

Surrey Quays

A walk for the Twentieth Century Society

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Background history

Surrey Docks has a long and complex history beginning with Howland Great Dock of 1696-9. This was a refuge dock to protect boats from storms. It later was used for the Whaling Trade and became called Greenland Dock. It was the redevelopment of Greenland Dock at the beginning of the 19th century that marked the beginning of what became Surrey Docks. Originally there were four competing dock companies that built docks for their immediate needs. They were amalgamated into the Surrey Commercial Docks in 1864, and attempts were made to convert the various docks and basins into a workable dock complex. The effect of the ad hoc development of the original docks explains the complex and confusing layout of the Surrey Docks. Superimposed on the docks was the Grand Surrey Canal of 1810. A branch canal to Croydon was built. This was originally intended to be extended to the English Channel but this never happened and this canal was in decline by 1845. The docks dealt mainly in bulk goods, and especially in timber from Canada and the Baltic, hence the names of the docks. The docks closed in 1969-70 apart from some ship repair work at South Dock. The Grand Surrey Canal closed in 1971. The route of this is fairly easily traced to Peckham. Initially the docks were taken over by Southwark Council and used in part for land fill with the intention of redevelopment. The area had been zoned for housing, but in the seventies there was little incentive to build. Traditionally the area was almost entirely rented accommodation. With the closure of the docks there was high unemployment. The Council and the Port of London Authority filled 423 of the 460 acres of water. The standard of infilling was not sufficient for rebuilding and much of it had to be dug out and refilled before building could take place. There was a master plan by R Seifert & Partners, produced for Lysander (a developer) and Southwark Council and the GLC. For various reasons this project failed to take off and the land was transferred to the newly formed London Docklands Development Corporation. The LDDC commissioned Brian Clouston and Partners, landscape architects, to produce a new master plan. They proposed a series of new waterways and paths linking the various parts of the docks and the Thames. Building heights and the types of materials used were specified and development areas were sold by competitive tendering. This led to a variety of styles of building. A retail and industrial area are centred on the Canada Dock. This is less successful part of the plan as it has produced a rather empty area between Canada Water and Greenland Dock. Russia Dock was made into a nature reserve. Small scale housing filled much of the rest of the docks. Larger developments took place along the river front; as a result the Thames Path leaves the river for quite long stretches. The work of the LDDC in Surrey Docks was completed

in December 1996 when the site was returned to Southwark Council. The whole area was renamed Surrey Quays in 1989 when the Surrey Quays shopping centre was opened. Surrey Docks tube station (now London Overground) was renamed at that time

Canada Water Station

Canada Water Station as designed by the Fleet Line Extension to Thamesmead in-house architectural team very early in the project and was hardly altered from the original plan when built as part of the Jubilee Line Extension. It is influenced by the design of the Hong Kong MTR box stations. It has three levels underground; a ticket hall concourse, the East London Line (now part of London Overground) and the Jubilee line platforms. As the East London is rising from its river crossing at this point the platforms for it are sloped; a unique situation on the tube. The final architectural details were made by the in-house team with Herron Associates and the engineering is by Benaims. The drum was designed by Bruno Happold. The station is simple and practical. It looks spectacular at night. The station is on the site of Albion Dock and opened in 1999; in August for the East London and September for the jubilee

Bus Interchange

The associated bus interchange is by Eva Jiřičná Architects. Like the station it is mainly of glass. It is completely covered to reduce the noise and pollution affecting the high rise flats of the Canada Estate (LCC/GLC 1962-4). Like the station it opened in 1999

Canada Water

Canada Water was one of a number of docks and pools that comprised the Surrey Docks. The main trade in the docks to the north of Greenland Docks was timber and the various docks are named after timber producing areas of Canada and the Baltic. Only part of Canada Dock has been re-excavated. It is mainly an ecological habitat. The Deal Porters sculpture by Philip Bews is hidden in the ecology! RPS Coulston designed the infrastructure here (and at Surrey Water)

Shopping Centre

A series of large sheds provide Decathlon, a mega sports store, and a shopping centre. The shopping centre, with large Tesco, was opened in 1988 and has 280,000 square feet of floor. Worth seeing are the two murals just inside the two entrances. It was designed by Fitzroy Robinson Partnership. The Decathlon, sports goods store, is very functional (and will probably be replaced). A leisure area with multiscreen cinema was built behind the shopping area

Bascule Bridge

A remnant of the docks retained as a field monument. It is a late example of the Scherzer Rolling Bascule. It was originally (1955) over Deptford Creek and was moved here in 1959. - Note the large fossil containing limestone used to face the underpass. This connection between the Canada Water area and Greenland Dock is unsatisfactory and improvement of this is included in the redevelopment

Greenland Dock

This is the site of Howlands Great Dock, originally built as a shelter dock for boats. It became the main dock for the Greenland Whaling Trade. Whaling ended in 1820 and the dock was converted to other trades, mainly grain here and in South Dock. The warehouses were still standing in the mid-eighties but were demolished without consideration of conversion. Greenland dock was enlarged in 1904 by Sir James Wolfe Barry. When LDDC took over the site they asked Conran Roche, in 1982, to develop a master plan for Greenland and South Docks as they were the largest area of water that had not been filled in. The report was received in 1984. Buildings in this area are in general higher than much of the rest of the docks area. (The walk will go down the north side of the dock but building on the south side will be pointed out)

Howland Quay

At the west end of the dock is a block of flats by, PRP Architects, with curved roofs and simple design which looks fifties, but date from 1995-6. They are aimed at the upper end of the market. They are gates in Worgan Street, where they face the Osprey Estate by Yorke, Rosenburgh & Mardell (1946-9) for the LCC. (If you go and look at the land side note the replica docker's shelter with a mural by Bermondsey Artists Group)

Lock Keeper Height

Block of flats. Privately let

Brunswick Quay

These blocks of flats are by the Form Design Group and where built in 1985. Like much of the work of this practice they have bold features. The arcades are also practical as they give some protection from the weather. It can be quite windy around here. (The naming conversion for the developments is that Yards become Quays so Brunswick Yard is Brunswick Quay.)

Greenland Quay

On the southern side of the dock this provides affordable housing. May be by Form Design or by Southwark Council in the style of Brunswick Quay.

Surrey Docks Watersports Centre

The original Watersports Centre was run by the ILEA at the Redriff Road end of the dock. The current building is on the site where the Surrey Canal joined the docks. It provides an important leisure use and includes exercise and gym based sports as well as water based sports. It was redeveloped in 2010, replacing the shed building of 1989-90.

Swedish Quay

This large development of flats is by David Price and Gordon Cullen (1985-90). It is an eclectic semi arts and crafts design finished to a higher standard than much of the other buildings.

Baltic Quay

At the western end of South Dock, it includes a 14 storey tower and rises above the surrounding building with curved roofs and bright colours. It is by Lister Drew Haines Barrow, and was designed for mixed use in 1990, but converted to entirely flats in 1994-6

James Walker

Engineer of Greenland Dock. Bust by Michael Rizzello 1990

Russia Dock

Now a nature reserve. We will enter this area later on

Russell Place

This is a mixed use development of shops flats and a pub by Shankland Cox from 1989. The distinctive features are the banding of two colours of bricks and the large bay windows and stair wells. The bay window is taken to an extreme size on the pub where it gives excellent views. The drum shaped end of Tavistock Tower provides a good feature marking the end of the dock, but the rest of the development is lower rise

Plover Way

This is one of the most adventurous of the many designs for housing lay out. It was designed by Shephard Epstein and Hunter in 1988-96. There is an outer crescent of fairly standard modern terrace. However the central part incorporates an industrial building of 1918, the yellow brick of the old contrasting with the red of the new. In the re-excavated part of Norway Dock pairs of semi-detached house, in white rendering and yellow brick, appear to float on the water. The little bridges provide a short cut across the site have recently been replaced. The original had become rotten and had been fenced off for some years, and were rather steep

Finland Quay

The housing here is by Richard Reid (1987-9). It is based on the Paragon at Blackheath. The flats over the car parks are arranged to look like pairs of large private houses

Swing Bridge

By James Walker Moved from South Dock

South Dock (on the opposite side)

During the War South Dock was drained and used to build Mulberry Harbours (named after Mulberry Quay on the Thames nearby). (A few Mulberry Harbours can be found on the riverside at Rainham Marshes where they once formed part of the sea defences). The dock was re-dug out and is now the largest marina in London. The interconnection between South Dock and Greenland Dock is new. It aids in circulation of the water and allows access for boats in Greenland Dock to the Thames

Helsinki Square

Social housing

The Danish Buildings

Either side of Greenland Passage are a group of buildings designed and financed by Danes. The architects are Kjaer & Richter, with Macintosh, Haines and Kennedy. They were also built by Danes with Danish materials, note the narrow bricks. They use a postmodernist interpretation of some classical feature, notably very tall columns. The buildings on the north side are Queen of Denmark Court (which has a private garden which we can get a view of through the entrance), the King Frederick IX Tower and Royal Court. On the south side is Prince's Tower. They date from around 1988

Retained buildings

On the south side are the tide gauge (the square building) and the lock keepers office. These were restored by LDDC in 1987. A new building, copying the office building, has been provided for the offices of the administration of the dock.

Curlicue

A sculpture in stainless steel piping by William Pye (1988)

Greenland Dock Entrance

The dock by Sir John Wolfe Barry (1904) is retained but not in use. Much of the hydraulic equipment is retained, as is the double swing bridge

Randalls Rents

Odessa Wharf was originally built as a mould loft. The moulds were patterns used in constructing ships. It was later used as a granary and has now been converted into housing. Note the retained crane at the far end

New Caledonian Wharf

The wharf was originally known as Redriff Wharf and continued to be a commercial wharf until the late 70s. After falling into disrepair, Rosehaugh acquired the site in 1989 and redeveloped it into 104 flats together with architects Shephard Epstein Hunter. The building benefits from a large central courtyard, which includes a fountain.

Ship and Whale

This public house dates from 1767 but was rebuilt in 1880

Redriff Estate

This is a nineteen thirties estate. One block is in the style chosen by for Bermondsey by Dr Alfred Salter (GP and Councillor) when it was clear that the borough could not afford the cost or the space to build in garden suburb style used at Wilson Grove. An extra floor has been added by using the roof open space originally provided for clothes drying and children's play area. The estate was bombed in 1940 and rebuilt in a style sympathetic to the original

The Ship York

First recorded in 1809 as the York. Possibly named after HMS York built by S and D Brent in 1907. Called the Ship York from 1835 by which time the York was a prison ship. The current building is probably a post bombing rebuild or repair

The Orange Bull

Opened in 1865 as the Surrey Commercial Docks Tavern. It was a take on pub where dockers were hired and paid by the day. In 1909 its name changed to Fitchetts. It was damage by bombs and repaired hence the 40s look. In 2005 it became a South African pub. It has very recently (February 2012) been launched as the Orange Bull

The Norwegian Seamen's Church (Docklands Settlement)

This is the original Norwegian Seamen's church. The foundation stone was laid by Prince Oscar, Crown Prince of Sweden in 1871. The Scandinavian churches still have a presence in Surrey Docks but their current buildings are to the periphery of the dock area. In 1920 the building became part of the Docklands Settlement. It continues in community use. The "Ebenezer" is from 1 Sam 7 12 *And Samuel took a stone and erected it between Mizpah and Jeshana and gave it the name Ebenezer saying "This far has the Lord aided us"*

(From here is a sight of a red crane retained as field monument.)

Church Court

Block of 1930s era flats. They have recently been refurbished by Barratt

Holy Trinity

The original church was built in 1837/8 by Sampson Kempthorne in neo gothic style (there are picture in the church). It was bombed on 7th September 1940 and rebuilt in 1957/9 by Thomas Ford with a barrel concrete roof and copper cladding. Its most interesting feature is a mural of the Crucifixion by Hans Fiebusch behind the altar. Fiebusch (1898-1998) was a German Jewish artist who fled Germany in the thirties as was befriended by Bishop Bell. He produced many murals for Anglican churches. An appreciation of his work was made by C20 in 1993. The war memorial survived the blitz.

Parish School

The parish school (1836) was untouched by the blitz. It was used for services during and after the war and now functions as the parish hall

Surrey Docks Farm

It will be obvious that we are by Surrey Docks Farm. It was opened in 1975 and moved to its current site in 1986 on the site of South Wharf which was the largest shipyard in Rotherhithe. We will not be visiting this today but it is worth a visit.

Bryan Road

Bryan House is a thirties block built forming three sides round a small formal garden

Holyoake Court

Built by Corigan Soundy Kilaiditi for the Regan Group as affordable for sale houses. It comprises units of various sizes in 3 story blocks. An interesting composition of shapes and colours

Bridge

The foot bridge crosses Salter Way. Salter Way was created by Southwark Council as part of its attempt to redevelop the site. It is an extension to the Redriff Road which bisected the original dock complex and is a replaces Rotherhithe Street as the main traffic route round the docks and their replacement.

Redriff Primary School

The original school dates from 1906 but was bombed in 1941. The school continued using the Settlement Building, empty buildings and rooms in private houses. In 1948 the current school was built by the LCC and is their first post war school. It was designed with plenty of playground. It had a canteen that also provided meals for other school, and a school clinic. In 1955 a nursery department was added. A notable feature is the murals.

Health Centre

The area behind the Health centre was laid out open space but I recall it being rundown in the late nineties. It is scheduled for redevelopment and the recent more secure fencing indicates that there may be action soon. The Health Centre which serves the whole of surrey Quays is what might now be called a polyclinic.

Downtown Road Shaft

Ventilation and escape shaft for the Jubilee Line.

Russia Dock Nature Reserve

The Russia Dock was converted to nature a nature reserve as part of the original plans. It provides a pleasant pedestrian route from Greenland Dock. The distinctive public seating is original. There are now classrooms within the wood

Stave Hill

A mound made of rubble in 1985 by the LDDC. It has good views over Surry Quays and for some considerable distance beyond. On the top is a bronze relief, "Surrey Commercial Docks 1896" by Michael Rizzello Stave Hill provides a good view over Surrey Docks and the wider docklands.

Fishermans Drive

A series of housing developments which apart from the choice of brick colour look as though they date from the thirties.

St John's RC Primary School

Dates from about 1990

Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception

This is a replacement for the Catholic Church, and Convent and girls home built in Bryan Street in 1858 and bombed in the war. It was built in 1987-8 and contains church and hall that can be combined into a larger space. It also includes clergy flat

Alfred Salter Primary School

This is by Southwark Council and dates from 1995. It is described as postmodern and has striped patterns in yellow and red brick

A selection of house styles

By taking a circuitous route, including Dockhill Avenue, Hull Close and Hurley Court we get a chance to see a variety of house designs. The use of a complex pattern of cul-de-sacs provides a level of privacy. In some social housing, (for example Grahame Park in Colindale) this arrangement has not worked. May be it is a matter of scale.

Bacon College

This is an old foundation from the Will of Josiah Bacon of 1703. The first school was built in 1713 and rebuilt in 1891. Originally it was a boy's school. The move to the present site and the current build are the result of a reappraisal of the role of the school. Bacon College opened as a City Technology College in 1991 and gained a sixth form in 1996. Its construction was funded by the LDDC, who also contributed to the building of other schools. Low yellow brick buildings round a courtyard. Low pitched roofs with metal cladding

Albion Channel

A new canal links Canada Dock to the River Thames. It was designed by RPS Cloustons and built between 1985 and 1990. The idea was to create a feature which would serve as landscape infrastructure for the redevelopment of Surrey Docks

Harmondsworth Quay

This large shed for the printing works of Associated Newspapers is by Watkins Gray International

Wolfe Crescent

A very compact development by CZWE with a crescent of town houses and some four story towers. Detailing on all the buildings are bold. Some may find it over busy on the eye.

Barratt's Development

The extensive developments by Barratt's are more massive and bulkier than the developments from the 1990s that we have seen so far.

Various Towers

These are by the Form Design Group built in 1988.

Gateway Plaza

The open area between the new flats and the library is being developed as a public open space.

Library

Opened in November 2011, building having started in 2009. It is designed by Piers Gough of CZWG. A dramatically inverted pyramid that overlooks Canada Water. There are three floors. The ground floor contains café, quick serve library and a community Culture Space. The first floor is the main library area with the fiction section and popular subjects like sport, gardening and travel. The top floor, in effect a gallery has reference section, local history and more academic subjects like business language and science. There are history panels in the second floor gallery which are worth looking at. It also has meeting and learning rooms. The building will spearhead the regeneration of this area of Surrey Quays

What next

The Barratt Housing probably indicates the scale and form of housing that will be built in the future. There are still some areas of undeveloped land. The industry is likely to move out. Harmondsworth (Associated Newspapers) are scheduled to move to Thurrock in the near future. This may well free up land for housing, although no decision has been made.

The redevelopment of the Canada Water area is the most significant change to the area. It is being developed by a consortium of British Land and Canada Quays (a new company). The developments were originally intended to start in 2005 but were delayed until 2009 when the library was started. The Library and the Plaza are the start of the redevelopment of the Canada Water Area. A rock feature Canadian Shield (using rock from the Shield) is planned for the eastern side of Canada Water. The ecological edge of Canada Water will be enhanced. The shopping experience will be enhanced with a refurbishment and enlargement of the Shopping centre. A retail shopping galleria will be built leading down to Surrey Quays Station. The bus interchange at the southern end of the site will be improved and pedestrian and road links out of the site will be improved. Sport and leisure facilities both within Canada Water and at Severn Islands Sports Centre on Lower Road will be enhanced. There will even be a space that will convert to ice skating in the winter.

Conclusion

All the areas of Docklands have distinctive features. Surrey Quays was always planned as mainly housing. The original new housing could be built as low density as initially demand was not great, although as the project developed demand increased, and developers stopped setting up show houses as they had waiting lists. The amount of open land and Ecology Park is generous. Canada Water, as discussed above, is due a makeover. As in much of London any new housing is likely to be of higher density. There is little in Surrey Quays that is spectacular but the overall look and feel is good.