This attempt is being made in certain of the most obscure and squalid parts of the Metropolis, where rooms are opened, at night, for the gratuitous instruction of all comers, children or adults, under the title of RAGGED SCHOOLS. The name implies the purpose. They who are too ragged, wretched, filthy, and forlorn, to enter any other place: who could gain admission into no charity school, and who would be driven from any church door; are invited to come in here, and find some people not depraved, willing to teach them something, and show them some sympathy, and stretch a hand out, which is not the iron hand of Law, for their correction.”

Almost 50 years after Dickens wrote that, Booth was here and took note of Deptford's Ragged School and the street that it was on:

Booth: *Deptford Ragged School – a large square block at W. corner of Giffen Street. Two women talking in roadway as we entered (Hale Street). Well known prostitutes said the inspector. The women moved off quickly evidently recognising him. (Some women) sitting in groups on the foot path, one on a chair, more on the edge of the curbstones which one woman completed a small circle by sitting in the road with her feet towards the curb. Candle factory at west end of street emitting very evil smells. Not much crime.*



Deptford Ragged School, founded 1844
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Booth categorised this as dark blue on his map, which meant “very poor, casual, chronic want”.



The area between Giffen Street (top) and Hale Street (lower centre) is indicated in dark blue and black for extreme poverty and the lowest class of people
© Charles Booth Online Archive, LSE

Directions 3

Follow the back of the buildings, with a parking area and school to your right. Turn left into Frankham Street back towards the High Street. Stop at the mural on the back of a building.

4. Mighty ships

Frankham Street

Deptford, along with a few other areas along the Thames in London, was a very important place in terms of maritime activity from the seventeenth century to the twentieth century, as we shall find out throughout this walk.

Look at the mural on the wall depicting Deptford as a hub of maritime and naval activity in the middle of the eighteenth century. The river was deep at this point and so docks could be built, and supplies of oak and other materials for shipbuilding could be brought up the Thames or along Watling Street from Kent. The road is now the busy A2.



The warship St Albans at Deptford in 1747
Wikimedia Commons (Creative Commons License)

Trade expansion and wars with other maritime nations such as Spain, France and Holland forced English shipbuilders to stay at the cutting edge of new technology. Over the centuries, famous captains such as Francis Drake, Walter Raleigh, James Cook, William Bligh and Horatio Nelson all sailed from Deptford.

Directions 4

Return to Deptford High Street and turn right. Stop somewhere before the railway bridge.

5. Cultural melting pot

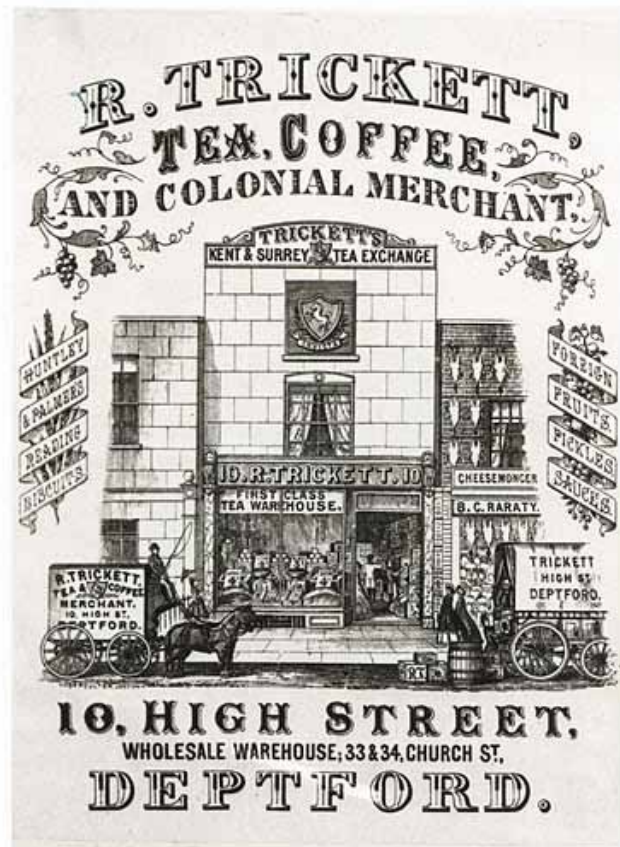
High Street

Look around you at the people on the High Street, the names of the shops and the products that they are selling. What you are seeing is a fabulous mix of cultures and races.

Deptford High Street is officially one of the most multicultural in the whole of Britain. The Vietnamese boat people came here in the 1970s. Lots of Southeast Asian and African countries are represented. We tend to think of multicultural cities as being a recent shift, but it has actually been like this in Deptford for hundreds of years.



International produce for sale on Deptford High Street
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain



The international flavour of Deptford High Street today (left) is nothing new, as the advert for Trickett's from 1850 (right) shows
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain / Lewisham Heritage (CCL)

Booth made some interesting comments about the High Street, and generally classified it was “middle class, well-to-do”.

Booth: *Wide market street 2-3 storied houses, almost as many styles of buildings as houses. The only agreement being that all have shop fronts, sometimes a part of the original building but more often as an addition thereto. Most of the shopkeepers live over the shops. Best shops are nearest the Broadway, decline in character being gradual towards railway arch. An Italian colony is growing up near Knott (Creekside) Street, ice cream vendors and Asphalt workers. North of railway arch to Evelyn Street trade is less brisk and shops not as good.*



Pyne Brothers store on Lewisham Way (1891)
– a more affluent area
Lewisham Heritage (CCL)

Directions 5

Continue along Deptford High Street. After passing under the railway bridge, take the first right into Crossfield. Keep on the road on the right hand side. After about 50 metres, stop at an opening in the wall where there is a fenced-off yard.

6. Victorian kitchen

Crossfield

There were several types of housing typical in the Victorian era. Housing for the poor tended to be long brick terraces. In Booth's time, there were terraces along both sides of Crossfield. One of them has now been replaced by the traffic island that you can see.

Look for the old fireplaces on the wall of the fenced-off yard next to you. This was once the kitchen parlour of a Victorian terraced house.

Here, Booth categorised the street as dark blue, meaning "very poor, casual, chronic want". Listen to what he noted:

Booth: *Crossfield Lane. On south side two to three storied old houses, some used as shops. Few pairs of old boots stays and stockings strung up outside one; a very primitive second hand store. North side, very neglected, broken and dirty windows, doors open, children playing about. Costers, woodchoppers, squalid poverty.*



Remains of a Victorian kitchen on Crossfield
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Crossfield Lane. On south side 2+3 storied old houses, some used as shops. Few pairs of old boots, stays & stockings strung up outside one; a very primitive second hand store. North side - 2st + 3st. wooden houses. Very neglected - broken ^{dirty} windows, doors open children playing about. Costers, woodchoppers etc. Squalid poverty. LV3 to DV3. LV3 on map

Original notes from Crossfield Lane (Ref: B368 pp20-21)
© Charles Booth Online Archive, LSE

Directions 6

Continue along Crossfield and then cross over Crossfield Church Street at the pedestrian crossing. Turn right towards the railway viaduct then almost immediately left through the entrance in the railings into the estate. Turn right and go through the third arch of the viaduct.

7. 'The worst part of Deptford'

Crossfield Estate

The blocks of houses you can see were built in the 1920s replacing Victorian terraces. The road itself used to be called Addey Street.

In Booth's time, the terraced houses here were overcrowded and the conditions for living were appalling, as Booth noted:

Booth: *Addey Street. Small two storey houses. Four rooms and an attic in roof. Footway leading to houses is about 2 ft. below level of roadway and is protected by iron railings.*



Terraced houses in Benmore Street (c.1900) cleared in the 1930s
Wikimedia Commons (CCL)

Some prostitutes and criminals. Low rough class. Officer went into a house here to arrest a man at 5am. Found father, mother and 5 children in one room. All rooms are small. The inspector reckons this is worst part of Deptford.



Part of Crossfield estate, built in the 1920s to replace Victorian terraced houses
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

So the local policeman told Charles Booth that this was the worst part of the town. But what about today?

Well the local authority buildings that now form the Crossfield Estate are considered to be of excellent quality, well-made and designed to encourage sociability.

Estates to the north-west of this site that were built in the 1970s are now considered to be the kind of poorly-designed housing that encourages social isolation and crime.

Directions 7

Walk along the path alongside the viaduct. Cross over Creekside and continue straight along the path. Stop at the bridge over the creek.

8. Victorian innovations

Halfpenny Hatch Bridge over Deptford Creek

We have been talking about poverty, overcrowding and unpleasant living conditions that were found in Deptford in the Victorian era, as well as other parts of London and other industrial cities.

But the Victorian era is not only associated with this. It was also an era of technical advancement, of engineering feats and urban modernisation. And from here we can see two of the developments of the era.



Deptford pumping station
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Here there are two railway bridges. Just behind the concrete bridge is a Victorian brick building. This is one of Joseph Bazalgette's great sewage pumping stations. In the middle of the nineteenth century, London was suffering from the 'Great Stink' as untreated sewage from an expanding population was discharged into the Thames. Bazalgette was asked by the government to find a solution and built a series of sewers and pumping stations that are still used today. The Thames is now considered the cleanest river in any capital city in Europe.



London and Greenwich Railway viaduct at Deptford (1841)
© The British Library

Another thing that developed on a broad scale in the Victorian era was the railways. The brick railway viaduct next to you is actually the oldest in London – it is a line going from London Bridge to Greenwich and beyond.

When the Greenwich station opened, Mr WH Smith, who had a stationery shop at London Bridge, was able to open a second shop in Greenwich and so begin his stationery empire.

Deptford station, opened in 1836, was the very first station that you could travel to from Central London.

There's more evidence of Victorian technology and ingenuity here, too. The railway line crosses the creek here, but the bridge would have prevented ships from coming up the creek, so engineers designed the tall metal structure that you can see. It took eight men to hoist this section of track up so that ships could enter.

It was known as the 'Halfpenny Hatch' bridge, because pedestrians were charged a halfpenny for using it. When Booth came here in 1899, the price had doubled to one pence!



The Halfpenny Hatch bridge on Deptford Creek
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Directions 8

Retrace your steps back along the path, this time with the viaduct on your right. Turn right into Creekside. At the first junction, there is a park ahead called Ferranti Park. Cross over into the park. At the far left corner is an opening into another part of the park. Go through this opening and stop nearby.

9. From pottery to park

Sue Godfrey Local Nature Reserve

Here we are in the Sue Godfrey Local Nature Reserve. Take a look at the plaque near the entrance to the park. For almost 300 years there was a pottery here. If you go to the wall in the middle of the park, you can see that it's still full of pottery shards. Here's what Booth has to say about the site when he visited it:

Booth: *Bronze Street (late Copperas Street) At the west end of the north side is a pottery. Children amusing themselves by throwing pellets of clay at each other. One girl knocks another one over in the middle of the street and is at once assailed with a volley of oaths from a woman at first floor window. On the North side houses are more modern, two storey with gardens in front.*



Deptford Pottery (1841)
© The British Library

Booth classified one side of the street as dark blue for “very poor” and those other side, where the houses were better, as light blue for merely “poor”. Take a look at the houses that are there now. They are a modern version of exactly what Booth describes: modern, two storey with gardens in front!

Bronze Street (late Copperas Street). South side is old dilapidated houses, windows broken, other decayed, contains; low labouring class. On north side houses are more modern. 2nd with gardens in front near middle of street, but very neglected; it decays wood & bushwood hangs at east end, slopes of great & contained neglected. At west end of north side is a pottery (red). Children amusing themselves by throwing pellets of clay at each other. One girl knocks another over in middle of street and is at once assailed with a volley of oaths from a woman at first floor window. Dark Blue as map. Centre of it, see map to L. 13. In L. 13



Original notes from Copperas Street (Ref: B368 pp24-25) and on the map (centre lower left in blue)
© Charles Booth Online Archive, LSE

Directions 9

Retrace your steps across the park back to Crossfield. Across the road is the entrance to the Laban building of the Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance. If it is closed, stop by the entrance. If it is open, go into the grounds. There are toilets and a café inside.

10. Dancing on deck

Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance

This magnificent and colourful building is the Laban building which was opened in 2002. The architects – Jaques Herzog and Pierre De Meuron – were awarded the prestigious Stirling Architecture Prize for it.

This is a popular and successful centre for dance. It is named after Rudolf Laban, the Hungarian choreographer who categorised the bodily movements that would become what we now call Contemporary Dance. Dancers are trained here and public performances are regularly given.



The Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance's Laban building
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Deptford is no stranger to dancing, though. Many of the ships that sailed from Deptford had among their crew, musicians – often fiddlers – who were employed by ships' captains. Their job was to play hornpipes so that sailors could exercise by dancing on deck on long voyages.

One fiddler recruited to play for sailors was Michael Byrne from Kilkenny in Ireland. He was 26 years old when Captain Bligh signed him on the Bounty. Bligh explained his view in a letter to Sir Joseph Banks:

"Some time for relaxation and mirth is absolutely necessary and I have considered it so much so that after 4 o'clock the evening is laid aside for their amusement and dancing. I had great difficulty before I left England to get a man to play the violin and I preferred at last to take one two-thirds blind than come without one."



Cadets on HMS Warspite dancing a hornpipe (1928)
National Maritime Museum (CCL)

Directions 10

If you could not go into the Laban building, go round the outside of the site by going along Creekside and then right into Copperas Street.

If you went inside the grounds of the Laban building, make your way around the side of the building which overlooks the creek. Look back for a view of the Halfpenny Hatch Bridge where you stood earlier. Go through the car park at the back of the building and out of the gate onto Copperas Street.

Follow Copperas Street round the corner to where it meets Creek Road. Cross straight over into Stowage. Just around the corner, the riverside footpath bears off to the right. Stop at this junction.

11. Riverside folk

Stowage

Now we're closer to the river where the wharves would have been. This was a place busy with activity, as Booth described.

Booth: *North into Stowage. A stinking unpaved lane with wharves on north side. On south side two storey modern homes are occupied by a low rough waterside population. This walk includes the greater part of poor Deptford.*

Most people living here work at one of the factories along the Creek. Besides the chemical works there are numerous business places employing a large number of 'hands'. The Steam Navigation Company has a large yard in the Stowage.

All these works are busy and work is plentiful so that no man need be unemployed. Women work in woodyard and laundry, girls in the tin factory or as 'gut girls' in the meat market cleaning the entrails of the slaughtered beasts.

I have grave doubts as to the knowledge of the police of the social conditions of the people. They measure the streets mainly by the proportion of offences against the law and diminution of these is an improvement which they attribute to improved social position.

What is particularly noteworthy about Booth's comments is that there is plenty of work for the local population. The actual jobs – such as gutting animal carcasses – and working conditions were probably very unpleasant and the pay poor, but no one was idle. Places like this, with its shipyards, factories and works were the driving force behind Britain's economic growth.

Unemployment levels are still quite high in the Borough of Lewisham and household incomes in Deptford are well below the London average. In many ways this makes modern Deptford quite similar to Booth's, but it is worth noting that Booth found virtually none of his lowest classification (black) in this area.



General Steam Navigation Company, Deptford (c1841)
© The British Library

Directions 11

Follow the riverside footpath for about 200 metres. Stop at the statue of Peter the Great on the corner of the riverside walkway.

12. Russian visitor

Peter the Great statue

Here we find a statue of Peter the Great. Why – you might wonder – is there a statue of a Russian Tsar in Deptford?

The reason is that Peter the Great came to Deptford from Russia over 300 years ago – in 1698 – to learn about shipbuilding.

There's a bit of a story here, too. Peter the Great rented the nearby manor house of Sayes Court and managed to do a great deal of damage by throwing wild drunken parties.



An Indiaman in Barnard's Yard, Deptford
Engraving by H Moses (1824)
© The British Library



Statue of Peter the Great
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering
Britain

The owner of Sayes Court – John Evelyn wrote about it in his diary:

Feb 6th 1698

The Czar Emperor of Muscovy, having a mind to see the building of ships, hired my house at Sayes Court (Deptford), and made it his Court and Palace, lying and remaining in it, new furnished for him by the King.

June 9th 1698

I went to Deptford to view how miserably the Czar of Muscovy had left my house after three months making it his court, having got Sir Christopher Wren his Majesties surveyor and Mr. London his gardener to go down and make an estimate of the repairs, for which they allowed 150 pounds in their report to the Lord of the Treasury.

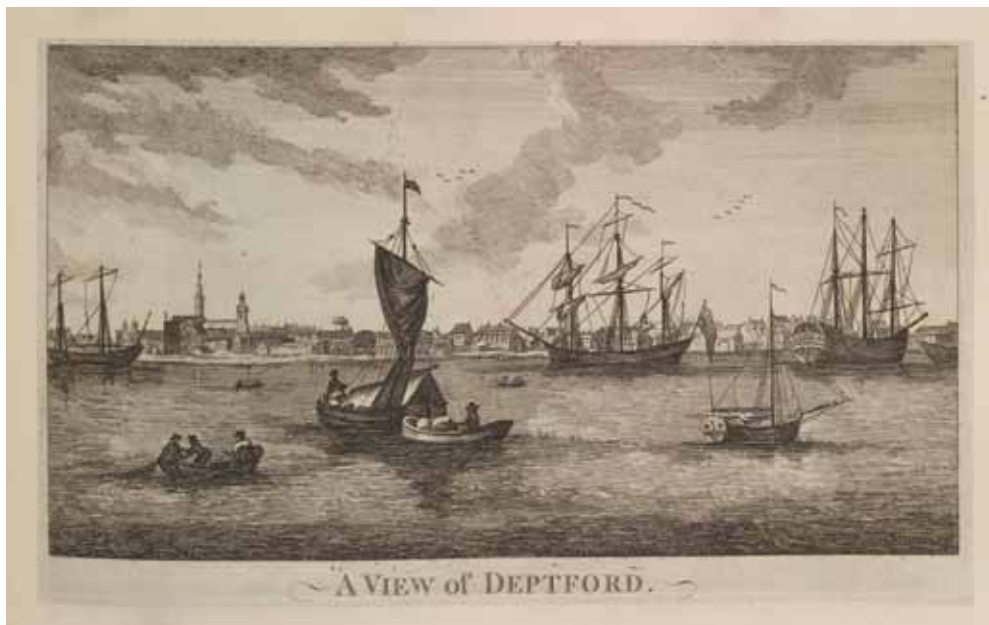
Directions 12

From the statue, turn back towards the river. Go to the railings overlooking the river.

13. An interminable waterway

Riverside

To get a picture of what it was like a hundred years ago, let's hear a description of the Thames at this point in 1902 from Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness*.



View of Deptford (1850)
© The British Library

'The sea-reach of the Thames stretched before us like the beginning of an interminable waterway. In the offing the sea and the sky were welded together without a joint, and in the luminous space the tanned sails of the barges drifting up with the tide seemed to stand still in red clusters of canvas sharply peaked, with gleams of varnished spits. A haze rested on the low shores that ran out to sea in vanishing flatness. The air was dark above Gravesend, and farther back still seemed condensed into a mournful gloom, brooding motionless over the biggest, and the greatest, town on earth.

The tidal current runs to and fro in its unceasing service, crowded with memories of men and ships it had borne to the rest of home or to the battles of the sea...It had known the ships and the men. They had sailed from Deptford, from Greenwich and from Erith - the adventurers and the settlers; kings' ships and the ships of men...hunters for gold or pursuers of fame, they all had gone out on that stream, bearing the sword and often the torch...What greatness had not floated on the ebb of that river into the mystery of an unknown earth!...The dreams of men, the seed of commonwealths, the germ of empires.'

Directions 13

Continue along the riverside footpath for a short distance. Stop alongside the abandoned landing stages.

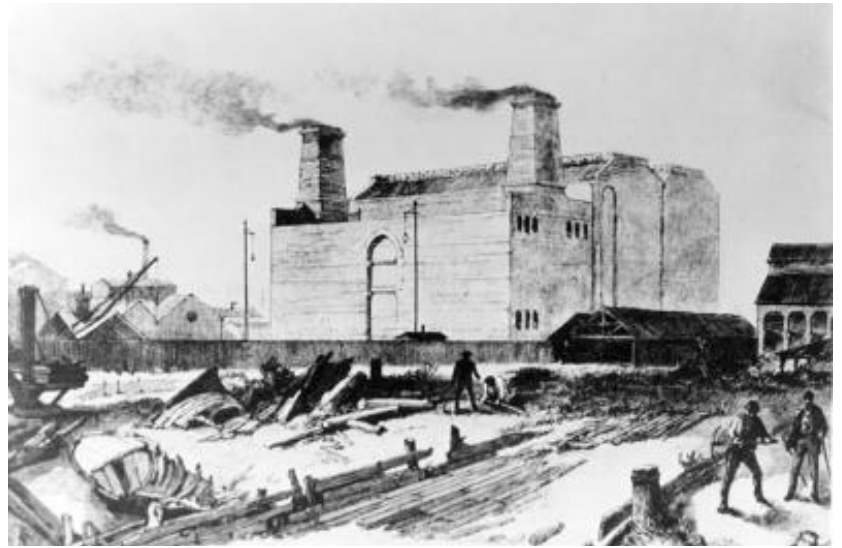
14. Powering London

Abandoned landing stages

As we have already heard, the Victorian era was one of industrial growth, engineering feats and technological advancement. One such development was electricity.

The ever growing number of factories and industrial plants needed power to run their machinery.

It was here that the world's first commercial electricity plant was opened in 1889, by Sebastian Ziani de Ferranti (who was from Liverpool, despite his Italian name).



Deptford Power Station (1890)
Courtesy of Magpie Resource Library



Abandoned landing stages at Deptford
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Deptford was chosen because this large site had been vacated by the East India Company.

It also had plenty of water and coal could be brought up the river to the landing stages you can still see, or by rail from other parts of the country.

Small areas of London were already being lit by small electricity generators using direct current (dc) but Ferranti's 400 kilowatt alternators used alternate current (ac) to send a 10,000 volt current of electricity to central London. The days of gas lighting were numbered.

Directions 14

Continue along the riverside footpath. After a short distance the path turns left away from the river with blocks of flats on the left and a boat storage area on the right. Follow the path round, go through the bollards and then turn left along Deptford Green. Stop outside one of the housing blocks on the right hand side.

15. Social mixing

Deptford Green

Here at the riverside part of Deptford, Booth noted a mixture in styles of housing and the type of people who lived here. His classification was mixed, including dark blue for “very poor” to pink for “fairly comfortable”.

Booth: *Deptford Green, Old fashioned houses, two and three storey. Very mixed in style and also character of occupants. Some red tiled roofs, others slated, one wooden house. Some look quite comfortable. On the riverside is old Deptford with its red tiled small windowed houses which in their decadence retain much of their quaint picturesque appearance.*



Housing on Deptford Green (left)
next to the riverside wharves
© Charles Booth Online Archive, LSE



A selection of types of housing in Deptford
Clockwise from top left: Flagon Row, Wellington Street (c.1880); Mill Lane, now Brookmill Road (c1890);
Prince Street (1931); Watergate Street (no date)
Lewisham Heritage (CCL)

What about this area today? Look around you at the different types of housing. Many parts of London have 'gentrified' in the last couple of decades and the process usually involves middle class people moving into Victorian and Georgian properties. Deptford however, has very few of these left – it's gentrification is happening in the form of the many shiny new riverfront blocks that you can see under construction.

Only time will show how well the residents of the social housing you have seen, and the residents of these new-builds will get on, but the trend is for the developers to provide many facilities inside the new blocks which does not bode well for integration.



Housing in Deptford today is mixed, as it was in Booth's time
Social housing such as the blocks on Deptford Green (top left) is juxtaposed with private housing such as the restored Georgian mansions on Albury Street (top right) and new apartment blocks including Creekside Village (bottom left) and Greenfell Mansions (bottom right)
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Directions 15

Continue along Deptford Green as far as St Nicholas Church on the left hand side. Stop outside the gates.

16. Skulls and murderers

St Nicholas churchyard

We've been thinking mainly about Deptford in the Victorian era, but there have been people living here for much longer.

If the church is open take a look inside. The oldest part is from the fourteenth century.

On your way into the churchyard, look at the gate pillars. Rumour has it that this is where Elizabeth I's privateers got the idea for a pirate flag.

Directions 16a

Go into the churchyard and make your way around the right hand side of the church. Look on the back wall of the churchyard, and stop at the stone to mark the death of Christopher Marlowe.



A skull and crossbones at the gates of St Nicholas Church
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain



A Portrait supposedly of Christopher Marlowe (1585)
Wikimedia Commons (CCL)

And here we come to a tale of murder! One of England's greatest playwrights, Christopher Marlowe – who was a contemporary of William Shakespeare – is buried somewhere in this graveyard.

His name appears on the churches burial register for 1593. He was stabbed to death in a brawl in a nearby house. There are many conspiracy theories surrounding his death – that Marlowe was a spy for the English government or possibly a double agent for the Catholics.

Here's an extract from the original 1593 coroner's report of his death, which describes how he met his end.

"after supper the said Ingram & Christopher Morley were in speech & uttered one to the other divers malicious words for the reason that they could not be at one nor agree about the payment of the sum of pence it so befell that the said Christopher Morley on a sudden & of his malice towards the said Ingram aforethought, then & there maliciously drew the dagger of the said Ingram which was at his back..."

...and with the same dagger the said Christopher Morley then & there maliciously gave the aforesaid Ingram two wounds on his head of the length of two inches & of the depth of a quarter of an inch; where-upon the said Ingram, in fear of being slain, & sitting in the manner aforesaid between the said Nicholas Skeres & Robert Poley so that he could not in any wise get away, in his own defence & for the saving of his life, then & there struggled with the said Christopher Morley to get back from him his dagger aforesaid...

in which affray the same Ingram could not get away from the said Christopher Morley; & so it befell in that affray that the said Ingram, in defence of his life, with the dagger aforesaid to the value of 12d, gave the said Christopher then & there a mortal wound over his right eye of the depth of two inches & of the width of one inch; of which mortal wound the aforesaid Christopher Morley then & there instantly died."



Memorial plaque for Christopher Marlowe
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Directions 16b

Retrace your steps out of the churchyard onto Deptford Green. Turn left and then immediately right into McMillan Street. After a short distance turn right and enter St Nicholas Green.

17. Riverside rest

St Nicholas Green

Although we have been able to see some evidence of Victorian Deptford in the street layouts and buildings, some no longer exist. There are two reasons in particular.

First that Deptford was very badly bombed in the Second World War and second that there were government programmes of slum clearances to demolish the cramped and unsanitary housing.

St Nicholas Green however, is not an open space created by slum clearance or wartime bombing, but an original public garden, just as it was in Booth's day:



Pond and public park at the corner of Borthwick Street and Watergate
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Booth: *St Nicholas Garden, which has been extended north-east to Benbow Street, the northern part being a children's playground. The ground is narrow but well stocked with trees, the shade of which is evidently appreciated by the people. Many men of the river side type meeting here.*

As you can see, little has changed and there is even a children's playground called Twinkle Park at the northern end.

Directions 17

Walk straight through St Nicolas Green to the primary school at the far end. Go round the left hand side of the school and follow the footpath through the playground. Go past the pond and turn left into Watergate Street. Stop at the first junction on the left with Trevithick Street.

18. 'Foetid smells and rough women'

Corner of Watergate and Trevithick Street

The area beyond the high brick wall was Britain's biggest cattle market during Booth's time and he didn't hold back in describing the conditions here, particularly the smells.

Booth: *South along Watergate Street. Cattle Market wall on west side. Men used to be decoyed here and robbed. Faint foetid smell prevails, overpowered in places by disgusting stenches, Rough women; one with head bandaged; others with blank eyes; one old harridan sitting on a doorstep with a dirty clay pipe; shoeless children.*

Costers, street sellers, gutcleaners. 'wherever there is beer there, they are, and the more the better' was the Sergeant's summing up of these people.

During the Second World War, this area of the cattle market was used as a US amphibious base in preparation for D Day but it was all but destroyed by V2 rockets in 1944.

Look at the railings of Rowley House. These are actually stretchers from the blitz that have been re-cycled.



The New Foreign Cattle Market, the Central Shed, Deptford
Engraving by Illustrated London News (1872)



Railings at Rowley House – recycled stretchers
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Directions 18

Continue along Watergate Street then turn right into Prince Street. Stop outside the Dog and Bell pub.

19. What shall we do with the drunken sailor?

Dog and Bell pub, Prince Street

Wherever there were large working populations, there were facilities for their rest and recreation. In Victorian London – as today – this was pubs and bars.

Many pubs are closing in Deptford (as they are all over Britain) as high taxation, the smoking ban and the popularity of wine bars all take their toll.

We all know alcohol consumption is as popular as ever, but fashions for drinking establishments change.

The Dog and Bell has been on this site for over three hundred years and despite these changes retains a traditional air and is still going strong.

Booth: *One characteristic of this area is the large number of fully licensed houses, some are large gin palaces but even the little places that in most districts would be beer houses have the full license. The cattle market and the works on the river bank explain this peculiarity but in any case the district has too many licensed houses.*



The Dog and Bell pub
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Directions 19

From the pub, go back to Watergate Street and turn right. Continue along to the junction with the main road. You need to go straight over into Deptford High Street but look for a safe pedestrian crossing point. Once on Deptford High Street, take the second left into Albury Street. Stop outside the row of houses on the left hand side.

20. Sea captain's houses

Albury Street

Of course, Deptford was not only a place for the very poor. Larger houses had been built for the middle classes, like these in Albury Street.

By the time of Booth's survey, however, some of the larger houses had been divided into multiple homes for poorer people.

He classified the street as purple for "mixed" with some people comfortable and others poor and pink for "fairly comfortable".



Full circle: three-storey houses on Albury Street were originally occupied by wealthy middle class people and are now once more a rather desirable address
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain



Elaborate door lintel on Albury Street
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Booth: *Old three storey houses built for middle-class and formerly occupied by sea captains. Fine panelled doors; carved lintels. Now most are occupied by labouring people, three or more families in a house. Doctor, nursery, regulated lodging house (about forty to fifty beds). At east end is a small cottage, around three rooms, ground floor only with large garden in front filled with vegetables, new laid eggs for sale.*

Directions 20

Continue along Albury Street. At the end, turn right down the side of some flats and right again around the back side. Find a gate on the left hand side into the grounds of St Paul's churchyard. Walk around to the front of the church. Look around the grassy area outside the front of the church for a small stone which marks the grave of Mydidee.

21. From Tahiti to Deptford

Mydidee's grave, St Paul's churchyard

Running throughout our walk has been a strong connection between Deptford and the sea.

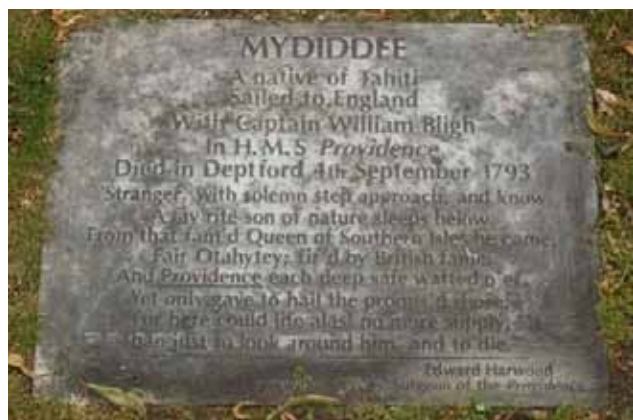
Over three centuries ago, it was a centre for shipbuilding and people came from abroad to learn British techniques.

Over two centuries ago, it was the launching point for ships that were heading out on expeditions and voyages across the world.

150 years ago it was a hive of activity as vessels docked at the wharves, bringing goods from across the empire.



A View of His Majesty's Dockyard at Deptford
Engraving by Carington Bowles (1772)
© The British Library



Grave of Mydiddee in St Paul's churchyard
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Here's something connecting Deptford with the other side of the world. Captain Bligh sailed from Deptford in 1787 on a mission to take breadfruit plants from Tahiti to the West Indies.

Bligh survived the famous Mutiny in 1789 and three years later completed the mission, returning to Deptford in 1793.

He brought with him a very special guest, a Tahitian prince called Mydiddee. You can read about his last months on his gravestone here at St Pauls.

Mydidee's story is a fitting end and pulls together some of the themes of seafaring, culture and class that we have explored on this walk. It is fascinating to compare Booth's notes with the present and see just what has changed and also what has remained the same.

Directions 21

You have now reached the end of the walk. If you go to the main church gates you will find yourself back on the High Street just a few hundred metres from where we started at the big anchor.

Further information

Caroline's Miscellany

Blog featuring Deptford

<http://carolineid.blogspot.com/search/label/deptford>

Charles Booth Online Archive

Major archive featuring searchable copies of Booth's maps

<http://booth.lse.ac.uk/>

Flying Bombs and Rockets

Details of German missiles that hit Deptford in the Second World War

http://www.flyingbombsandrockets.com/V1_summary_se14.html

Old Deptford History

<http://www.olddeptfordhistory.com>

South London Guide: Deptford

History of the area plus a large collection of period images and maps

<http://www.southlondonguide.co.uk/deptford/index.htm>

South Western Electricity Historical Society

Ferranti's Deptford Power Station

<http://www.swehs.co.uk/archives/news25su.pdf>

St Paul's Church

Information on the church's history, building and Sinfonia

<http://www.achurchnearyou.com/deptford-st-paul/>

Credits

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