



TOWER HAMLETS

# eastendlife

THE COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER FOR TOWER HAMLETS PRODUCED BY YOUR COUNCIL

Enjoy some East End industrial heritage as **Graham Barker** explores Limehouse Cut and Three Mills Island on this month's walk. Photos by **Mike Askew**.

## Set off with a spring in your step

**IN the East End we're fortunate to have plenty of places for waterside walking. This route follows water for virtually its full length, beside a dock, canal and river.**

It takes you past remarkable industrial heritage too, including a railway viaduct, Victorian dog biscuit factory, Georgian mill complex and bridges galore. Try it out on a Sunday afternoon to incorporate a visit to the House Mill at Three Mills Island, a fitting climax to the walk.

We start this month's walk at Limehouse DLR station. Exit the station at the eastern end – signed to Branch Road – to avoid having to cross the busy approach road to Rotherhithe Tunnel. As you leave, catch a glimpse of the tunnel entrance, framed by the arched tunnelling shield used to excavate it in 1904-8.

At the foot of the DLR stairs, turn left and follow the railway viaduct (1). Built by George and Robert Stevenson in 1839, this was originally known as the 'four-penny rope' as the railway carriages were pulled by winding gear using hemp ropes. In the distance you'll spot the tall octagonal tower of the Limehouse Accumulator (2), erected in 1869 to provide hydraulic power for the dock cranes and locks.

Walk anti-clockwise around Limehouse Basin (3), keeping the water on your left-hand side. You'll weave in and out with the dock edge, past smart new apartment blocks, as well as power boats, yachts and colourful barges.

Originally called Regent's Canal Dock, the basin was opened in 1820 as an interchange between the Thames and the canal network. Coal and other cargoes were transferred from sea-faring ships on to narrow boats, which then transported their loads along the Regent's Canal, northwards round to Islington, Camden and Paddington.

Just beyond the three-tier marina office, walk over the first metal footbridge across the channel leading to the Thames. Continue around the dockside, passing the headquarters of the Cruising Association. At the next corner, head right, underneath



**Time stands still in Three Mills Island**

the first metal footbridge and with Canary Wharf on the horizon, continue underneath a second footbridge.

You are now walking along Limehouse Cut. The tower of St Anne's Church (4) soon appears on your right, flying the white ensign. Nicholas Hawksmoor's architecture is impressive, it's worth a quick detour if you have time – by walking up the steps after the blue DLR bridge and following the slabbed path to the church.

Back on the towpath, just before you head underneath Commercial Road, glance left to the soaring façade of The Mission (5), a former sailors' hostel opened in 1924 and now converted to flats.

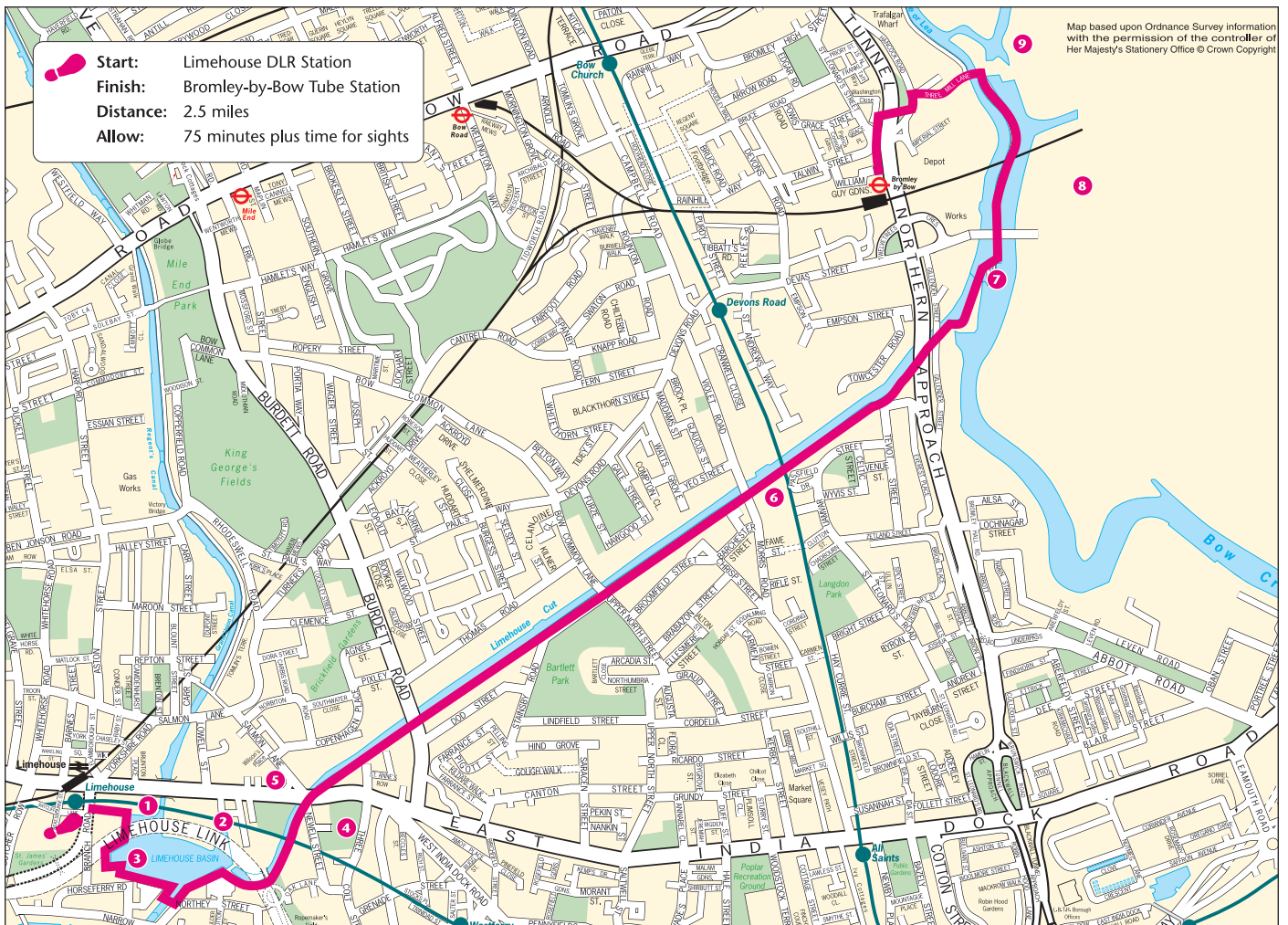
Limehouse Cut now follows a remarkably straight path all the way to Bow Locks. It's the oldest canal in London – built as a short cut for boats to avoid the tortuous and tidal curves of Bow Creek. As you follow the towpath, gritty underfoot, you pass old warehouses and walk under a succession of bridges: Burdett Road, Bow Common Lane, Violet Road, the DLR and

Blackwall Tunnel Northern Approach. Look out en route for a row of sculpted 'capstans' (just after Burdett Road) and a beautiful mosaic showing the length of the Cut (just before Violet Road).

Immediately after the Violet Road bridge is the old factory of Spratt's Patent Limited (6), the world's first dog biscuit manufacturers. You can get the best view of it, with arched windows and a painted advertising sign, from Morris Road. Charles Cruft, founder of the dog show, was an early employee of Spratt's.

To avoid crossing the very busy Blackwall Tunnel Northern Approach, the towpath now diverts underneath along an award-winning 'floating towpath' – more stable than it sounds – running some 240 metres over the water. You emerge on the other side to arrive at Bow Locks (7). Cross over on the white footbridge as it snakes elegantly ahead, giving you views over the pair of parallel locks and Bow Creek to your right.

Continue on, passing first under the broad white road bridge and then the rail-



way bridge, with Tube trains rattling overhead. The path widens out here and water runs to both sides. Through the trees, the listed, rust-coloured Twelve Trees gasholders (8) are earmarked to have new buildings constructed within their skeletal frames.

Three Mills Island (9) soon comes into view. This atmospheric cluster comprises, from left to right, the House Mill, Miller's

House, Clock Mill and Three Mills Studios beyond. House Mill – with a 1776 crest inset into the façade – is believed to be the largest remaining tidal mill in the world, and is open for guided tours on Sundays (see box). Clock House sports an octagonal clock tower and two oast houses. And Three Mills Studios is London's largest film and television studios – so if you hang around you might just spot a star or two!

After exploring, cross the canal and follow the pavement beside Tesco. At the end, turn left and just after the bus stop cross on the zebra crossing.

Slope down to the foot subway underneath the Blackwall Tunnel Northern Approach. On the far side, turn left up steps and follow the roadside pavement to reach Bromley-by-Bow underground station, the end of our walk.



The imposing facade of The Mission



Boats moored in the Limehouse Basin



Bow Locks was built to avoid the tides



Gasholder in Twelve Trees



The bridge over the River Lee