

u3a Bike Rides
To the Trinity Buoy / London Lighthouse
Tuesday 17th February 2026

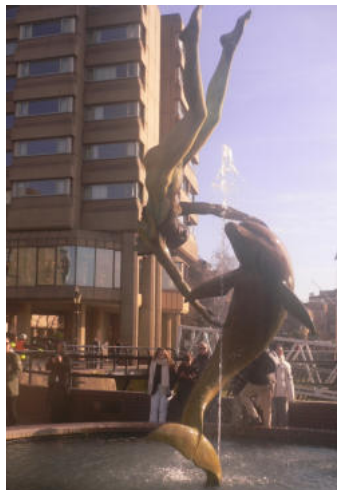
From our meeting point, Brockwell Lido, we headed out via Burgess Park and Leather Market towards Tower Bridge, our route across the River Thames.



Whites Grounds took us under the railway lines running out of London Bridge Station, on to short stretch of Tooley Street and so on to Tower Bridge.

This bridge has no dedicated cycle route but traffic was quite light and we were able to cross to the north side relatively easily.

At the traffic lights we crossed over and descended St Katherine's Way to the river and a dramatic view of Tower Bridge.



In front of the Tower Hotel stands the elegant statue of "Girl with a Dolphin", with tourists posing for photos by the figure.

And so we arrived at St Katharine Docks. The docks were opened in 1828 and this Thomas Telford-designed dock was once one of the busiest ports in the UK. The port was renowned for handling luxury goods; sugar, rum, spices, perfumes, wines and tea.



The bridge that spans the entrance to the East Dock is modern one. The original bridge here was built in 1830 under the direction of Thomas Telford. The cost at the time was a modest £447 !

A rare design, the two halves of this pedestrian bridge withdrew into recesses in the masonry on a rack and pinion mechanism. The two parts are now preserved alongside the replacement bridge.



A prominent building was the **Dickens Inn**. The building is an original warehouse building, much of it dating from the 1700s.

The docks (there are two, the East and West Docks) are full of luxury boats moored in berths reputed to cost £500 plus per month to lease.



This was our coffee stop, the “White Mulberries”; some found seating indoors and others chose to sit outside in the warm sunshine.

After leaving St Katharine Docks, and to avoid the route along Wapping High Street with its cobbled surfaces, we turned into Hermitage Basin, descended a switch-back path leading to the Ornamental Canal and on to Tobacco Dock.



Two 'Pirate Ships' are ‘moored’ in Tobacco Dock, but all is not what it appears to be!! They are “mock- up constructions” built to attract customers to the Tobacco Dock shopping centre, which eventually failed commercially.

After crossing the diminutive Wapping Woods, we emerged at Shadwell Basin.

At its entrance stands the **Shadwell Basin Bridge**, one of the four Scherzer rolling bascule bridges along this stretch of the Thames, all painted red, and I just had to stop to take a photo of this wonderful piece of engineering.



The Thames Path past King Edward's Memorial Path was undergoing extensive work and so we had to make a detour along the pavement before re-joining the Thames Path at Stepney Bridge and crossing the swing bridge at the entrance to Limehouse Basin.

The road passed under the DLR and West India Dock Road into Poplar High Street. A cycle path took us to Bow Creek and we followed around the many bends of the river as it made its way to our destination, Leamouth and **Trinity Buoy Wharf**. The lower part of the River Lea is known as the Bow River.

At Trinity Buoy Wharf was our lunch stop, The Orchard. Someone had parked their taxi on the roof!! It was one of the several quirky pieces of street art here. There was time to explore the area....

The Light Vessel LV95, resplendent in its red paint, was at the Goodwin Sands for a time; now it has been converted into a floating music recording studio; the lighthouse, known as the Bow Creek Lighthouse.

These lighthouses were never intended for use on the river; they were used to conduct trials on lighthouse designs. Below is an old photo from the 1920s which shows that there were originally two lighthouses here.



There is a tidal-powered lunar clock, *Alunatime*, described as ‘London’s first public moon and tide clock which displays the phase of the moon, and the state of the tide’; however, this appears not to be working. Nearby is a tidal bell, ringing in response to the waves. We have not seen this working before, and it seems to work only at high tide, as it was today. The lighthouse is occasionally open and on a previous occasion I had the opportunity to climb the stairs to see the mechanism.

Also in the lighthouse, playing on a loop, is a sound recording of random music which apparently does not repeat over a 1000 year cycle. (But who checks that it’s true?) Michael Faraday also conducted some experiments here.

Leaving Trinity Buoy Wharf, we circled East India Dock Basin and continued on to the river-side Virginia Settlements Monument to the first settlers of North America.

This was where Captains Christopher Newport and John Smith set sail in three ships in December 1606 – some 14 years before the Mayflower set out two miles further upstream.



Homeward bound, we continued on through the centre of Canary Wharf.

Along the Thames Path and past Limehouse Basin, then on to Cycle Superhighway CS3. Although we did not stop on this occasion, on a gable end there is very large mural depicting the Battle of Cable Street in 1936.

This protest by a crowd from the East End disrupted a march by the British Union of Fascists under Oswald Mosely and effectively closed down the organisation. It has been described as "...the moment at which British fascism was decisively defeated".



From here we crossed Blackfriars Bridge and headed back to Brockwell Park.

Another ride enjoyed by the group to an interesting destination. Thank you John and Denise for leading the ride.

Acknowledgement: source material from Wikipedia and Oxford Bodleian Library

Riders: Daniela Walther, Denise Davies, Jane Andrew, Jeremy Burke, John Clements, John Davies, Mark Stones.

Ride Leaders: Denise and John

Report: John Clements, 19th February 2026

NOTES

The Dickens Inn is an original warehouse building; it's thought to have housed tea or to have been owned by a local brewery. It certainly existed at the turn of the 18th century and may well have been built in the 1700's. During the early years as a pub "The Tavern Bar" used to feature sawdust strewn floors and no bottled or canned beer was stocked. Diners also enjoyed candlelit meals on the balconies; this practice has been phased out due to modern fire safety regulations!

The Shadwell Basin Bridge on Wapping Wall is a bascule bridge and very similar to the Surrey Water bridge. As both were operated by the Port of London Authority they were probably sourced from the same manufacturer. The Shadwell Basin bridge was erected during the 1930s by the successful engineering contractors Sir William Arrol and Co which specialised in rolling lift bridges during this period.

This design of bridge is described as a single-leaf rolling lift bridge; also as a "Scherzer rolling bascule lift bridges" after the American engineer William Donald Scherzer who refined the Bascule design into the rolling lift bridge. The original Bascule design used a single large axle, whereas the rolling lift bridge has the weighted counterbalance that rolls back on a hinge with a cog rack and pinion. The design dates from the end of the 19th century. ("Bascule" is French for see-saw, or balance.)

There is a video of a bascule bridge opening at:

<https://www.mfoot.com/blog/2016/06/26/historic-remnants-1-the-bascule-bridges-of-rotherhithe-and-surrey-quays/>

Trinity Buoy Wharf

The original lighthouse was built by an engineer of Trinity House, James Walker in 1852, and was demolished in the late 1920s. A second lighthouse, which survives, was built in 1864–66 by James Douglass for Trinity House. The lantern at the top of the tower came from the Paris Exposition of 1867, where Trinity House had used it to demonstrate Professor Holmes's improved system of electric lighting for lighthouses. Initially it housed ('for experimental purposes') the optical equipment which had been shown at the Exposition. Michael Faraday carried out experiments there. It was later used to test lighting systems for Trinity House's lights around England and Wales. Both lighthouses were also used for training prospective lighthouse keepers.

For an 1831 plan of London Docks tab down.

Plan of London Docks by Henry Palmer 1831, courtesy of Oxford Bodleian Library

*Tobacco Dock & Tobacco Warehouse and Hermitage Basin still remain.
Wapping Basin and the large Western Dock and Eastern Dock have all been filled in, but their
“footprints” remain evident even today..*

