

The Thames River Police Heritage Trail

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St. Margaret's Church

Nearest Tube Stations: Westminster, St. James' Park

Situated in the heart of Westminster, in the shadow of Westminster Abbey you will find St. Margaret's Church, the parish church of Parliament. Located on Thorney Island, it was originally built by Edward the Confessor in the 11th Century. The church we see today was constructed in 1523. Many famous people are commemorated there, such as the famous Elizabethan explorer Sir Walter Raleigh (who is buried under the altar), and such events as the baptism of Olaudah Equiano, a freed slave also known as Gustavus Vassa who supported the British abolitionist movement.



The front of the church

The church is home to the memorial stone of Patrick Colquhoun, a Scottish magistrate and founder of the Thames River Police, alongside John Harriott and The West India Committee. He wrote *'A Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis'* a groundbreaking study of crime in London, which also outlined a preventive police force to combat it. He identified different types of criminals, many of them river workers, stealing goods from West Indian ships and gave them flamboyant names such as Rat-Catchers, Light and Heavy Horsemen and Scuffle-Hunters. His influential work led to him being commissioned by the West India Committee to design a police force to protect the trade on the River Thames.

As you enter the church, the stone is located to the left, in the corner, and lists his many achievements.

New Scotland Yard

Nearest Tube Station: Westminster



The sign over New Scotland Yard

Leaving St Margaret's Church, walk to Parliament Square where you will find statues of famous politicians, such as the former President of South Africa Nelson Mandela, and former British Prime Minister and the founder of the Metropolitan Police Robert Peel. Head towards the left of Big Ben and turn left down Embankment, where you will find New Scotland Yard. Originally located at Great Scotland Yard, the home of the Metropolitan Police has been relocated many times and this latest location was officially opened on 13th July 2017. Across the River Thames you will see the London Eye, along with other popular tourist attractions.

Established in 1829, the Metropolitan Police were founded on the same principles of preventative, community policing that were proven to work by the Thames River Police over the previous 31 years. In 1838 the first known mixed-race officer, Robert Branford, joined the Metropolitan Police, eventually rising to the high rank of Superintendent. The Thames Police became the Metropolitan Police's Thames Division in 1839.

R.N.L.I. Tower Lifeboat Station

Nearest Tube Stations: Waterloo, Embankment & Temple

Remain on Embankment and walk north down the river. By Somerset House you will find the R.N.L.I.'s Tower Lifeboat Station. Head onto Waterloo Bridge for a clearer view of the busiest lifeboat station in the country. Prior to what you see today, it was a landing stage for steamboats and was a Thames Police Station from 1872 to the end of the 20th Century, called Waterloo Police Pier. The current structure is the second one to be moored at this location and was built especially for the police at the beginning of the 20th century.

The river has changed a lot over the past few centuries. It once reached the South Wing entrance of Somerset House, where above you will see a relief of Old Father Thames, the personification of the river. The construction of the Embankment in Victorian times means that the river is smaller and faster than it once was. Where ships once dominated the river carrying cargo such as sugar from the West Indies and ivory from Africa, it is now predominantly used for pleasure boats. The water today is the cleanest it has been for centuries; in 1957 the Natural History Museum declared the Thames to be biologically dead!



Wapping Police Station

Nearest Overground Station: Wapping

Come out of Wapping Overground Station and turn left down Wapping High Street. Go past the Captain Kidd pub, where Execution Dock is believed to have once been located, and Wapping Police Station will be on your left, marked by signs on the wall. Founded in 1798, Wapping Police Station has been renovated and rebuilt over the centuries but the site remains the same. In the 18th Century this was a warren of small streets inhabited by sailors who drank in the many pubs in the area. Further down the high street is the Town of Ramsgate pub, where legend has it that Captain Bligh met and had a drink with Fletcher Christian before their famous voyage on HMS Bounty in the 1780s. The Turk's Head pub, now a café, can be found a street back from the High Street and another local legend says that the title deeds obliged the landlord to give a quart of ale to condemned men on their way to Execution Dock.

Wapping Police Station is the home of the Thames Police, the oldest continuously serving police force in the world, who have operated out of this site since 1798. It is now the last Thames Police Station left on the river. In October 1798 the police station was the site of a riot. Although the police were an instant success in combating theft, river workers who had previously taken goods felt like they were denied the perks of the job. Led by James Eyres, they attacked the police office, leading to the death of a rioter and police officer Gabriel Franks.



The Thames Police Museum is located inside the police station and can be visited by appointment.

The Church of St. George in the East & the Highway

Nearest Overground Station: Shadwell

Nearest Docklands Light Railway Station: Shadwell

Walk up from the Police Station through Wapping Rose Gardens, turn right down Green Bank and then turn left and follow Wapping Lane until you reach the Highway. In the early 19th Century it was known as Ratcliffe Highway. It was a bustling street of traders, ladies of the night and sailors, notorious for its ill-repute. Crossing over the Highway, walk into the park that was formerly the graveyard of the Church of St. George in the East. On the north side of the park you can find a mural of the Battle of Cable Street, where the Jewish Community and assorted left-wing groups fought against the British Union of Fascists in the 1930s. The Church itself was designed by Charles Hawksmoor and was bombed during the Second World War, leading to a redesigned interior.

In December 1811 a set of murders occurred, spreading fear down the highway and throughout the country. The Marr family were killed in their shop, the site of which is now believed to be occupied by a Peugeot garage. Thames Officer Charles Horton was the first policeman on the scene and secured the murder weapon, a shipwright's maul. A second set of murders occurred soon afterward and the Thames Police patrolled the streets of Wapping instead of the river, to protect the people, highlighting the need for a preventative police force on land which eventually resulted in the Metropolitan Police. The Marr family were buried in the churchyard but their grave can no longer be found and the headstone has been lost.



West India Quay

Nearest Docklands Light Railway Stations: West India Quay & Westferry

Nearest Underground Station: Canary Wharf

Situated by West India Quay station, you can still see a remnant of the longest brick building in the world, a set of warehouses which stretched for three quarters of a mile. It housed imports from the West Indies, such as sugar, spices and rum. These goods were fueling the economy and the Industrial Revolution. The warehouses are now home to the Museum of London Docklands and a variety of businesses.

The West India Committee campaigned for the creation of the docks, none more so than Robert Milligan, whose statue is located outside the Museum of London Docklands. It was designed to be a secure wet dock, to combat theft like its counterpart the Thames River Police. Construction started in 1800 and was completed in 1802. It was granted a monopoly on West Indian goods for 21 years, meaning that all exports and imports to and from the West Indies were handled here. The docks closed in the late 20th century and Canary Wharf was built on the site.



The West India Committee is a charity established in 1735, which was granted a Royal Charter in 1904. It aims to improve the lives of the people of the Caribbean and the societies in which they live. In 1798 they founded and funded the Thames River Police in partnership with the government.

This guide has been produced by Interns from the Prince's Trust as part of the West India Committee's project on the history of the Thames River Police. This project will reveal the little-known contributions of the West Indies to some of Britain's biggest institutions, including the Metropolitan Police. It is hoped that it will reveal the hidden links between modern policing and the West Indies.



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