

U3A Bike rides Autumn ride to Olympic Park Friday 2nd August 2024

Some of the group assembled at Denmark Hill station, Platform 2, on a very warm summer's morning. A 35 minute train ride on the Overground took us to Haggerston Station where the whole group gathered in Stonebridge Gardens.



Thanks to a reminder by Caroline, I organised the group photo, taken by a passing gentleman!

A new route which avoided the Regent's Canal, with its low bridges and narrow tow-path, led us along residential street to the entrance to Victoria Park. An enjoyable ride took us past the large lake to the Podium Café, and then on around the park perimeter towards the Cadogan Gate.



Just before we left the park, we stopped beside one of the two alcoves to be found there.

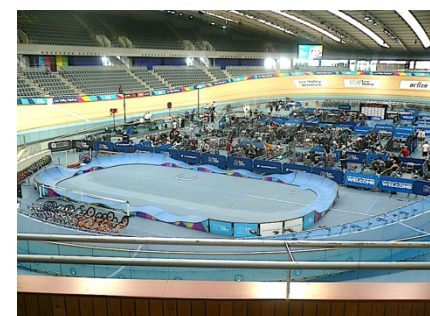
These once were to be found on the medieval London Bridge, the one built in 1209 and lined with houses, shops and even a chapel; these buildings were torn down to ease congestion and four alcove were added. (The others are now in the grounds of Guys's Hospital and in the Courtlands Estate in Richmond.)

The route was then across the pedestrian bridge spanning the busy A12, with the sound of traffic below, and we arrived at a set of steps (with the option to use a lift) to take us into the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park beside the Copper Box.



Ahead were the wide open paths across the park and we were soon approaching the Lee Valley Velodrome, with its distinctive flared roof.

Bikes locked up, we went up to the viewing area of the cycle track. There were lots of people and bikes, but disappointingly, there were no riders on the track.



The café is called The 42 Degrees, this being the maximum angle of the banked track and which we agreed it would be a daunting experience to ride!

On the move again, a slope took us down to towards the River Lea and then on along some narrow paths where brambles and nettles reached out to impede progress before we crossed the Lea and arrived at the Lea Navigation and the route of the Capital Ring to the Old Ford Lock.

A pedestrian bridge took us from the north to the south bank, and we crossed beneath a busy intersection on the A12, unaware of the traffic above.

And so to Three Mills Island and the House Mill, with the Oast House alongside, where there is the largest standing tidal mill in the country.

The House Mill and the Clock Mill made a fine view. The channel which carried the mill race used to power the mills is clearly visible below the House Mill. Each day there are four periods during which the flow turns the mill wheels.



We learned that at the time of the Domesday Book there were eight or nine mills here, used to grind flour for the bakers at Bow.

The next point of interest was the Bow Locks where the Lea Navigation meets the River Lea, soon to become Bow Creek; the creek makes its meandering way to the Thames at Leamouth. Cycles had to be pushed over the bridge, with its ridged surface designed to give horses purchase on the slopes in former times.



We had arrived at the Limehouse Cut that provided a navigable route from the Lea Navigation to the Thames at Limehouse Basin.

The duckweed was thriving after a period of strong sunshine. I pointed out the walls of the canal; some parts were of the original stone blocks (as seen here), others were ugly modern concrete or metal shuttering.



At one time the Limehouse Basin would have been full of sailing ships and canal barges, horses and warehouses; now it is surrounded by expensive properties, and yachts and motor launches nearly fill the basin.

We cycled around the east end of the large basin, About 200 yards to the east of the canal entrance, behind a viaduct arch, is the octagonal tower of an hydraulic accumulator, built in 1869, with an information board. This provided power to cranes, dock gates and winches. The path continues around the Basin to the east, crossing a pedestrian bridge over the Limehouse Cut. The canal passes through the Limehouse Basin Lock and under the Narrow Street swing bridge to reach the River Thames. To the right was Gordon Ramsey's restaurant The Narrow.

A short ride took us to the Yurt Café where fortunately we were able to find tables in the shade under the large awning. The second group arrived some time later, having taken an extensive tour of the Olympic Park.

Riders Andrew Burke Brin Heatley Caroline Strallen. Daniela Walther. David Rosenfeld. Irene Skiadopoulou. Jan Rae. Jane Evans. John Clements. John Davies. Mark Stones. Martin Dale. Mary Burke. Peter J LeVoir

Acknowledgement: source material from Wikipedia

Ride leader: John Clements

Report and photos by John, 4 August 2024

Notes

Limehouse Basin. This basin was built by the Regent's Canal Company and was used by sea-going vessels and lighters to offload cargoes on to canal barges, for onward transport along the Regent's Canal. Although initially a commercial failure following its opening in 1820, by the mid-19th century the dock and the canal were an enormous commercial success, transporting coal to the many gasworks and subsequently the electricity-generating power stations along the canal, and for domestic and commercial use. At one point it was the principal entrance from the Thames to the entire national canal network. Its use declined with the growth of the railways, although there was a revival of canal traffic during both World Wars.

The hydraulic accumulator, This was part of a system providing hydraulic power around the basin. The tower regulated the hydraulic pressure in the system. The hydraulic mains supplied power to the coal-lifting cranes and the lock gates. [The associated steam-raising plant and hydraulic pumps have been removed.] The building was converted for the then London Docklands Development Corporation to function as a viewing platform. It (and the basin itself) is now owned by the British Waterways Board; and is a Grade II listed building. A notice says that the tower is open every year during Open House Weekend, usually the third weekend in September but currently it appeared to be completely surrounded by a construction site.

Three Mills In the 11th or 12 century Stratford Langthorne Abbey(founded in 1135) acquired three mills and gave the name to the area. By the time Henry VIII dissolved the abbey in the 1530s, the mills were grinding flour for the bakers of Stratford-atte-Bow, who were celebrated for the quality of their bread and who supplied the City of London market. In 1588, one of the mills was described as a "gunpowder mill". During the 16th century the three mills were reduced to two (which today are the House Mill, built in 1776, a Grade I listed building, and the Clock Mill, rebuilt 1815-17, incorporating the old clock). In the 17th century the mills were used to grind grain, which was then used to distil alcohol; the mills became a major supplier to the alcohol trade and gin palaces of London. There was also a windmill which survived until about 1840. In 1878 there were seven mills, 4 in the House Mill and 3 in Clock Mill. The output of the two mills was about 125 tons per week. In 1872 the properties were acquired by Nicholson and Co and produced gin until 1941. After the war it was used by Bass Charrington for bottling. The House Mill continued to operate until 1940 and the Clock Mill until 1952.

Olympic Park

Before the London 2012 Olympics, the Lower Lea Valley was an area of urban deprivation with many derelict industrial sites, poor quality housing and high unemployment rates, and chemicals badly contaminated the land and waterways. During its construction over 80,000 workers were engaged on the project. Before the major phase of construction began, the 52 electric pylons up to 65 metres (213 feet) high that dominated the landscape in and around the park were removed and the power transferred through the newly constructed Lower Lea Valley Cable Tunnels. Also, a Roman village was discovered during the excavations. Following site clearance, the soil across the Park site was cleaned down to a human health layer, by soil washing.

<https://www.outdooractive.com/en/track/haggerston-olympic-park-limehouse-cut-24june-2024/295314093/?share=%7Ezzgifciv%244ossigfi>