

# CITY RIVERSIDE

*A GUIDE TO THE RIVERSIDE OF THE CITY OF LONDON  
...AND ITS FUTURE*



CORPORATION  
OF LONDON

## CITY RIVERSIDE

*A Guide to the riverside of the City of London*

### Introduction

Like all great city rivers, the Thames, wending its way through the heart of London and forming the southern boundary of the City itself, adds a character of its own to the life and traditions of our capital. In terms of London's history, trade and amenity, the river has played and continues to play a vital and dynamic role. Indeed the river has been responsible for initiating, sustaining and nurturing the development of the City of London from its beginnings as a Roman trading port to its present day status as a leading world financial centre.

In addition to its historical role, the Thames offers a valuable, if under-used, open space to all who live or work in London and to visitors. Moreover, it supports a surprising diversity of wildlife. The amenity value of the river is one which the Corporation of London, as the local planning authority for the City, is keen to develop and promote.

The feeling of space and light, coupled with the atmosphere of a working river provides a focus for recreation in the City, second to none, and it has been our policy for many years to create a public City riverside walk which will enable this vital asset to be enjoyed by everyone. Obviously, such an ambition could not be achieved overnight. Many existing waterside buildings abutted the river bank and so we had to bide our time until rebuilding and road improvements provided the opportunity for a public walkway to be accommodated into new schemes. Today, most sections of the river walk have been completed; the remaining links are either under construction or are the subject of careful negotiations to secure public access. Additionally the Corporation is undertaking a programme of environmental improvements designed to enhance the character and amenity value of the City's riverside.

The Corporation's aim is to have a continuous riverside walkway, from the City of London's boundary on Victoria Embankment to its eastern edge at Tower Pier, in place by the millennium. This will form an important part of the Countryside Commission's long-distance Thames Path National Trail, running some 180 miles along the banks of the river, from its source in Kemble, Gloucestershire to the Thames barrier, at Greenwich.

*Brewman*

Chairman: Planning & Transportation Committee

*Chel M. Cohen*

Chairman: Trees, Gardens and City Open Spaces  
Sub-Committee

## RIVERSIDE CONTEXT

The City's River frontage stretches from Temple Pier on the Victoria Embankment, to Tower Pier in the east. The varied and familiar City skyline and riverscape ranges from the formality and openness of the Embankment to the concentration of riverfront buildings further east. The riverside is punctuated by its 5 bridges, and enclosed downstream by Tower Bridge. Much of its visual character is relatively recent. However, many references to the City's history survive in the form of street patterns, buildings and place names. What is less apparent is that the river frontage has successively encroached upon the River. The present form and scale of development, the position of the river frontage and the absence of much commercial activity cloud an immediate understanding of the history of the City's riverside.



### EVOLUTION OF THE RIVERSIDE

#### Roman

Roman Londinium, at around 130 hectares, was essentially the later walled City. The riverfront followed the present southern side of Upper Thames Street and Lower Thames Street. In the 1st and 2nd centuries there were substantial timber wharves, with vessels using the foreshore at low tide. The River Fleet estuary extended this waterfront beyond the walled City. The river, more than half a mile wide at high tide, was spanned by a timber bridge at a narrow point, just to the east of the present London Bridge; the same site adopted for the first stone bridge in 1176.

Londinium expanded rapidly to become a thriving centre of commerce and government, and principal European trading port. The waterfronts have revealed spectacular archaeological finds. Principal buildings include public baths at Huggin Hill and private baths at Lower Thames Street by St. Dunstons Hill. The Provincial Governor's Palace lies to the east of and beneath Cannon Street Station. Forum, basilica and a temple lie astride the line of Gracechurch Street where it meets Fenchurch Street, with direct access to London Bridge. The basilica was the largest Roman building north of the Alps. The defensive wall built between the mid 3rd and later 4th centuries and interspersed with bastions and gates, was eventually extended along the riverfront.

#### Saxon

Early Saxon settlement characteristically avoided the Roman walled City, centring upon the more open area of Fleet Street and the Strand. The walled City remained the focus, however, for routes using the river crossing and, as in the Saxon use of Roman towns elsewhere, may have been a centre for Royalty and the Church. A royal palace existed at Aldermanbury, with St. Paul's founded in AD 604.

The later Saxon period re-established the City and provided the foundation for its future continuous growth and prosperity. The riverfront was reclaimed, improved and new landing stages created. Of note are the harbours of Dowgate, Queenhithe and Billingsgate; the last two being public landing places with duties payable to the Crown. As trade increased public markets evolved on the foreshore which survived until the early 13th century.

The network of minor lanes, alleys and streets of today's City essentially derives from this period. A series of lanes running north-south linked the riverside and its commercial activity with the rest of the City, especially between Queenhithe and Cheapside.

## Norman and Medieval

From 1066 sites were extended into the river to form a new waterfront on reclaimed land. The Roman City Wall was extended in the west to the River Fleet, and to the east William the Conqueror built the White Tower to assert his control over London. In doing so, he reaffirmed the administrative and trading rights of the City.

The riverside Roman wall had been demolished by c.1150 and the first stone bridge across the Thames was completed in 1209. London Bridge was the only stone bridge in London for 5½ centuries, and the only one in the City until Robert Mylne's Blackfriars Bridge of 1769.

In the 12th and 13th centuries principal monasteries were founded within and outside the City. Carmelite (Whitefriars) and Dominican (Blackfriars) situated either side of the Fleet, were the two closest to the Thames.

By the time of the Great Fire of 1666 there were 97 churches within the walls and 10 more outside in the 'liberties', within today's City boundary. Some are thought to date from the Saxon period, though reference is scarce before the 12th century. Following the Great Fire, 51 of these were rebuilt to create, with St. Paul's, the most evocative ecclesiastical skyline of the City. Post-Fire rebuilding re-instated the essentially Saxon street pattern and pre-Fire scale of buildings. The River Fleet was canalised, extending quay frontage up to Holborn Bridge. The canal was arched over in 1765, providing the approach to the new bridge at Blackfriars and the site of the Fleet Market to the north.

By 1588 London handled half the nation's trade. To combat smuggling all ships were compelled to discharge goods at 17 Legal Quays in the Upper Pool, between London Bridge and the Tower. In 1665 three more Legal Quays were established. The Legal Quays, together with a few 'Sufferance Wharves', where certain lower duty goods could be handled, were still in control of all trade in the late 18th century. The volume of trade tripled during the 18th century making London the world's busiest port. Goods were increasingly transferred to and from barges downstream to serve the overcrowded Wharves and Quays. Congestion on the Thames increased by its use for commerce, recreation and public transport. From the 15th century the City Corporation and the City Livery Companies established a tradition of river-based processions; their colourful barges joined by many other craft in water pageants likened to those of Venice.



## 19th and early 20th century

Congestion in the Pool of London eventually prompted the construction of enclosed docks downstream from 1802. The City quays, however, remained competitive and profitable, handling more specialised and fresh produce; and new warehousing and wharves were built, increasingly served by barges. By the 1890s there were 50 working wharves on the City waterfront, with many warehouses providing sales and auction services for the City merchants.

The first Blackfriars Bridge, opened in 1769, was followed in the 19th century with the construction or renewal of the other City bridges. Southwark Bridge was completed in 1819 and London Bridge was rebuilt on new line to the west in 1831. Blackfriars was rebuilt in 1869 and finally Tower Bridge was opened in 1894. The rail bridges were added at Blackfriars in 1864 and 1866 and Cannon Street in 1866; their stations creating riverfront landmarks. Other surviving landmarks are Billingsgate Market, built in its present form in 1866, Custom House, built in its current position in 1817 and substantially rebuilt in 1827. The Fishmongers' Hall was opened in 1834, adjacent to the new London Bridge.

The City's responsibility for the 69 miles of River Thames between Staines and Leigh-on-Sea passed to the Thames Conservancy in 1857 and the Corporation maintained its influence through this agency. In 1909 the tidal river and its docking became the responsibility of the new Port of London Authority.

With the principal exception of the Victoria Embankment, completed in 1870, the City's riverfront was characterised by a concentration of small docks, warehousing, wharves, cranes and narrow alleys until the 1940s - small vessels above London Bridge and larger in the Upper Pool. Despite war damage many of the warehouses remained in use until the 1960s when the increase in vessel size and containerisation completed the concentration of trade at Tilbury.

The predominant use of the City's riverside buildings is now offices but also includes two telephone exchanges, housing, the City of London Boys' School and Fishmongers' Hall. Improvements in the handling of refuse at Walbrook Wharf have resulted in the infilling of the dock at the City's last working wharf, in the vicinity of the original Dowgate dock. Queenhithe remains an existing dock.

## RIVERSIDE CHARACTER AND ENVIRONMENTAL AIMS

### Character

At the turn of the century the City's riverfront followed its present alignment, except for the stretch between Blackfriars and Broken Wharf. From the Embankment eastward the waterfront was divided by small docks reached by numerous alleys, many of Saxon origin. Some approaches were linked by quays, but the nature of waterfront access was at right angles, not parallel to the River.

The principal changes in the 20th century were a result of Second World War damage and post-war enthusiasm for comprehensive reconstruction and improvement. The form and horizontal emphasis of the replacement buildings, and the total change introduced by road improvements east of Blackfriars Bridge, constructed on reclaimed land, removed most of the surviving intricate sequence of City warehousing, wharves and alleys.

### Early Policy Intentions

The aim of a continuous City riverside walk first emerged in the planning and improvements report by C.H.Holden and W.G. Holford. Bomb damage in the 1940s and new development presented an opportunity to incorporate public riverside access. The idea was adopted by the City Corporation and from the 1950s became an objective of riverside development.

Highway improvements to Upper Thames Street between Blackfriars Bridge and Southwark Bridge afforded the opportunity to create a continuous stretch of riverside walk, now known as Paul's Walk, from the Embankment to Broken Wharf. It encroached into the River, extending the alignment of the Embankment under the first arch of the Blackfriars Bridges. Its completion resulted in the loss of earlier City scale, vertical emphasis and visual vitality, but created a major section of public walk; a notable achievement at the time but warranting improvement by today's environmental standards.

The influential environmental control affecting the City skyline between the Temples and Cannon Street Station was drawn up in the 1930s to safeguard the prominence of St. Paul's Cathedral. Devised by the Surveyor to the Fabric of St. Paul's and accepted by the City Corporation from 1936, St. Paul's Heights code restricts the height of buildings across this arc to the south of the Cathedral, preserving and enhancing views from an area of the Thames from Hungerford Bridge to London Bridge. Further enhancement and protection of townscape views has been achieved with St. Paul's vista, up Peters Hill, as well as views to and from the Monument.

**FURTHER INFORMATION**

- Department of Planning  
Urban Design & Conservation Section  
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- Access Officer 0171 -332 1995

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*The Corporation of London is the local authority for the financial and commercial heart of Britain, the City of London. It is committed to maintaining and enhancing the status of the Business City as one of the world's three leading financial centres through the policies it pursues and the high standard of service it provides. Its responsibilities extend far beyond the City boundaries and it provides a host of additional facilities for the benefit of the nation. These range from the Central Criminal Court, The Old Bailey, to the famous Barbican Arts Centre and open spaces such as Epping Forest and Hampstead Heath.*

*Among local authorities the Corporation of London is unique: not only is it the oldest in the country, combining its ancient traditions and ceremonial functions with the role of a modern and efficient authority, but it operates on a non-party political basis through its Lord Mayor, Aldermen and Members of the Court of Common Council.*

*The Corporation of London:  
a unique authority for a unique City.*



Fleet Street

Temples

**BRIDEWELL PALACE**

Bridewell Palace was built by Henry VIII in 1523 on largely reclaimed land at the junction of the Fleet and the Thames. It was arranged round 2 main and 1 external courtyards. In 1553 it was given by Edward VI to the City as a prison, hospital and workrooms. Rebuilt after the Fire it continued in use as a prison, providing education for apprentices and early medical care, until its closure in 1855 and demolition in 1864.

**WHITEFRIARS**

The monastery dates from c.1250 and at its height occupied an area stretching from Fleet Street to the River and Whitefriars/Carmelite Street to the Temple. Like Blackfriars the monastery buildings had associations with the theatre after dissolution.

Embankment

Roman waterfront, City wall & principal buildings

Late 17th century waterfront & principal buildings

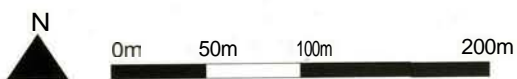
Waterfront c.1910

Route of Riverside Walk



**BLACKFRIARS BRIDGE**

Blackfriars became the second City bridge on its completion in 1769. Officially named the William Pitt Bridge, it was designed by Robert Mylne in an idiom inspired by Piranesi, with whom Mylne had spent much time. Freed from tolls in 1785 it was replaced by the present bridge designed by Joseph Cubitt and H. Carr: it was opened by Queen Victoria in 1869 on the same day as Holborn Viaduct. This bridge was widened on its western side in 1907-10.



## BLACKFRIARS

Established on the site of the first Baynard Castle and Montfichet Tower in 1278, and involving the demolition of part of the City wall and its reconstruction along the Fleet, the Dominican Priory became very influential. It served as a meeting place for the Court of Chancery, Privy Council and Parliament and was the scene of many affairs of Church and State before dissolution in 1538. Blackfriars remained a fashionable residential area with literary and dramatic associations.

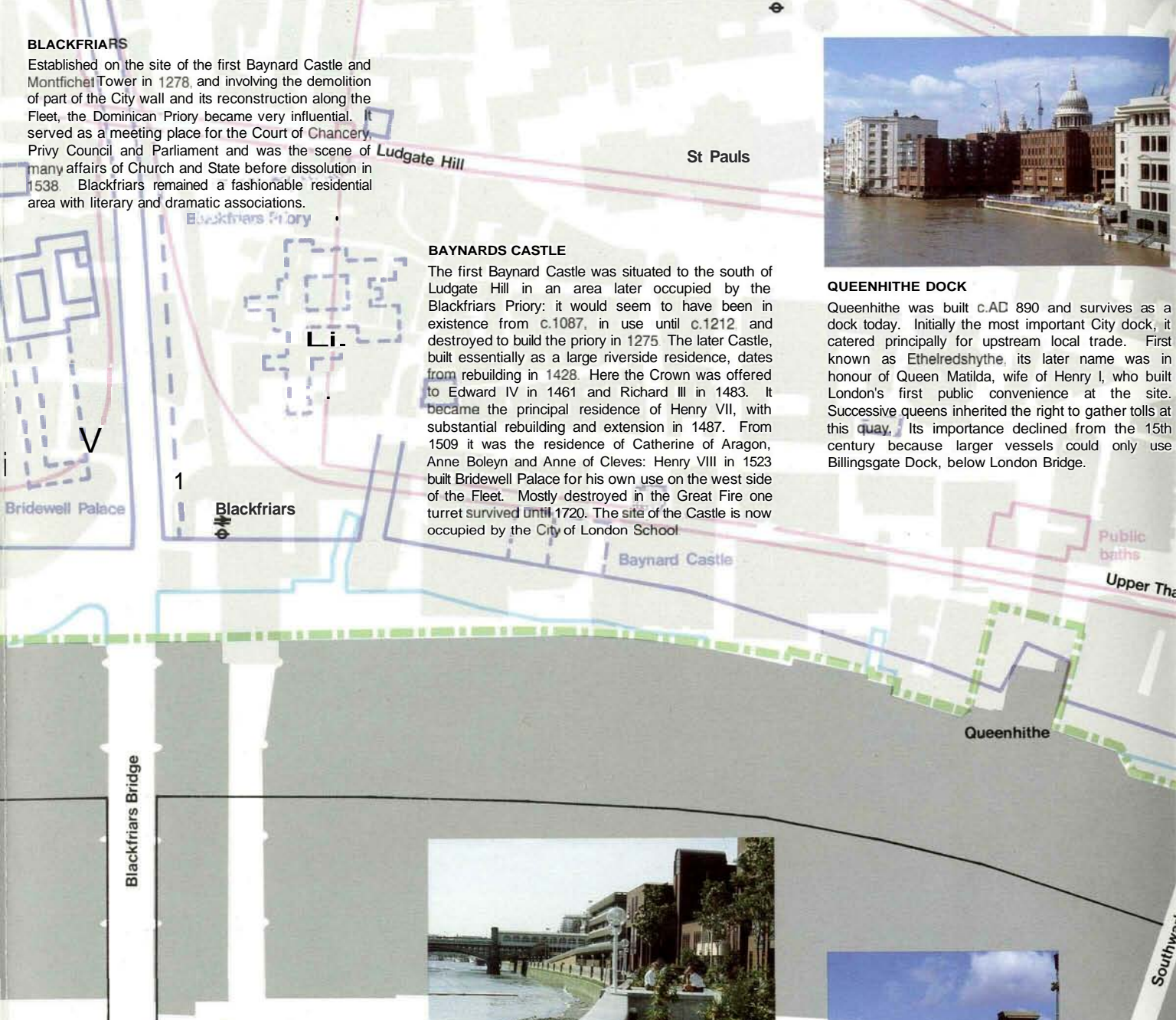
## BAYNARDS CASTLE

The first Baynard Castle was situated to the south of Ludgate Hill in an area later occupied by the Blackfriars Priory: it would seem to have been in existence from c.1087, in use until c.1212 and destroyed to build the priory in 1275. The later Castle, built essentially as a large riverside residence, dates from rebuilding in 1428. Here the Crown was offered to Edward IV in 1461 and Richard III in 1483. It became the principal residence of Henry VII, with substantial rebuilding and extension in 1487. From 1509 it was the residence of Catherine of Aragon, Anne Boleyn and Anne of Cleves: Henry VIII in 1523 built Bridewell Palace for his own use on the west side of the Fleet. Mostly destroyed in the Great Fire one turret survived until 1720. The site of the Castle is now occupied by the City of London School.



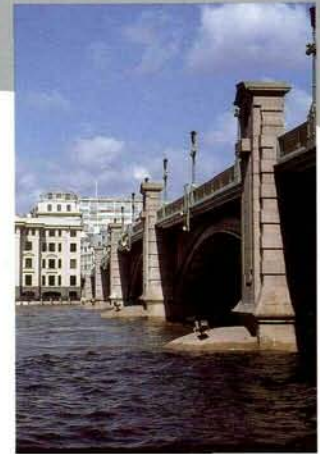
## QUEENHITHE DOCK

Queenhithe was built c.AD 890 and survives as a dock today. Initially the most important City dock, it catered principally for upstream local trade. First known as Ethelredshythe, its later name was in honour of Queen Matilda, wife of Henry I, who built London's first public convenience at the site. Successive queens inherited the right to gather tolls at this quay. Its importance declined from the 15th century because larger vessels could only use Billingsgate Dock, below London Bridge.



## BLACKFRIARS RAIL BRIDGES

At Blackfriars the western railway bridge, by Joseph Cubitt and F.T. Turner, was built for the London, Chatham and Dover Railway in 1862-4. It was designed in conjunction with the road bridge, keeping the same alignment for the piers, and built incorporating stone from the old Westminster Bridge in the abutments. The second bridge at Blackfriars, known as St. Pauls Bridge, was designed by Sir John Wolfe-Barry and H.M. Brunei for the Holborn Viaduct Station Company and opened in 1886. Only the abutments (of the earlier bridge) with their decorative insignia, and the massive Romanesque cast-iron columns, now survive.



## SOUTHWARK BRIDGE

The first Southwark Bridge, designed by Sir John Rennie, was completed in 1819. In order to minimise obstruction to navigation it was built of cast-iron with 3 arches, the central arch achieving a span of 73m - making it the largest bridge ever constructed of this material. It was rebuilt as a 5 span bridge designed by Mott and Hay in association with Sir Ernest George, between 1912 and 1921.





Cornhill

Leaden

Basilica & Forum



Eastcheap

Monument

Lower Thames Street

House of  
baths



Cannon Street

Governor's Palace

### FISHMONGERS' HALL

The present building is the fourth Fishmongers' Hall, the Company Charter dating from 1272 and the first Hall from 1310. With the importance of fish in the medieval diet the Company acquired great wealth and influence and still maintains an inspection role today. The 3rd Hall, 1671, by Edward Jarman, was demolished with the building of the new London Bridge in 1827. The existing building, completed in 1834 and designed by Henry Roberts, lends classical elegance to the riverfront and this approach to the City. The area under London Bridge and in front of the Hall provides an attractive addition to the Riverside Walk.

### BILLINGSGATE

Billingsgate Dock, first referenced c.1000 in London's earliest harbour regulations, catered for both local and overseas trade. The larger revetments similar to Roman dock construction; a process that was to continue until the increasing use of stone in the late medieval period. The dock was filled in to provide a site for the first Billingsgate Market in 1850. The present listed building has recently been refurbished for office use and is fronted by a notable space, part of which is dedicated public walkway.

### CANNON STREET RAIL BRIDGE

The Cannon Street Station Bridge, or Alexandra Bridge, was designed by Sir John Wolfe-Barry and John Hawkshaw, and opened in 1866, serving the City terminus of the South Eastern Railway. The Station roof took the shape of an almost semi-circular arch 207m in length, rising to 32m in height. Following air raid damage the roof was eventually removed in 1958, but the twin towers, now listed and refurbished, remain one of the landmarks of the City. The riverside walkway is incorporated into an arch beneath the station.

London Bridge

### LONDON BRIDGE

The first London Bridge was completed in 1209 and cleared of houses in 1757, was replaced on a new alignment in 1831 to the designs of Sir John Rennie - following the rejection of other designs, including one by Telford for a 182m single span cast-iron bridge. The formation of King William Street, Princes Street and Moorgate, cutting through the medieval fabric, created an approach to London Bridge. Despite widening in 1902-4 the Rennie bridge was replaced between 1967 and 1972 by the current bridge, designed by Mott, Hay and Anderson in association with Lord Holford.



all Street



Fenchurch Street



**CUSTOM HOUSE**

Customs duty appears to have been introduced by King Ethelred. The first Custom House was built on the old Wool Quay east of the present site. It was rebuilt in 1378, 1559, by Wren in 1671 and on the some foundations in 1725 by Thomas Ripley. The present building by David Laing was completed on the new site to the west in 1817, but following substantial collapse, had its Long Room and front facade replaced by Robert Smirke in 1827. The present facade of this listed building, 363m in length, faces onto an attractive and historic private quay, complete with cranes and railings, and distinguished by an attractive sequence of trees.



Custom House

Tower of London



**TOWER BRIDGE**

Tower Bridge opened in 1894; designed by John Wolfe-Barry and Sir Horace Jones, overcame the problems of maintaining adequate shipping access to the Upper Pool by its opening bascules. A previous design for a single span road bridge by Bazalgette in 1879 had been rejected because of insufficient headroom. The design of Tower Bridge, now listed, was strongly influenced by a Government requirement that it should in appearance complement the adjacent Tower of London,

Tower Bridge



# COMPLETION OF THE RIVERSIDE WALK AND ENHANCEMENT OF THE RIVERSIDE

## The Corporation's Commitment

The creation of a public walk along the City's river frontage has been a long term aim of the Corporation. Sections of the walk have been achieved incrementally usually as a result of redevelopment. This acquisition has been a relatively slow process but is now nearing completion. The Trees, Gardens and City Open Spaces Sub Committee has responsibility for overseeing the completion and enhancement of the riverside walk. A working party of officers, led by the Department of Planning, has been charged specifically with the tasks of co-ordinating the work of owners of riverside buildings and developers, of advising the Sub Committee on how best to secure the expeditious completion of the walk and a programme of environmental improvements to stretches of the existing walk. This will include works to improve its appearance and landscaping, better amenities such as lighting, signs and seats, improved access and facilities for people with disabilities, as well as the provision of information about the history of the river and the riverside.

Since 1967 the Corporation has had statutory power to create city ways either by imposing appropriate conditions on planning permissions or by entering into agreements with the relevant owners of property. A few owners are reluctant to relinquish their private rights on the riverside. Legal agreements to allow public access are currently being sought on the last few sites to complete the walkway. If no mutual agreement can be reached on any site, the Corporation may exercise statutory powers to acquire compulsorily the necessary land. It is anticipated that sections where links are still to be achieved will be completed and accessible to the public by the end of the century.

The Corporation's statutory responsibilities for the river and the riverside are contained in the City of London Unitary Development Plan. The UDP includes policies:

- to ensure all developments pay regard to the character of the riverside and to maintain or improve views of the river.
- to implement the St Paul's Heights policy.
- to resist development in or over the river.
- to encourage public facilities and a variety of uses.
- to restrict the permanent mooring of vessels to those of national importance or with special connections with the Thames.
- to restrict the use of moored vessels to activities that would enable the public enjoyment of the river.
- to ensure the completion of the riverside walk and its enhancement.
- to support the increased use of the river for public and freight transport services.
- to maintain and safeguard Strategic Views.

The Corporation of London would like to thank the City of London School for its support in the production of this leaflet.

