

Welcome

The CreekLink Heritage Trail is a Charitable Incorporated Organization (CIO), Charity Number 1205283 established in 2023. Its objects are to create and maintain a Creekside heritage trail along Deptford Creek, in SE London, which will raise awareness and understanding of the remarkable 19th century industrial history and current biodiversity of Deptford Creek. This will be for the education of the public. The enhanced public amenity will be a particular benefit for all the local communities in the Deptford Creek neighbourhood of the London Boroughs of Greenwich and Lewisham, who share a common historical legacy.

For more details of CreekLink's charitable status, consult the Charity Commission. See also link [here](#).

News

Latest news

Feb 2025: Crowd Funding Site developed ready for launch.

End of 2024: Planning permission put in for the Ha'Penny Bridge Information Board. When installed in 2025 it will be Creeklink's first.

In 2024: CreekLink's new board of trustees began 2024 by deciding to concentrate on implementing Phase One of its proposed heritage trail. This will focus on the core legacy area centred between the Ha'Penny Hatch bridge and the A2 at Deptford Broadway. It will use four of the total of the ten proposed Information Points to tell the stories of the Greenwich Railway, and the Bazalgette / Thames Water Greenwich Pumping Station. The Phase One story boards will also use commissioned material from the Creekside Discovery Centre to celebrate the environmental riches and challenges of the 21st century Creek.

In 2023: CreekLink uses the year to successfully recruit six trustees to join Barbara Reid and Mick Delap in a Charitably Incorporated Organization entitled the CreekLink Heritage Trail, Charity Number 1205283.

In 2022: CreekLink builds support for the proposed Heritage Trail from stakeholders including Thames Tideway Tunnel, Thames Water, the Creekside Discovery Centre, Royal Museums Greenwich, and the Royal Borough of Greenwich. CreekLink also begins offering a series of popular guided Creek walks to residents. But its status as an unincorporated local organization rules out any charitable funding, and attempts to partner with charitably incorporated local organizations fail.

In 2021: Mick Delap and Barbara Reid create the CreekLink Heritage Trail Action Group. Dr Mary Mills publishes her Creek research in book form, as "The Industries of Deptford Creek". With donations from the Greenwich Industrial History Society, The Greenwich Society, and the Ashburnham Triangle Association, CreekLink commissions a CreekLink Heritage Trail Feasibility Study from heritage trail professional Madeleine Adams. The proposed heritage trail will consist of story boards sited at 9 Information Points (later 10) on both banks of the Creek.

Aim

Aims & Programme

Since 2022, CreekLink has been working to create ten Information Points along both banks of Deptford Creek, from where the Creek meets the Thames to its upper limit at Deptford Broadway. Each Information Point will be provided with one or more story boards, describing different local aspects of the Creek's 19th century industrial history, and its 21st century environment. The story boards will touch on the challenges we have inherited from our coal-based past, and include child and family friendly material. For a more detailed account of CreekLink plans, see the [2022 Feasibility Study](#) on this website or have a look at the updated version [here](#).

As Phase One of these overall plans, CreekLink is focussing its efforts in 2025 on creating its first three Information Points in the vicinity of the Ha'Penny Hatch bridge and pathway at the heart of the Creek. They will tell two stories of key Creek historical contributions to today's London. First there is the pioneering London Bridge to Greenwich Railway (in 1836, a London first). Second, there is the Greenwich Sewage Pumping Station, from its crucial role in Joseph Bazalgette's revolutionary introduction of a London-wide sewage system in the mid nineteenth century, to its place today as a vital element in Thames Tideway's modernising Super Sewer.

An additional board along the Upper Creek will aim to add accounts of the steam powered flour mills, Merryweather's world famous fire engines and the arrival of electricity to light Greenwich High Road, generated by Ferranti's pioneering power station at the mouth of the Creek.

History

Historical Background

There have been important Tide Mills on the Deptford Broadway section of the Creek since medieval times, and some relatively small scale pioneering chemical manufacturing lower down the Creek since the 17th century. But otherwise the swampy Creek remained largely a neglected backwater well beyond the orbit of London - until all changed at the beginning of the 19th century. With the arrival of the coal powered Industrial Revolution, London entered the new century with a population rapidly heading towards a million. By 1845 there were two million Londoners, and by 1885, four million. They needed better transport, by land and sea, more power, improved health and safety, more food, and manufactures of every kind. And inventors and manufacturing entrepreneurs flocked to London in response. But as early as 1825 it was becoming increasingly difficult to find the right conditions within the heart of London for start-up ventures: cheap land, easily accessible sea-borne supplies, especially of coal. Plus access to existing engineering and technical skills.

Nearby, though, Deptford Creek ticked all the boxes. So, between 1825 and 1900, a series of innovative Creek-based ventures helped London expand into the world's first mega city.

On the transport front, John Penn's Greenwich-built marine steam engines, and the Brocklebank brothers' General Steam Navigation Company led the way in using steam power to transform sea transport. In 1836, London's first railway, between London Bridge and Greenwich, did the same on land. By this time, Deptford Creek was also becoming a hot bed of new chemical manufacturing techniques and production. In 1845, John Bennett Lawes started the world's first Super Phosphate fertilizer factory here – to help struggling farmers keep pace with the growing appetites of urban factory workers, in London and round the world. To keep London's overcrowded workers healthy and safe, between 1857 and 1865 Joseph Bazalgette provided London with the world's first effective mass sewage system. And from the beginning the Greenwich Pumping Station played the key role it still maintains, with the 21st century addition of the modernised Thames Tideway Super Sewer. Meanwhile, from the 1870's Merryweather's prize winning fire engines were leaving the Creek not just for London, but for every corner of the world. As steam power reached its limits in the 1880's, it was at the mouth of Deptford Creek that the young Sebastian de Ferranti masterminded the creation of the world's first modern-style electricity power station – and in 1891, put Greenwich High Road among the world's earliest streets to be illuminated by powerstation generated electricity.

This scale of influential industrial innovation and manufacture couldn't last. London, and especially places like Deptford Creek, were physically too small to sustain the levels of production their 19th century successes now required. So as the 20th century developed, one after another, aging Creek industries re-located beyond London. They were replaced by much more basic activities where water transport was still an asset, like the removal of scrap metal and urban rubbish, and the delivery of building aggregate. The Creek and its communities survived the two World Wars, but by the 1980's, even those basic activities were failing, leaving the Creek to the 21st century property developers. First results have seen an uneasy mix of older and newer communities, united in little except the general amnesia about the Creek's 19th century glory days. CreekLink was founded to help make this forgotten historical legacy available once again to all the Creek's communities, via a new public realm equally accessible to all, and proudly shared at the heart of a newly vibrant Creek neighbourhood.

[Read less](#)

Deptford Creek Timeline

This sections sets out some of the history of the Creek and work done to establish the Creeklink Charity

Timings

Middle Ages

Tide Mills at Deptford Bridge.

17th Century

Pioneering Copperas chemical works.

1825

First steam powered Creek industries, including foundation of the General Steam Navigation Company, and the Phoenix Gas Works. Plus John Penn's marine engines, and Frank Hill's Greenwich Chemical Works.

1836

The Greenwich Railway, London's first, reaches Deptford (1838 arrives Greenwich).

1845

John Bennett Lawes opens his world first Super Phosphate Fertilizer factory. Mills converting to steam power. Wheen's Soap Factory opens next door in 1849, on the Laban site for next 100 years.

1857 - 1865

Joseph Bazalgette builds the Greenwich Pumping Station as part of his London Sewage system.

1870's and 1880's

Peak industrial activity up and down the Creek, including Tide Mills converting to steam power and establishment of Merryweather's Fire Engine works.

1891

Sebastian de Ferranti opens London Electricity Supply Company's Deptford Sub Station – world's first modern style power station. Via LESC sub station and pioneering high tension cables Greenwich High Road gains electric street lighting.

20th Century

Major industries abandon the Creek, slowly at first, and then more quickly.

21st Century

Beginning of Creek re-generation, Creekside Discovery Centre and Laban Dance Centre leading the way, plus Creekside housing developments.

2010 - 20

While local historian Dr Mary Mills continues to research and publish on the Creek, local resident Mick Delap, joined by Barbara Reid, begin to campaign for better public access to the Creek, and more public awareness of its historical legacy.

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