

u3a Bike Rides
Woolwich Ferry and Greenway
Friday 17th June 2025

This was a longer ride that started at Peckham Library and from there along the Surrey Canal Road and on to Deptford and Greenwich.

The Thames Path heads down-river, through the grounds of the Old Naval College, past old pubs such as The Cutty Sark and the Trafalgar Tavern.

The path is a shared path but was not that busy this morning.

Some parts are wide, others quite narrow, as we travel around the Greenwich Peninsula, with the O2 at its most northerly point. There are splendid views across the river back towards Canary Wharf, bright in the sunshine.



Turning the corner we pass the North Greenwich Pier and were then cycling on the glorious broad well-surfaced Olympian Way. To our right stand the beautiful, elegant figure of a mermaid. A little further on appears a tall menacing figure, with no head; this piece of sculpture is Damien Hirst's *Demon with Bowl*. I



Arriving at the Peninsula Ecology Park, we head for the *Café Pura* for a well-earned coffee. Returning to the Thames Path, we ride past the Greenwich Yacht club before reaching an industrial part with several sites where aggregate is processed, a bit dusty.

The Thames Barrier comes into view and a short ride brought us to the Woolwich Ferry terminal.



Once the barrier was up, we wheeled our cycles on to the ship, the “*Dame Vera Lynn*” The journey takes only ten minutes or so and we passed the second ferry, the “*Ben Woollacott*” which was also running. (See below for information on the naming of this vessel.)



Soon we are off along the north shore along a path that is a part of the Capital Ring. Keeping to the pavement beside the Albert Road, we paused on the bascule bridge. Heavy vehicles made the bridge shake! To our left was view of the Royal Docks. To our right, were the lock gates and the River Thames.



The road continues over the Sir Steve Redgrave Bridge, with a small marina to the right and the impressive expanse of the Royal Albert Dock to the left. Alongside the dock is the runway of City Airport, where a plane was just taking off.

The route turns west for a wonderful ride on a broad path along the north side of the Royal Albert Dock, until we reach two red brick building where we turned to cross the DLR rail line at Becton Park. Just across Strait Road is the entrance to the park and we followed the Capital Ring as it meandered through the park, across Tollgate Road and on to its northern exit. This delightful park, was a joy, with good paths passing open fields and through wooded areas.

We hear before we see the traffic along Newham Way. The Becton Footbridge provides a safe route over this busy road. On quiet residential roads we are very soon at the **Greenway**, and climb a gentle gradient to the elevated path. This is a 7-kilometre path built on the embankment that contains the Northern Outfall Sewer, constructed by Joseph Bazalgette. It runs from the Abbey Mills pumping station to the west to a treatment plant in Beckton. Formerly it was an ugly sewer pipe and called “Sewerbank”! Built between 1860 and 1865, it was part of a network of over 1,300 miles of brick sewers and four pumping stations. In the 1990s the pipe was covered with a layer of soil and a path built on top of it, forming the Greenway. Here is a photo of the sewer being built.



NORTHERN OUTFALL SEWER IN COURSE OF CONSTRUCTION.
1860-67.

We head west on a good path. This is riding at its easiest! Bliss!! We pass the distinctive Victorian Abbey Mills Treatment Works, currently covered with scaffolding. Thames Water have closed part of the path, so we follow a short diversion to bring us back to the last part of the Greenway.

We leave it to join the path along the Three Mills River and continue through Three Mills Park to arrive at the historic Mill House with its tidal mill. We are now cycling along a narrow spit of land between the River Lea and Bow Creek.



Just before Bow Locks, a bridge takes us to the eastern side of Bow Creek and then on through the “Cody Wilds” to Cody Docks our lunch stop beside Bow Creek where there are some shaded picnic table.

As some of the Group know I have a “thing” about bridges and at Cody Dock there is one of particular interest. It may even be a unique design. Described as a “Rolling Bridge” and installed in 2022, it moves along a wavy track and ends up inverted, leaving a clear passage for boats to pass below it. It’s so finely balanced that it can be moved by a hand crank! To see a YouTube film of it moving, see the Notes below.



After a relaxing lunch, it was time to leave and we retraced our steps back to the Bow Lock. This is a view from the bridge over the Bow River towards the lock.

From here it was a straight run down the Limehouse Cut, the oldest London canal. The path was dry gravel and demanded our attention. From Limehouse Basin we picked up the CS3 Superhighway back to Tower Hill and on to Blackfriars Bridge

Well done to all who completed this ride, longer than most but we visited some interesting locations along the way, and without using any major roads.

Distance 28 miles

Time: 7 hours (total) 5½ (riding)

Riders: *Andrew Burke. Daniela Walther. Jan Rae. Jane Andrew. John Clements. Julia Carter.. Mark Stones.. Mary Burke. Patrick Mulhern.*

Ride Leader: *John Clements*

Report: *John. 19th June 2025*



Notes.

The Ben Woollacott

Jane Andrew has researched the origin of the name of the second ferry. The story is a sad one and involves the death of a deckhand in 2017 who became entangled in a mooring rope. I wonder if this prompted the installation of the magnetic clamps which now hold the ship steady by the ferry landing. (I did not know this story when I demonstrated the use of a “Monkey fist” on the heaving line which would have been used by deckhands at the time.)

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-40509262.amp>



Cody Dock

Originally built in 1871, Cody Dock was constructed by the Imperial Chemical Company for unloading coal brought in by barges. The coal was used to produce coal gas (town gas) and to manufacture the many by-products, such as soap and the pigment Prussian Blue.

The dock is now home to an artistic community who are in the process of transforming it into a creative hub.

Cody Dock Rolling Bridge

As part of the renovation, it was decided to reopen the dock to a nearby river's tidal waters, which in turn required the removal of an old dam on the site and the construction of a new footbridge. Simon Myers, of the Gasworks Dock Partnership and in charge of redeveloping the dock, had planned to install a traditional bascule bridge for the site. However, when architect Thomas Randall-Page heard of these plans, he approached Myers and, with the support of engineer Tim Lucas, pitched a counter proposal for a far more ambitious type of bridge, a rolling bridge. He was inspired by the story that it is possible to ride a square-wheel cycle along an undulating track!

The bridge was, opened in 2022, appropriately named the Cody Dock Rolling Bridge, and this project formed a part of a larger redevelopment of this former industrial dock area.

The bridge is partly inspired by Victorian-era infrastructure like canal locks and is constructed from weathered steel and oak, weighing in at 13 tonnes.

In its usual position, cyclists and pedestrians make their way across the bridge. When a boat needs to pass under it, steel teeth installed on the rectangular ends of the bridge allow it roll on a pair of tracks that are installed into the concrete abutments on either bank. The bridge deck rises and eventually is at the top of the structure, creating headroom for the boats in the lock. The process takes about 20 minutes.

The bridge includes scrap metal and concrete ballast, countering the weight of the deck and enabling it to roll smoothly through an entire 180 degrees until it comes to a stop at a fully inverted position. Impressively, the whole thing is so carefully engineered that it requires no motors or electricity to move. Instead, it's totally powered by a hand winch.

Here are a couple of videos that tell the story and show the bridge in action:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IAJy5ai6E2U>

<https://codydock.org.uk/cody-dock-rolling-bridge-update-may-2023/>