

The Thames Gateway: An introduction to the historical landscapes of the northern riverside

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This introduction does not aim to be comprehensive, but focuses on a few examples to demonstrate the diversity of the relics of the past thousand years that make up the landscape to the east of London. More detail can be found in the sources listed.

Settlements along the Thames and its tributaries have a long history. The land was easily available to invaders from the Continent, and settlers were attracted both by the good grazing land, and by the opportunities offered by fishing and river trade. Barking, now the chief place in the London borough of the same name, was one of the oldest important settlements, with a harbour in the creek at the mouth of river Roding, which was also a means of transport inland for heavy goods such as coal and lime (Fig 1). The town flourished for many centuries as a port, with Barking vessels transporting fish and local vegetables to London; by the 19th century the area had become well known for its potato crops. Barking's early 19th-century character is conveyed in the view from Wright's *Essex, 1836* (Wright 2, 474) (Fig 1), which shows the harbour with the medieval parish church in the distance, a reminder of the town's older history. The church was built in the precinct of Barking Abbey, a nunnery founded by the Bishop of London in the 7th century. Until its dissolution in the 16th century, this nunnery, housing the shrine of its first abbess, St Ethelburgha, was one of the wealthiest in England. It was the major landholder in the area, its property extending over much of the present boroughs of Barking and Redbridge. The parish church survives, although the town has changed radically. Its centre shifted away from the river after the decline of the fishing industry from the 1860s, and industries, especially chemical factories, developed along Barking creek (VCH 5, 240).

Other parts of the riverside have changed less. Although the area between London and Southend was crossed by the London Tilbury and Southend railway, reaching Southend by 1862, industrial development remained scattered, and much of the Thames riverside continued as undeveloped marshland into the 20th century, with the land used for grazing. Many of the landscapes of the Thames estuary are not 'designed landscapes' in the

conventional sense of aesthetically planned spaces, but these wide open areas with their often arbitrary components have their own very distinctive appeal. As Ken Worpole has written, in his sympathetic essay, *350 Miles: An Essex Journey*, with its evocative photographs by Jason Orton, the coastline ‘moves from the brutalist to the inspiring and then on occasions, to the transcendental.’

Geology and early settlement

The special character of the riverside areas and their settlement pattern owes much to geology: the flood plains with marshland close to the riverside deterring settlement, which was concentrated on the higher gravel terraces created by the Thames at the time of the ice age (Blandford). The tributaries of the Thames created natural boundaries, which maintain their significance in today’s built-up areas. The River Roding divided the old settlements of Barking and East Ham, and remains as a boundary between the modern boroughs of Newham and Barking. Dagenham and Rainham likewise began as settlements on higher stretches of gravel north of the riverside marshes, divided by the river courses of the Beam and the Ingrebourne (Fig 2).

Over the centuries there have been many changing relationships between the land and the water. A thousand years ago, at the time of Domesday Book, the marshlands were more extensive, and were well used for fishing, fowling and grazing (Hunter, 76). Rising sea levels from the 13th century led to the need for sea defences and to successive reclamation of land. Dagenham Breach (Fig 2) is a relic of the River Beam breaching its banks in the 14th century; it was partially drained in the 17th and 18th centuries, leaving a large lake, which though diminished since, still survives as a surprising feature beside the Ford motor works (VCH 5, 285–9). In the 18th century Defoe records that the marshes were stocked with large fat sheep from Lincolnshire, bought at Smithfield market in the autumn and sold at great profit in London around Christmas. He also comments unfavourably on the ‘unhealthiness in the air of the low marsh grounds’ which led to a high female mortality rate. Women moving from the healthier uplands died young, and the local men might have five to fifteen wives in succession, or so he was told (Defoe 1, 9–3).

The early pattern of settlement is still marked by surviving medieval churches. Almost all the ancient churches in the riverside parishes still have 12th-century fabric, very likely replacing



Figure 1. Barking in 1836: park on the River Roding (Wright)



Figure 2. Geology: Dagenham and Rainham in the 19th century, on gravel terraces above the Thameside marshes

older timber buildings, at a time of prosperity after the uncertain years immediately after the Norman Conquest. A striking example is St Mary Magdalene, East Ham (Fig 3). Chapman and André's map of 1774 (Chapman and André) shows how the 12th-century building is sited on a gravel terrace just above the flood plain, close to a manor house, some distance from the scattered hamlet which had developed further north. Its relative isolation until the end of the 19th century may explain why the church has survived little altered from its Romanesque form apart from a slightly later west tower.

East Tilbury, a small and now mostly 20th-century settlement, has a church with a late 12th-century north aisle which was added to an earlier building, suggesting that this settlement on the land just above the marshes was expanding at this time (see Fig 17). The significance of the little port of Rainham is indicated by an ample 12th-century church with both north and south aisles. Other village churches have been extended later but many in the riverside hinterland still show evidence of 12th-century fabric, for example at Wennington, North Ockendon, South Ockendon, Aveley and Chadwell St Mary (RCHME; Pevsner).

Gentry estates from the 16th Century

The dissolution of the monasteries led to a major upheaval in land ownership; the Barking Abbey lands were divided up and a variety of gentry estates emerged from the 16th century onwards. Wright mentions around a dozen gentry mansions in the area extant in the early 19th century (Wright 2, 485). Survival today is arbitrary and varied, as a few examples shown on the Chapman and André map can indicate (Fig 4). The Gascoyne family were among the major landholders by the 18th century, with a seat at Bifrons, on the edge of Barking. The estate was built up from the early 18th century by Dr John Bamber, and inherited by his son Bamber Gascoyne, who married into the Gascoyne family. On the 1774 map Bifrons is shown with an eighty-acre park, but all traces of this have gone, as the house was demolished in 1815, and the land built over from the 1880s. Parsloes was the seat of the Fanshaws, 'a very good estate' in the time of Defoe. It was sold to the London County Council and developed as part of their Becontree estate (VCH 5, 278). The house was demolished in 1925 but part of the grounds was retained as a public park. A house may occasionally survive, but without its land, as at Eastbury, once a tenement of Barking abbey, sold after the Dissolution. The existing house was built in 1556 by a merchant, Clement Sisley, and passed through many owners from the 17th to 19th centuries. In the 18th century, no longer fashionable, it was

described by Defoe as almost fallen down. The estate was split up and sold for building land, but the house was preserved in 1841 through the interest of local antiquarians, and then saved through the efforts of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings and the London Survey Committee. It was taken over by the National Trust in 1917 (Pevsner, *London 5 East*, 129–31). This fine example of a mid-16th-century brick Tudor mansion is now the sole representative of a type of building that was once more frequent in the area (Fig 5). Other buildings were less fortunate. An example of a tantalising fragment remains in Emerson Park, Hornchurch (London Borough of Havering), an extensive superior suburban development of 1895 onwards of the Great Nelves estate. The old mansion, much altered but originally built for William Roche, a 16th-century Lord Mayor, survived to 1967. Part of what appears to have been a moat around the house site has been retained as landscaping to a group of recent neo-Georgian houses (Fig 6). Some way off, in another front garden, a quaint 19th-century roof caps a structure which has been identified as part of a 16th-century brick conduit house serving the mansion (VCH 7; Pevsner, 179–80).

Further east, Hornchurch and Upminster benefited from the green belt and although still within Greater London are not entirely built up. Here too are relics of the country seats established by city men (Figs 7 and 8). The 16th-century timber-framed Upminster Hall, built on an estate formerly belonging to Waltham Abbey, survives as a golf club house. At Corbets Tey, a hamlet south of Upminster, a fragment of a landscaped park comes as a surprise among dull streets of suburban housing. This was the estate of Great Gaines, where ‘an elegant seat’ (Wright 2, 527) consisting of a formal Palladian house by James Paine, with fine grounds, was built in 1771 by the main local landowner, Sir James Esdaile, city banker and Lord Mayor. The house was replaced in the 19th century and the site is now uninspiringly covered with suburban housing, but an 18th-century lodge remains, and further south, part of the picturesque setting which had been ‘laid out with great taste ... with much fine timber’ (Rush 87). The remnants of this, now known as the Parklands Open Space, include a bridge and a serpentine lake (Fig. 9). Esdaile also left his mark in the village of Upminster, where his house, New Place, was rebuilt in 1775. It served a more public function, as its ballroom was used as a local assembly hall. Only the stables remain (now converted to housing), but appropriately, part of the grounds is now a public park (VCH 7; Pevsner, 213–5).



Figure 5. Eastbury Manor House, Barking, built mid-16th century (photo: 2006)



Figure 6. Emerson Park, Hornchurch: recent housing by old water feature on Great Nelmes estate



Figure 7. Upminster, Corbets Tey and Cranham in the mid-19th century (Ordnance Survey: 1844)

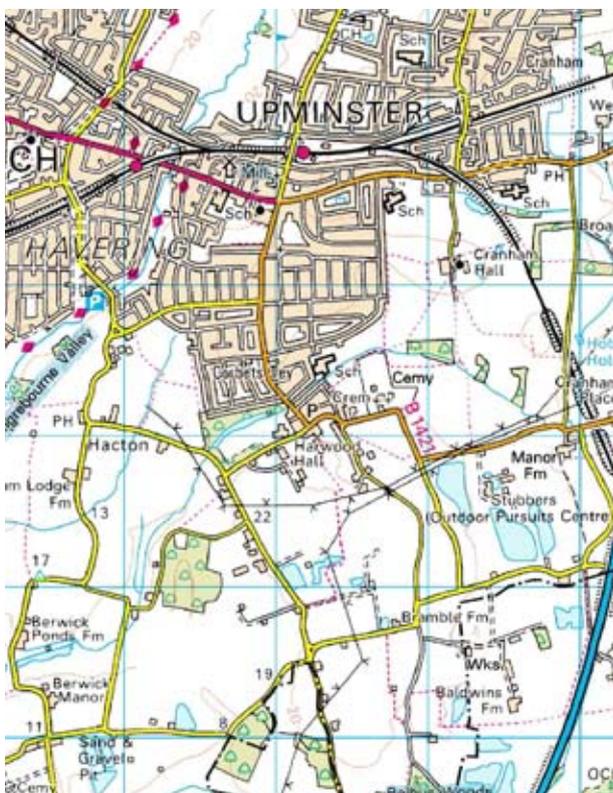


Figure 8. Upminster, Corbets Tey and Cranham
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The principle of the green belt around London established before World War II, and endorsed by Abercrombie's Greater London Plan of 1944, froze the expansion of suburbia. Thus North Cranham is an outpost of Upminster, but its church, ambitiously rebuilt by the wealthy Victorian owner of the neighbouring manor house, still has a rural setting (see Fig 8). Abercrombie was keen to stop the destruction of farmland, referring to outbreaks of 'bungaloid rash' near Hornchurch and Rainham, which he considered should be returned to agricultural use (Abercrombie, 135). After World War II a policy of preserving the countryside was pursued by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government from 1962 (Hebbert, 94), and endorsed by Essex County Council, which acquired land for recreation, especially following the Countryside Act of 1968 which encouraged the creation of Country Parks. More recently, part of this green belt has been embraced by the organisation Thames Chase, which has a centre near Upminster set in newly created woodland. The project began in 1990 and aims to create a 'community forest' on plots scattered over 40 square miles in Havering and Essex, with an emphasis on health and community development (Hunter, 177; Thames Chase). The tree planting is partly a response to the loss of elms as a result of Dutch elm disease, which spread from Tilbury in the 1970s, making a radical difference to the tree cover in the area.

Belhus estate, Aveley, is one of the Thames Chase sites. Bell house or Belhus was a large Tudor courtyard house, remodelled for Lord Dacre from 1744 to 1747 (Fig 10). Chapman and André show the park by Capability Brown, enlarged from 1770 to 1771 by Richard Woods, the Essex landscape designer who lived nearby at North Ockendon (Cowell) (Fig 11). The 300-acre deer park with its fine trees still attracted admiration in 1897 (Rush 34). The estate and park are now being reassembled as a Country Park with responsibility shared between several owners: Essex County Council, the Forestry Commission and the Woodland Trust. The house was demolished in 1957 and part of its 18th-century park is now a golf course. But two wooded mounds, and the shrubbery, now a woodland walk, remain from the 18th-century layout, also a long pond now bisected by the M25 (Fig 12). The grounds adjoin Belhus Chase to the north, recently acquired by the Woodland Trust and planted with native trees (Fig 13), and the adjacent Country Park, which has lakes in former gravel workings (Hunter, 172).



Figure 9. 18th-century bridge, Corbets Tey (photo: 2004)



Figure 10. Belhus, Aveley: house and deer park in 1836 (Wright)

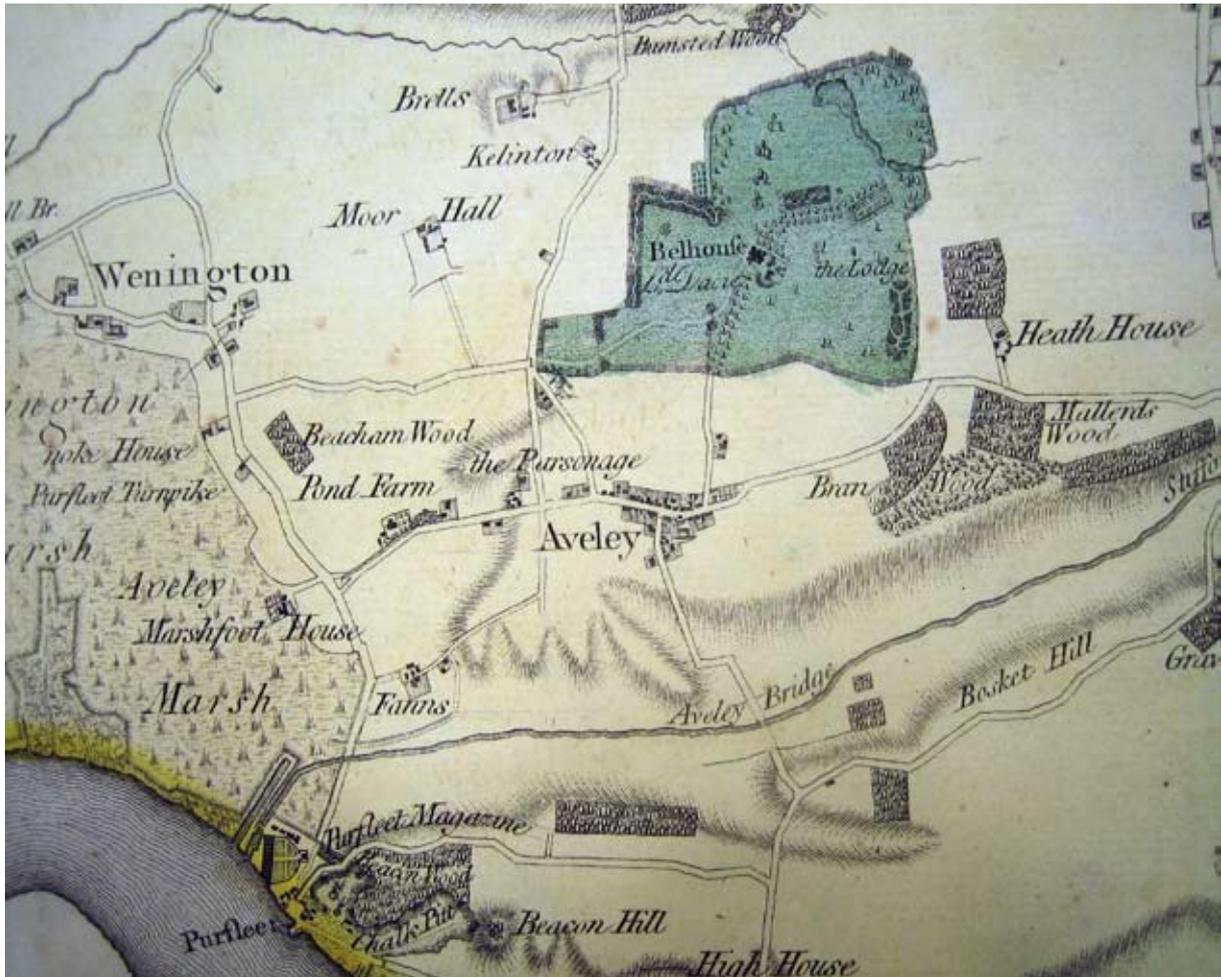


Figure 11. Belhus, Aveley: detail from Chapman and André's map, 1774



Figure 12. Belhus, Aveley © Crown Copyright. All rights reserved. English Heritage 100019088, 2008



Figure 13. Belhus Chase: new woodland (photo: 2006)

Public pleasure grounds

The shift from the private landscapes of the eighteenth century to the publicly accessible parks of today was foreshadowed by the development of public pleasure grounds providing retreats for expanding urban populations. An example is Royal Victoria Gardens at North Woolwich in the Borough of Newham. The railway line arrived here in 1847; a direct line to London followed in 1849 linking with a steam ferry on the Thames. North Woolwich was then still a pleasant semi-rural excursion. The Railway Company opened pleasure gardens by the river to encourage visitors, but these only had a short success, declining in popularity after the coming of docks and industry. Nevertheless the gardens remain, refurbished as a public park in 1890, after North Woolwich had become an outlier of the London Borough of Woolwich across the Thames, and could benefit from improvements by the London County Council (*Pevsner, London 5 East*, 311–2) (Fig 14). For long one of the few Thames-side green spaces in Greater London, this park is now a green interlude along the more recent long-distance Thames Path. The ideas of opening up the Thames riverbank for a long-distance walk, and likewise of developing the linear parks alongside the river Lea, are 20th-century concepts which were initiated by Abercrombie's Greater London Plan (Abercrombie, 110), although not achieved until the later 20th century.

By rail the Victorian tripper could steam across the Thames marshes and reach Southend. The seaside attractions of this small hamlet, once the 'south end' of the parish of Prittlewell, had been discovered earlier. It was developed as a resort from the 1790s, an urban seaside landscape with a Royal Terrace, so named in 1804 after a visit by the Princess of Wales, and an impressive pleasure pier, first built in 1830, which claimed to be the longest in the world. In 1831 the population was 2,200 and Wright could extol the combination of good beaches, fine prospects and pleasant rural walks (Wright 2, 609–10) (Fig 15). From 1854, after the railway made access easier, the resort became less select, and the town expanded to envelop six former parishes, embracing the formerly separate fishing village of Leigh, famous for its oysters (Wright 2, 599). In the 20th century growth continued west of Leigh, and Canvey Island, once grazing land successively reclaimed from the sea, was built up as a more downmarket holiday resort. Its bold centrepiece is the Labworth Café, 1932, an early modernist work by Ove Arup, built of reinforced concrete as part of the sea defences (Powers, 46).



Figure 14. Royal Victoria Gardens, North Woolwich, created 1849 (photo: 2006)



Figure 15. Southend in 1836, with Royal Terrace and pier (Wright)

From military to leisure activities

Other parts of the coast had a more sober history. The riverside was vulnerable not only to inroads from the sea but to attacks from abroad, and the banks of the Thames have numerous reminders of defensive structures provided at different periods, some of which have been given a new life as heritage centres. At Tilbury there was a fort in the 16th century, famous for the visit from Queen Elizabeth I; it was reconstructed from 1670 as part of the defences against foreign invasion. The pentagonal structure with its ceremonial gateway remains one of the best examples in England of late 17th-century military building (Saunders, 1985) (fig 16). In the context of modern Tilbury the fort is now an isolated heritage relic, eclipsed by the town's more recent rapid changes of fortune. The increased size of ships led to the opening of docks at Tilbury in 1886, downstream from the Port of London, making use of the railway line of 1854. The Tilbury docks were extended in 1912 and 1929 and a passenger terminal was built in 1930. The town grew, and was largely rebuilt in the 1920s with a civic square by Adshead & Ramsay, but was much reconstructed after serious Second World War damage. Abercrombie suggested the population should be moved to Grays, and doubted if the docks would need to expand further (Abercrombie 135). As with all post-war forecasts about the docks this proved wrong. With the development of container traffic the Docks doubled in size from 1963 to 1970, and Tilbury became a major global transit point. While Tilbury developed a new mercantile identity from the later 19th century, East Tilbury remained relatively remote, surrounded by open countryside. The course of the Thames bends sharply here, and this was a significant defensive point into the 20th century. Coalhouse Fort of 1866 to 1871, which replaced earlier defences of the 16th and 17th centuries, is an impressive casemate fort with dry and wet ditch, with additions for both First and Second World War gun emplacements. The site, with its impressively extensive views across the Thames, is now managed as a picnic place and walking area. The village developed on slightly higher ground a little way inland. Here even the church reflects the military importance of the site. The base of the church tower was built by the Royal Engineers stationed at the fort in World War I, to replace a tower destroyed in Dutch raids in 1667. It was left incomplete when the war ended (Figs 17, 18).

Another aspect of the military history of the riverside was the use of isolated sites for storage of dangerous substances. At Purfleet, Thurrock, a Powder Magazine for testing and



Figure 16. Tilbury Fort, built 1670-83, in 1836 (Wright)



Figure 17. East Tilbury: St Catherine's church, looking towards Coalhouse Fort (photo: 2006)



Figure 18. East Tilbury: inscription on the uncompleted tower of St Catherine's church



Figure 19. Purfleet, Military and Heritage Centre, former powder store (photo: 2006).

storing gunpowder was built by the Royal Engineers from 1763 to 1765 (VCH 8). Only the clock tower, proof house and one of the five huge, austere stores remain. The store is now Purfleet Military and Heritage Centre, established in 1992 and run by enthusiastic volunteers (Fig 19). The rest was replaced in the 1970s by uninspired social housing, with a path along the flood bank. The Purfleet area as described by Wright in 1836 was regarded as a picturesque place, with its lighthouse on Beacon Hill and dramatic chalk quarries to the south of the gunpowder stores adding the required touch of sublimity. A mid-Victorian attraction was 'Botany Garden' in a disused chalkpit at Purfleet, still recalled by the name 'Botany Cottages' on the road near the gunpowder store (VCH 8, 57; Harrold). But the picturesque effects which can be produced by quarries are generally ephemeral, and today Beacon Hill is covered by indifferent housing, extending over former industrial sites.

Industrial development along the riverside

The impact of industry on the riverside is a huge subject. Industry responded to the opportunities provided by London's expanding role at the centre of world trade, and negative aspects of its impact on land and people received little consideration before the mid-20th century. The riverside hamlets east of the Pool of London developed maritime-related activities and by the 17th century formed a continuous built-up fringe up to the Isle of Dogs. Water mills for milling grain existed along the River Lea from the Middle Ages, followed by other industries from the 18th century onwards. A rare reminder of this early history of the Lea is the 'three mills' site at Bow with buildings of the 17th and 18th centuries (Pevsner, *London 5 East*, 241–2). East of the Isle of Dogs, at the mouth of the Lea and along the Thames, shipbuilding and repair were promoted by the docking of East India Ships at Blackwall from the 17th century, encouraging the growth of the hamlet of Poplar along the gravel causeway running east from Limehouse (*Survey of London, Poplar*) (Fig 20). South of this the low-lying Isle of Dogs, periodically affected by flooding, continued to be used for pasture until the enclosed docks were made around 1800. Early maps show an orchard at Leamouth, the name retained today in the road Orchard Place, but elsewhere in this area nothing remains from before the 19th century.

By mid-19th century Leamouth had been taken over by industry (Fig 21). Thames Plate Glass works in the loop of the Lea existed from 1835 to 1874. Its most recent successor, a margarine factory, which closed in 2004, was the last major industry here to demonstrate

the dramatic visual impact of belching chimneys and working machinery on a grand scale. Across the Lea much has changed. Nothing is left of Mare & Co, opened in 1846 (later Thames Ironworks shipbuilding yards), or of the other heavy industry which followed along the banks of the Thames in the area which is now part of the Borough of Newham. The late 19th-century workers' housing of Canning Town, by the mouth of the Lea, has almost all disappeared. The breathtakingly vast waterscape of the Royal Docks remains (Victoria Dock, opened in 1850, extended by Albert Dock from 1875 to 1880), now visible from the new perspective of the elevated Docklands Light Railway or the new transporter bridge over Victoria Docks, but with only a handful of older buildings in its neighbourhood (Pevsner, *London 5 East*) (Fig 22). South of the Royal Docks factories once stretched along the riverside through Silvertown to North Woolwich. Silvertown was named from the rubber and telegraph works of S.W. Silver, founded in 1852; Henry Tate manufactured cube sugar here from 1878, and in 1921 amalgamated with Abram Lyle, whose works were at Plaistow wharf from 1881. Relics of these activities are now diminishing fast, although the Tate works still function at Silvertown. The Lyle works at West Silvertown are recalled by the tiny Lyle Park, created next to them in 1924 by West Ham, a rare effort to preserve some green riverside space (Fig 23). A narrow approach leads to a wider area by the river, now embellished by gates brought from the Harland & Wolff works at Woolwich. The park is well maintained by the Borough of Newham, which also cares for a slightly earlier park (now part of New Beckton Park) created further east (Fig 24). Here in 1903 the Borough of East Ham laid out Savage Gardens in front of the borough's first council housing, in an effort to improve the character of the poor and isolated development of New Beckton (Pevsner, *London 5 East*, 308). Development of Beckton followed the opening of the Beckton gas works in 1870, constructed for the Gas Light and Coal Company, covering 540 acres of the Thames side marshes. Generally, industry marched side by side with workers' housing. Unusually, at Dagenham, the Ford Motor Company, arriving in the late 1920s, was able to draw on a ready-made labour force, as plans for the LCC's huge Becontree estate had been prepared in 1921. By 1935 this new township of repetitive winding roads of terraced cottages had a population of over 167,000 (Pevsner, *London 5 East*, 137). In contrast to this is the exceptional and well-preserved example of planned industry and housing at East Tilbury. On a site in the flat open country, some way inland from the old village, the Czech Thomas Bata opened a shoe factory in 1933, with progressive housing of reinforced concrete, designed to attract

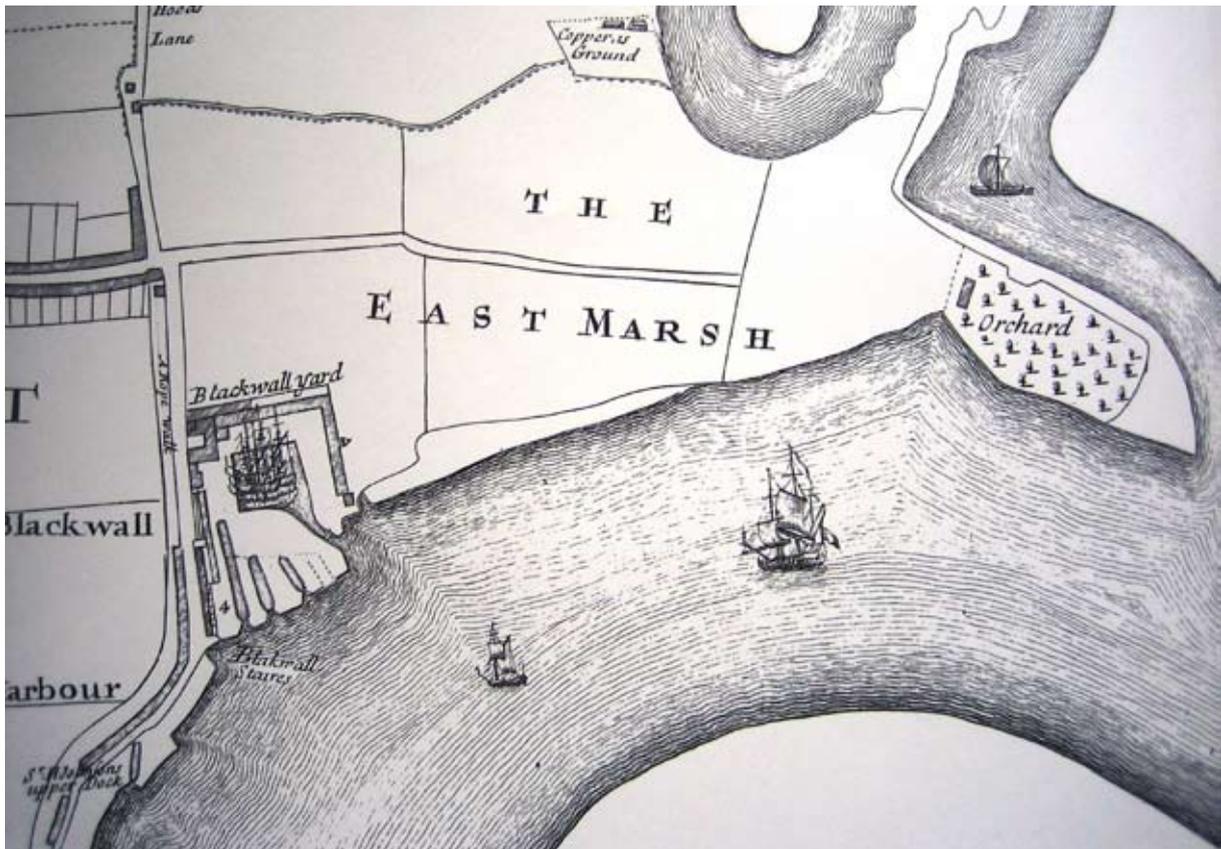


Figure 20. Blackwall and Leamouth, from A Survey of the Parish of St Dunstan Stepney, by Joel Gascoyne, 1703

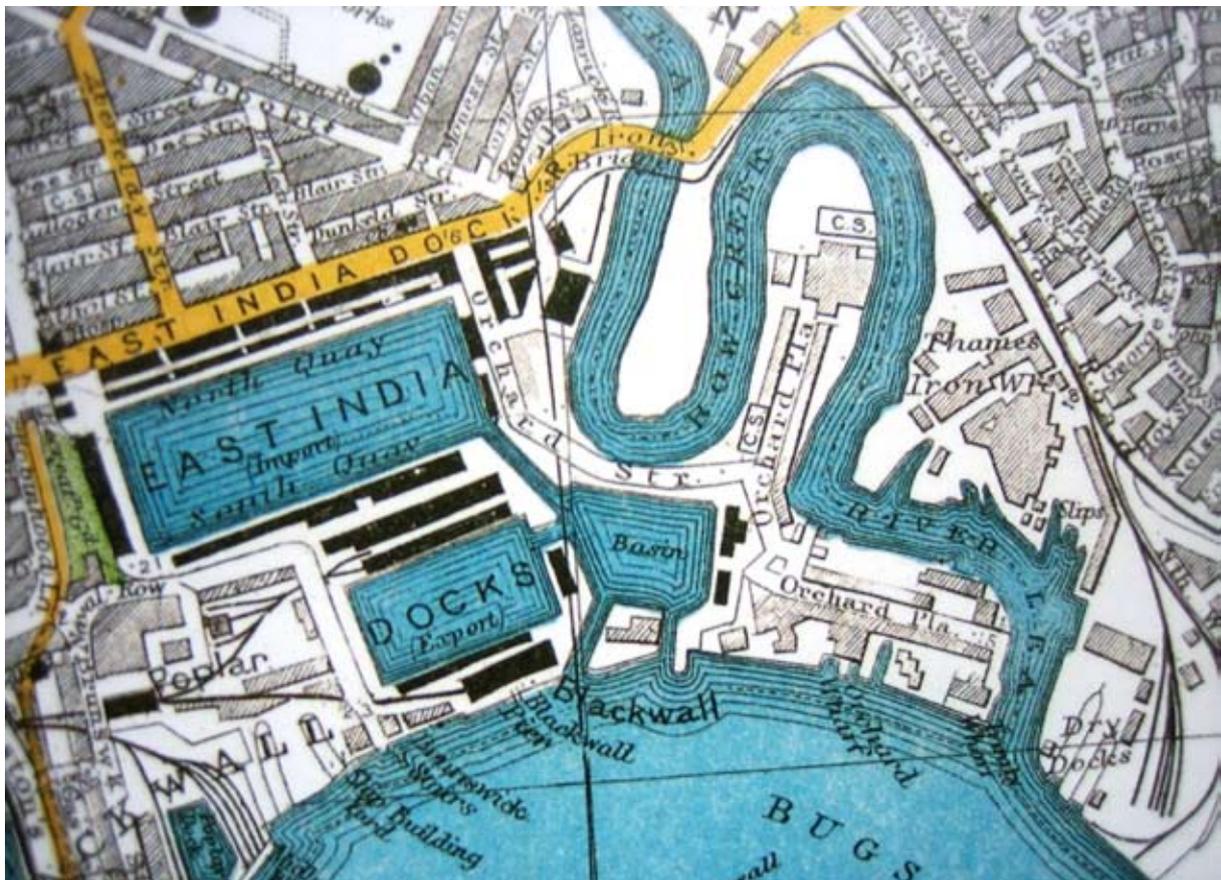


Figure 21. Blackwall and Leamouth in the early 20th century, from Bacon's Large Scale Atlas of London and Suburbs, c. 1912



Figure 22. Royal Victoria Dock, looking east (photo: 2006)



Figure 23. Lyle Park, West Silvertown, created 1924, looking towards the river (photo: 2006)



Figure 24. Royal Docks: recent developments, with old and new parks © Crown Copyright. All rights reserved. English Heritage I00019088, 2008



Figure 25. Advertisement for Bata shoes: Thames Development Board, 1946

workers to this isolated spot (Figs 25, 26). The architect was Vladimir Karfik, architect of the company's model settlement at Zlin (Pavitt; Powers, 156). The housing consists of a grid of streets with flat-roofed semi-detached family houses, with a five-storey 'hotel' which provided accommodation for single people, with community facilities and shops on the ground floor. Adjacent, in front of the factory buildings (which are now seeking new uses) is a somewhat embryonic park, defined by a row of poplars (Fig 27).

At West Thurrock, to the west of Tilbury Docks, development was less coherent. Here a medley of large industrial works transformed the character of the riverside from the later 19th century, fitting in around the relics of older quarry sites. They included several cement works from 1874, the Thames Board Mills, producing cardboard and packaging, from c 1887, and the Stork margarine works of Van den Burgh and Jurgens (later Unilever) from 1917; in addition there was oil storage, which started at Purfleet from 1888, and oil refining (VCH 8, 66–7; Harrold) (Fig 28). Between the wars these concerns expanded, several employing workforces in four figures, with factories distinguished by modern machinery and processes. The advantages of the site for river transport were emphasised in the publications of the Thames Development Board, an umbrella body advising on location of industry, established in 1936 (Fig 29). After World War II it was assumed that existing riverside industry would continue, just as it was not questioned that the Docks would have a future. The Board proposed sites ripe for further development, in particular 600 acres adjacent to the Ford works at Dagenham (TDB) (Figs 30, 31). Ford's indeed continued to expand, employing 40,000 by 1953 and building a new assembly plant in 1954–9 (Pevsner, *London 5 East*, 156 – 7) (Fig 32).

In the early 20th century, while industries were spreading over Thurrock, the absence of planning controls created a different legacy further east at the head of Pitsea Creek, where the higher ground overlooks the wide expanse of the Corringham marshes (Fig 33). On the uplands, as a result of the agricultural depression, land had been sold off from 1900 onwards as weekend (and sometimes permanent) retreats for Eastenders. By 1949 the population of these plotlands between Laindon and Pitsea was 25,000, increased by wartime evacuation. There were 8,500 dwellings, over 6000 without sewers, 59 % without electricity, in what was described in 1942 as a 'poor bramble-covered region, a vast array of tiny bungalows ... corrugated iron shanties with dreadful rutted mud roads' (Hunter, 168).



Figure 26. East Tilbury: houses built in 1933 for Bata workers (photo: 2006)



Figure 27. East Tilbury: Bata factory (1933): park in foreground (photo: 2006)

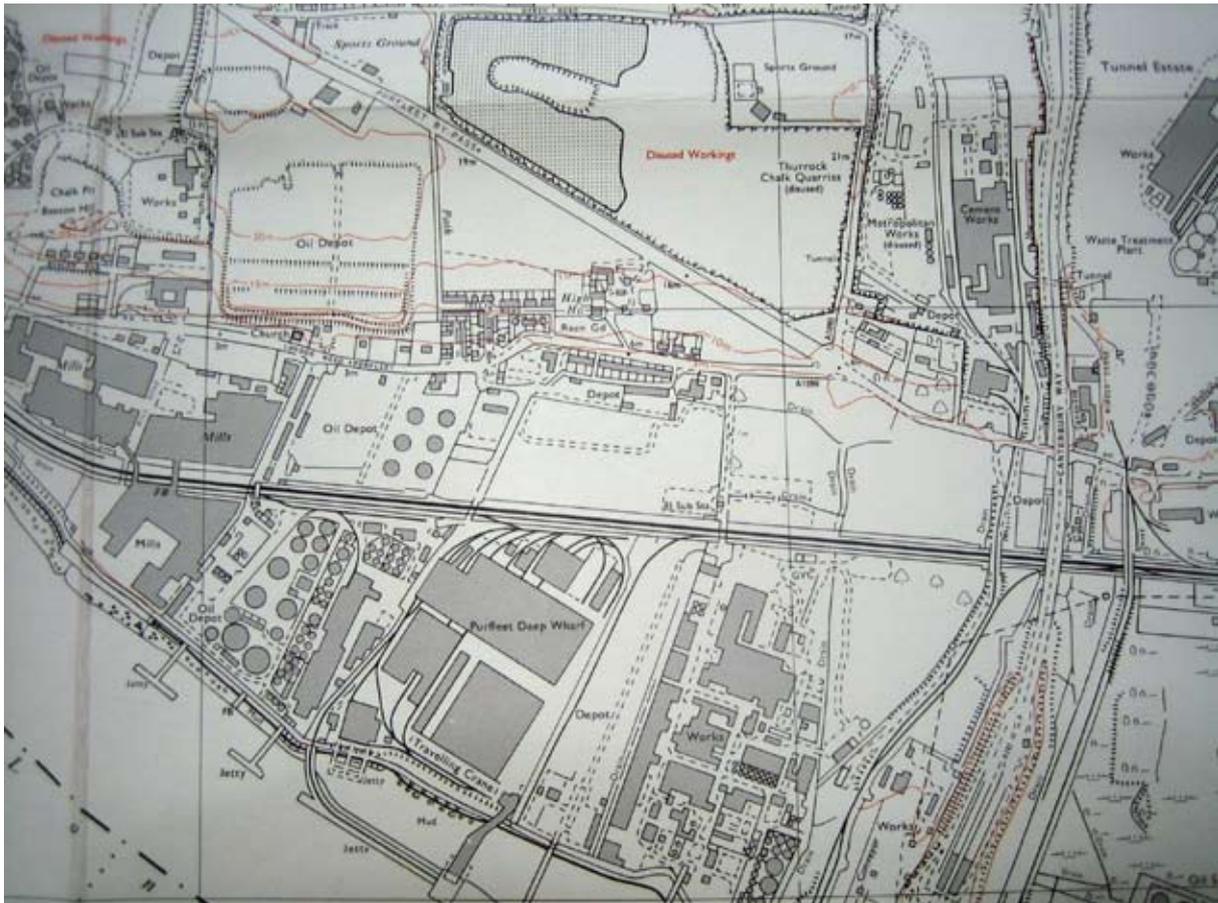


Figure 28. Purfleet and Thurrock: quarry sites and industrial development: Greater London Development Plan, 1914-18

FACTORY SITES ON THIS THAMESIDE TRADING ESTATE HAVE AVAILABLE:

- Good communications by road, rail or water.
- Deep water frontage.
- Large supply of labour.
- Nearby market of 9,000,000
- Easy access to markets.
- Good foundations of chalk and gravel.

WEST THURROCK ESTATE
 (Phone Tilbury 461)

GRAYS - ESSEX

Head office - Whitehall Security Corp. Ltd.,
 47, Parliament Street - S.W.1.

Figure 29. Sites available for development: Thames Development Board, 1946

Choose your site AT THE GATEWAY TO LONDON

Enclosed at No. 7 Jetty

YOU now have the opportunity to establish your factory or depot within a dozen miles of the centre of London, on a riverside industrial estate, well served by road and rail and particularly suitable for sea and river borne traffic. Wharves and jetties provide berths for ships up to 15,000 tons, and the facilities for the bulk handling of solid and liquid cargoes and loads are extensive. A staff of civil, mechanical and electrical engineers are available on the Estate. They can submit schemes for construction and undertake plant installation and maintenance work.

Apply to the address below for full particulars
 SAMUEL WILLIAMS & SONS LTD.
 8 FLOYS AVENUE, LONDON, E.C.3
 TELEPHONE: ROYAL 3111

FACILITIES AT DISPOSAL OF TENANT

- COMPLETE HANDLING EQUIPMENT including cranes up to 40-ton-lift, pipe line screening plant, etc.
- MAINTENANCE & REPAIR SHOPS
- ENGINEERING & BUILDING SERVICES
- PRIVATE RAILWAYS AND SIDINGS
- RIVER TRANSPORT including tank vessels, tugs and barges
- ROAD HAULAGE vehicles for all kinds of haulage work

DAGENHAM DOCK INDUSTRIAL ESTATE

Figure 30. Ford Motor Company Advertisement: Thames Development Board, 1946



Figure 31. Advertisement for sites on West Thurrock Trading estate: Thames Development Board, 1946

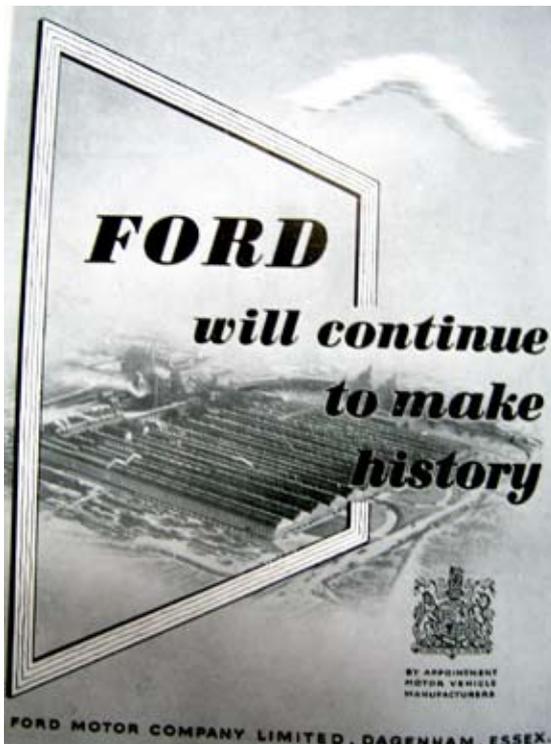


Figure 32. Advertisement for sites on Dagenham Dock estate: Thames Development Board, 1946

As a way of dealing with the area, at the request of Essex County Council, the new town of Basildon was designated in 1949, in the wake of the post-war New Towns recommended in the Abercrombie Greater London Plan. Basildon was built from the centre outward, and the twenty-four neighbourhoods gradually absorbed the plotlands to the west and east. There was much local opposition; but sympathy with the older history of individual initiative was expressed by a plotlands museum and trail (Hardy and Ward, 204 – 212). In place of unkempt countryside there is now a town centre with informal townscape in the post-war picturesque tradition of the Festival of Britain (Fig 34), with neighbourhoods and parks linked by landscaped foot and cycle paths (Fig 35). Basildon district indeed claims to have more parks and open spaces than any other district in Essex (Schaffer; Basildon website).

The concept of linking neighbourhoods by pedestrian routes, a basic principle of the post-war new towns, has been adopted in urban areas as well. In the 1980s the Borough of Newham made ingenious use of a functional industrial feature: the Greenway is a linear walk making use of the raised bank of the outfall sewer which runs through Newham from Bazalgette's Pumping station at Stratford (Fig 36). Work is in progress on a pedestrian and cycle path along the Roding valley, planned from 1996 (Thames Gateway website).

The last twenty-five years: The East London boroughs

As major industries declined, alternative forms of development began to be promoted. An ambitious example was the creation of Lakeside in 1990, to the west of the old centre of Grays, in the district of Thurrock. This was a novel type of landscape on a grand scale, combining an American-style retail development with water-based sports, exploiting the concept of shopping as a leisure activity. It was planned for a wide catchment area, encouraged by the proximity of the M25 motorway. After expanding to 320 acres in 1998 Lakeside boasted 550 shops, the largest site of its kind in Britain (Morrison, 298–9, 305). An opposite approach is the use of former industrial sites for the regeneration of wild life and for non-profit-based community and educational activities. Extractive industries, exploiting gravel river terraces and outcrops of chalk, have left a legacy of ponds and lakes with potential both for wild life and for modern recreational use, as can be seen in many examples, among them Eastbrookend Country Park, Dagenham, reclaimed from the 1990s, with a Millennium centre designed for ecological education. The use of marshland between industrial sites for landfill and rubbish tipping still continues, although some of the marshes



Figure 33. Pitsea: church tower, looking south toward Corringham Marshes (photo: 2006)



Figure 34. Basildon New Town, designated 1949, built 1960-2 (photo: 2006)

have also been reclaimed, notably those of Rainham and Wennington, now managed by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. A different kind of wildlife landscape is provided by the enormous overgrown churchyard of St Mary Magdalene, East Ham, which expanded over the centuries as an informal London cemetery. From the 1970s it has been managed by Newham as a nature reserve, an early example of its kind (Fig 37). Over the last twenty years the growing strength of the ecological movement can be seen in the creation of wild life havens not only in a rural setting but as an essential amenity for heavily built-up areas (Hoyles). Thames-side examples include the former entrance basin of the East India Docks at Blackwall, and the eastern banks of the Lea at Bow Creek (see map, Fig 24).

After the closure of the older docks from the 1980s, the decline of manufacturing industry became increasingly pronounced in the 1990s in the East London boroughs (Poynter, 1996). The spur for radical change was the creation of the London Docklands Development Corporation in 1981, which provided the opportunity to plan for an infrastructure that would include both transport and open space provision, with generous opportunities for public art (Pevsner, *London 5 East*, 109). At Beckton, linked to London by the extended Docklands Light Railway, new housing was planned from the 1980s, together with a large informal district park created on derelict land. On the Isle of Dogs the new offices at Canary Wharf were set in a formal landscape, with much use of sculpture, while the slightly later Jubilee Park south of Canary Wharf is an urban space with an unusual informal and organic layout, designed by the Belgian firm of Jacques & Pieter Wirtz from 2000 to 2002. Around the Royal Docks the empty spaces are gradually being filled for mixed uses, with the docks retained as recreational water (see Fig 22). On the north side of Victoria Dock an array of cranes planted as picturesque features are complemented by formal landscaping by Patel Taylor beside hotels and an exhibition centre. A landscaped walk links the housing on the south side to the outstanding new green contribution, the Thames Barrier Park designed by the French firm Groupes Signes (Fig 38). This was laid out from 1997 to 2000 on derelict industrial land, now framed by two areas of new housing. It incorporates a 'green dock' of undulating hedges; areas of geometrically arranged trees with meadow land on either side; and an eloquently minimal riverside pavilion forming a memorial to victims of war.

At present attention is focused on the Olympic site in the Lea valley. But there is no overall strategy for the open spaces of the whole of the Thames Gateway site, although plans are



Figure 35. Basildon New Town footpath (photo: 2006)



Figure 36. Greenway, Newham, created in 1980s above outfall sewer (photo: 2006)



Figure 37. East Ham churchyard, nature reserve (photo: 2006)



Figure 38. Thames Barrier Park

being developed for transport links which include pedestrian and cycle paths (Thames Gateway website). Imaginative unofficial concepts have been put forward, such as Terry Farrell's suggestion of a Thames estuary country park, or the proposal of water cities to take account of the issue of rising sea levels and potential flooding (*Architects' Journal* 2006). A visionary master plan is needed which will give sympathetic attention to the character of the future open spaces in the unique land-and-waterscape of the Thames Gateway, drawing on the rich and varied legacy of its past history.

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Further Reading

A general historical overview of the Thames Gateway area both north and south of the river is provided by Blandford 2003, and a more detailed account of the Essex landscape as a whole, by Hunter 1999. Histories of some of the Essex parishes (including those now in Greater London) can be found in the relevant volumes of the Victoria County History (VCH); the Isle of Dogs is covered in detail by the Survey of London. Brief accounts of the principal buildings, with general introductions and further reading, are in the Pevsner Architectural Guides. Social and economic trends in East London are discussed in the collection of essays edited by Butler and Rustin. Information on historic green spaces in the London area is available in the ongoing inventory prepared by Sally Williams for the London Parks and Gardens Trust (LPGT); similar research by the Essex and Kent Gardens Trust is under way.

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1, 15, 16: Wright, *History ... of Essex*, 1836

2: Ordnance Survey Geological Map, late 19th century

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28: Greater London Development Plan, 1914 – 18

38: National Monuments Record, English Heritage

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