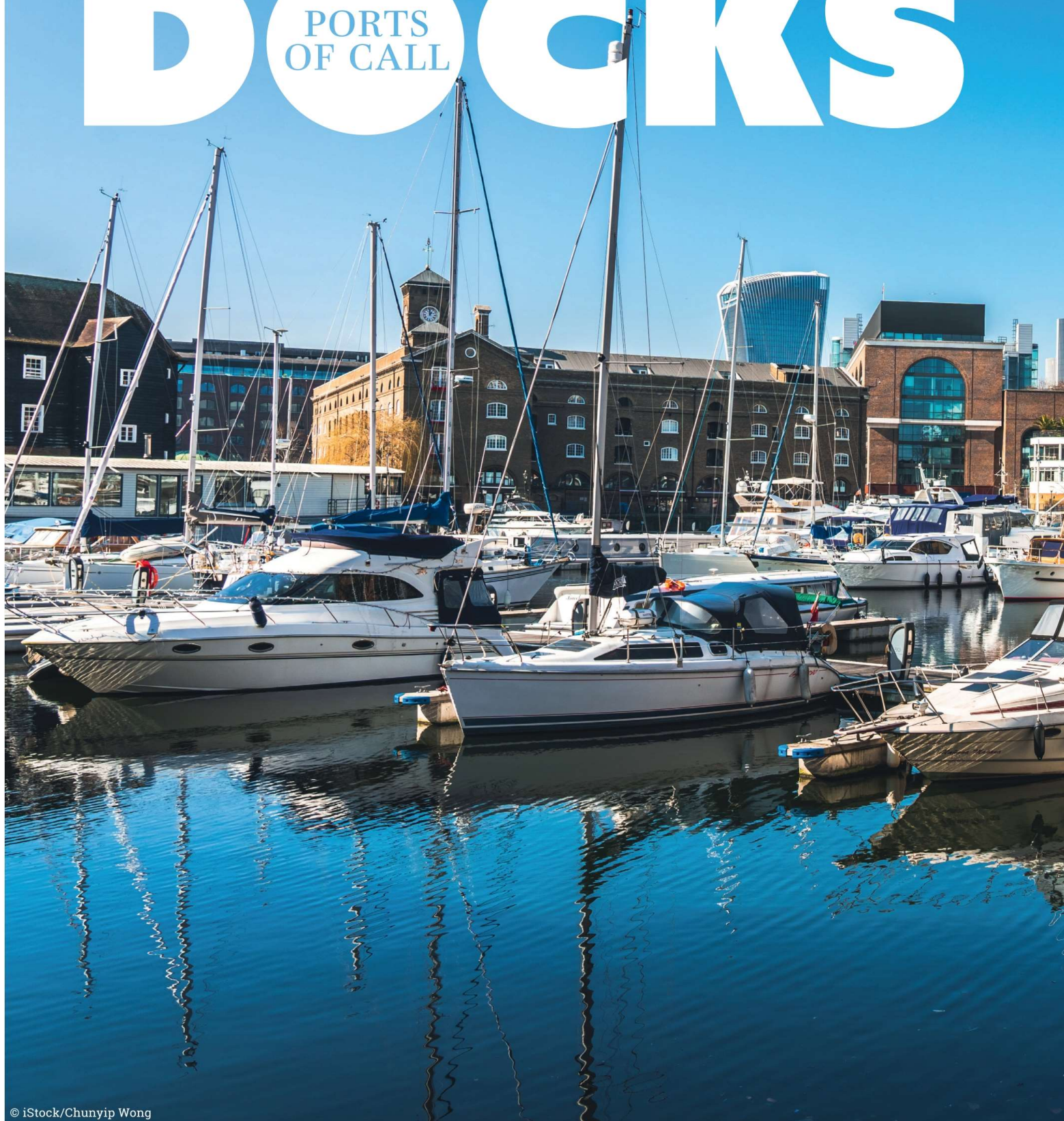


PORTS OF CALL ST KATHARINE DOCKS

# ST KATHARINE DOCKS

PORTS  
OF CALL





Based in the heart of London, perfect for exploring the Thames and its reaches, there is no marina like St Katharine's, as Mark Featherstone and Jo Moon were to discover!

Even though winter's grip may still seek to do its worst, for all of us who love the water, we set our sights on the season ahead and the promise of spring when our coastlines come

alive and the seas sparkle blue once more. While the winter months may represent a boating 'downtime' for many of us, they can still offer good opportunities to do some exploring with the season ahead in mind.

Armed with such noble intent, Jo and I headed for the bright lights of London to find out more about London's most famous Thames-side marina complex, the historical and surprisingly extensive St Katharine Docks.

### A jewel in London's crown

Just as the Cullinan Diamond sits proudly within the centre of the Imperial State Crown (housed, as it is, a mere limestone's throw away in the Tower of London), likewise St Katharine's, the jewel in the Thames's diadem, is located in the middle of the river's long and winding path. Around 45nm from the estuary's great tidal reaches east of the London conurbation, the voyage upstream to St Katharine Docks is as much a part of the adventure as







the destination, as it passes a rich tapestry of historical and modern sites, each offering a unique glimpse into the diverse character of London itself.

Although the Thames is the busiest waterway in the kingdom, with a little planning, its navigation can be very rewarding indeed. To aid you in your information gathering, you'll find plenty of information on the St Katharine Docks website, particularly in the site's 'Visitor Arrival Guide'. It's comprehensive and represents valuable 'local knowledge'. The Port of London Authority Vessel Traffic Services operates the river, and it's important to remember that their VHF channels vary according to the area or section of the river you're navigating. The outer reaches of the Thames are not only busy with commercial traffic, but the waters themselves can also be testing, especially in wind-against-tide conditions. So pick your weather well, and definitely consult your tide timetables.

## In from The Wash

Heading westward in from the North Sea and The Wash, the low-lying landscape of the estuary's shore begins to close ever nearer. As the waterway narrows, so it becomes ever

## ST KATHARINE DOCKS OFFERS ITS VISITORS A REAL CONTRAST TO THE LIGHTS AND VIBRANCE OF THE CAPITAL CITY.

more built up, but every mile along the way is a mile steeped in history. Little wonder why these opposing shorelines have inspired the pen of so many playwrights and authors over the years, not least the great man himself, Charles Dickens. Canvey Island, Tilbury, Gravesend, Grays, Purfleet, Dartford, Woolwich – all these names and more besides feature in the traditions and history, both fact and fable, of this ancient river.

Having negotiated the iconic steely bastions of the Thames Barrier and slithered your way on past the majesty that is Greenwich, fronted as it is by the masts and spars of the permanently moored tea clipper Cutty Sark, the river's silty waters will soon be carrying you around the Isle

📍 St Katharine's by air - © Steve Bateman 🕒 Rush hour at the docks!







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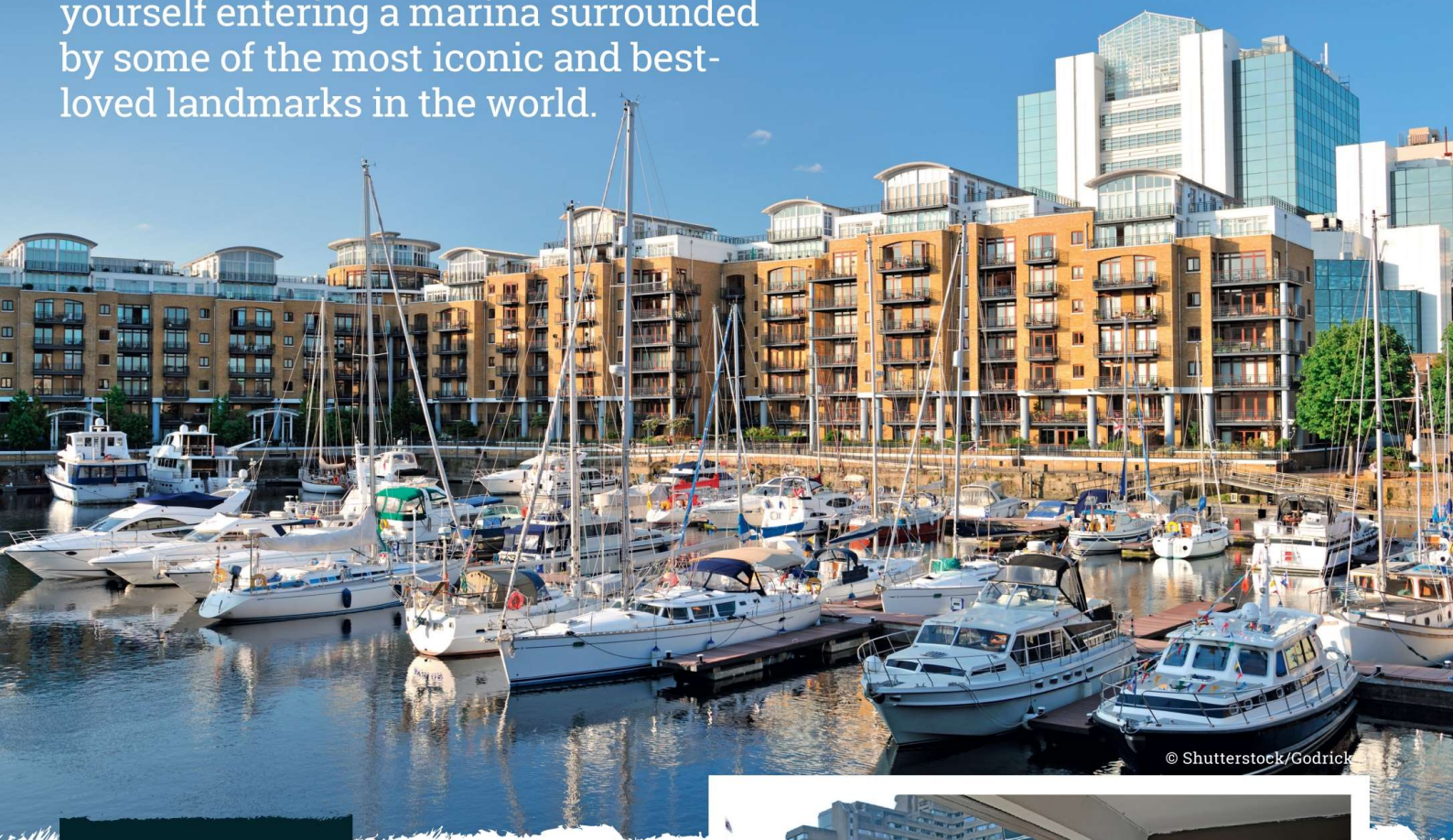
Trafalgar Wharf  
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It's quite an amazing experience to find yourself entering a marina surrounded by some of the most iconic and best-loved landmarks in the world.



## Transport links

### Underground:

Tower Hill Station – District and Circle Lines

**Docklands Light Railway:**  
Tower Gateway Station

### Riverboat:

Cruise boats and river ferries run from Tower Bridge Quay and Tower Pier.

Thames Clippers (Uber boats) provide travel to Greenwich and West London.

### Taxis:

There is a taxi rank at the reception of the nearby Tower Hotel.

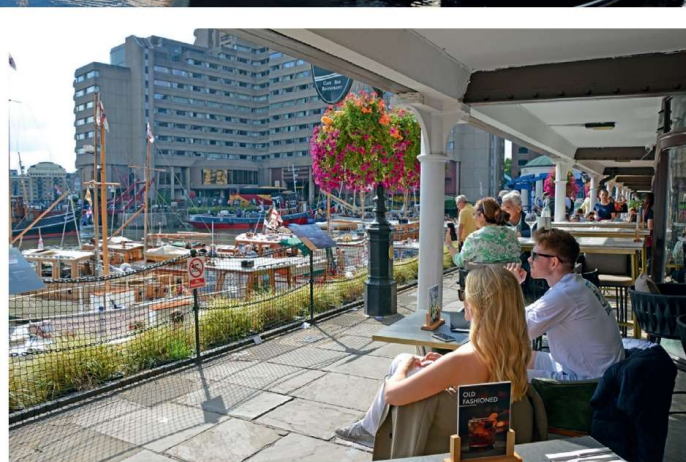
### Cycling:

Santander Cycles – self-service bike-sharing scheme. There are three bike docking stations near the marina.

of Dogs, with such sights as the O2 Arena, City Airport and the towering, ever-growing skyline of Docklands and Canary Wharf along the way. Then, upon rounding the sweeping bend with Limehouse and Wapping on your starboard side, you'll gain your first proper sighting of the old City, marked by the unmistakable, world-famous profile of Tower Bridge and the imposing, pale stone flanks of the Tower of London.

## Landmarks

It's quite an amazing experience to find yourself entering a marina surrounded by some of the most iconic and best-loved landmarks in the world. Indeed, St Katharine Docks Marina must surely possess the best address of any marina in existence! The marina lock operates approximately two hours before and 1.5 hours after high water (London Bridge), so if you arrive outside of these times there are six yellow mooring buoys downstream of the dock to make fast to. But beware: on a spring ebb there is 4-5 knots of tide running. So we recommend booking a berth at least two days in advance,



There are plenty of eateries and bistros with outdoor seating on the dock

which you can do by email or via the marina website.

Renovated in 2017 and taken over in 2020 by Island Global Yachting, a company that operates a worldwide portfolio of premium yachting destinations, St Katharine Docks is London's largest marina, providing 185 berths in three basins and capable of accommodating vessels up to a full 40m in length. Upon our visit to the facility here, we received a warm welcome from the team, some of whom have worked at 'the docks' for several decades now. Hospitality

is very much in St Katharine's DNA, because a large proportion of what exists today was actually built on the site of 'St Katharine by the Tower', a monastic centre founded in the 12th century that served as a refuge for travelling pilgrims. Such sites were later termed 'hospitals', derived from the Latin hospes, meaning 'guest'.

## Trading places

The marina office houses washrooms and a laundry, and entry to this building and the pontoons is reassuringly secure thanks to the use





📍 The dock can take craft of all shapes and sizes up to 40m! 📍 The now famous *Girl with a Dolphin* fountain designed by David Wynne 1973. © Shutterstock/Ttatty

of berth holder-only access cards. Provisioning is really straightforward, with a Waitrose and a Tesco Express just a few minutes' walk away. But when it comes to restaurants and eateries, their menus reflect the cosmopolitan vibe of London, with culinary options designed to suit all palates and pockets.

Sipping our coffee outside the bright and breezy Café Rouge, it felt as if we were in some kind of 'parallel world' – one that simultaneously existed far from the hustle and bustle of London life, while at the same time, and like an oasis of calm within a storm of activity, being close enough to the City's 'round the clock' hubbub that you felt you could virtually reach out and touch it. But with the likes of the Shard and Walkie-Talkie buildings so profoundly punctuating the cityscape with their aggressively modern profiles, it somehow made the solid and composed nature of St Katharine's Victorian edifices feel all the more

permanent, all the more reassuring.

Situated on the north bank of the Thames, having been designed in 1829 by Thomas Telford, for nearly two centuries the docks were the epicentre of the UK's merchant trade. Walking around the cobbled quayside, the echoes of their vibrant past linger in the air, and you can almost smell the scent of exotic spices from the Orient, not to mention the rich aroma of the 32,000 tonnes of tea

brought in on the Thames Barges.

These grandes dames of the Thames, with their distinctive ochre red sails, plied their trade along the river courtesy of their flat-bottomed hulls. This design made the barges ideal for navigating the shallow waters. Such was their versatility that they even played a vital role in the Second World War, including being used in the Dunkirk evacuation. Today, out

of the thousands that once existed, only 30 barges remain, but they are still frequent visitors to the docks, returning like homing pigeons to the refuge they've known for centuries.

Directly ahead of the central basin, which is entered from the lock entrance to the marina, is Ivory House, now a residential complex but originally a warehouse for an estimated 40 tonnes of ivory that

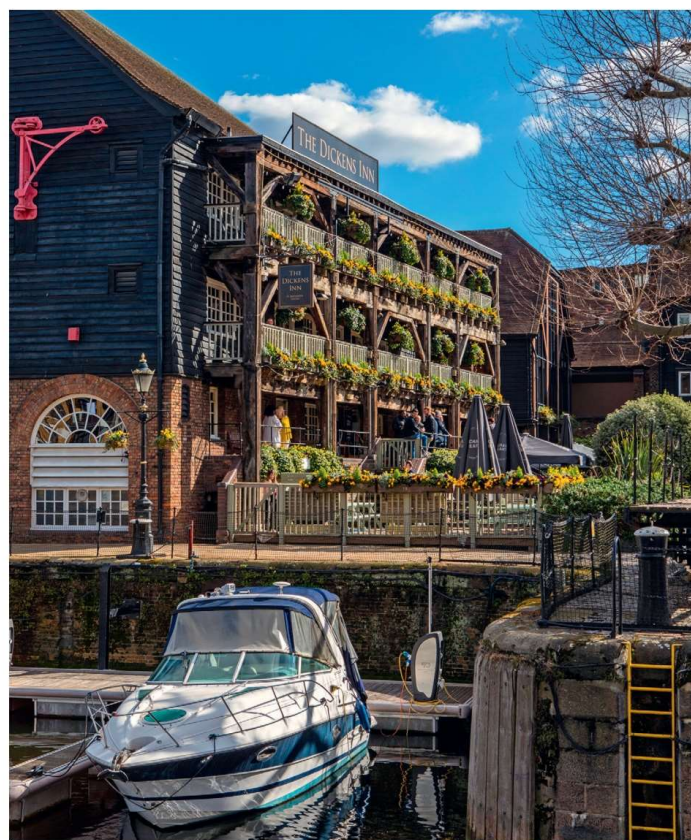
**SIPPING OUR COFFEE OUTSIDE THE BRIGHT AND BREEZY CAFÉ ROUGE, IT FELT AS IF WE WERE IN SOME KIND OF 'PARALLEL WORLD'**







© Shutterstock/Chris Lawrence Travel



The Dickens Inn public house. © Shutterstock/Chris Dorney

entered the docks in the 19th century. The contribution this made to the wealth of the area is commemorated by an elephant guarding each gate to the dock complex. Beneath the high arches of the vaults in Ivory House is a fabulous fish restaurant, Le Melusine, where Victorian industrial elegance meets contemporary culinary delights, such as the brill fillet and Cornish greens that we enjoyed as we watched the comings and goings of the marina folk. Dotted around the East Dock are plenty of references to the rich trading history of the site. This includes a huge anchor from SS Amsterdam, the ill-fated East India merchant ship that sank on its maiden voyage. Sculptures representing the goods that were once traded here, including turtle shells, carpets from Persia and feathers, which were in great demand for ladies' hats and fans, adorn the restaurant.

Moving on a little further, the timber-framed Dickens Inn, located within the complex, was originally a tea warehouse and is now an atmospheric bar and restaurant that

## Did you know?

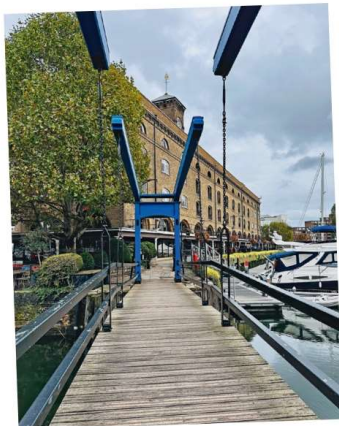
Besides the surprising facts contained in the article, did you know that the much-loved comedian and writer Ernie Wise made the first mobile phone call from the docks on 1st January 1985.

'The Girl with a Dolphin' sculpture located on the river front here is by famous sculptor David Wynne. It was recently reported in the news that former champion tennis player Virginia Wade agreed to model in the nude for the sculpture.

Robin Knox-Johnston was harbour master at St Katharine's during the 1970s.

The 2013/2014 round-the-world Clipper Race started from this special location.





has lots of outdoor seating. With its flower-filled facade, it's surely one of London's prettiest waterside eateries. Crossing over the dainty Dutch-styled Coronarium Bridge to the West Dock, we came across a crystal crown sculpted from an acrylic block that Stanley Kubrick originally commissioned for the film 2001: A Space Odyssey but was subsequently repurposed to commemorate Queen Elizabeth II's visit to the docks in 1977.

After strolling along Cloisters Walk, we climbed the steps onto Tower Bridge and marvelled at this quintessential example of Victorian engineering and design, before descending to meet again with the rich brown, swirling waters of the Thames. Walking back along the bank to St Katharine's pier, we arrived just as a Princess V40 nosed her way into

the marina lock – whereupon, just like the figurines on the clock of Fortnum & Mason, out popped two marina staff members to oblige with helpful direction and quayside assistance.

## A tale of two cities

Just as Dickens' tale of duality, A Tale of Two Cities, plays out in London's metropolis, St Katharine Docks offers its visitors a real contrast to the lights and vibrance of the capital city. But it is the most amazing base from which to get out and about to discover London's many tourist sites, which include some 170 museums, countless historic buildings, theatres, palaces and royal parks, as well as a calendar of world-class events. It's also a great location for further exploration by boat to the chalky cliffs of the south-east coast, or even for a short 'hop' across the Channel to France. Whatever your reason for visiting, St Katharine Docks is likely one of London's best-kept secrets – and in a setting that truly captures the essence of the city's enduring charm. **PBR**

## Cruising destinations

### Kingston upon Thames

Nestled on the south bank of the River Thames, this lively market town has riverside eating, wonderful walks

as far as Hampton Court and some interesting art installations.

### Windsor

The MDL Windsor Marina has extensive facilities, including petrol and diesel fuel, and is just 3 miles from the historic town of Windsor – and, of course, the world-famous castle.

### Greenwich

A visit to the National Maritime Museum and the Cutty Sark is a must for mariners, and London's Planetarium in the historic Royal Observatory is home to the world-famous Prime Meridian line.

### Burnham-on-Crouch

Known as the 'Cowes of the east coast', the attractive quayside is full of old-world charm and there are plenty of wonderful coastal walks.

### Calais

'The gateway to France', Calais offers plenty to explore in both the old town and the new quarter. Situated just 26 miles from Dover, Calais, with its beautiful beaches and nature reserves, is a town with a rich cultural heritage in lace making, and for those who love history, it benefits from having many architectural sites to wander around and enjoy. ■



## Useful info

### Tidal Thames app

Port of London Recreational Users Guide (printed copies available at all London marinas)

### St Katharine Docks Visitor Arrival Guide

[www.skdocs.co.uk](http://www.skdocs.co.uk)

Tel: 0207 264 5312

VHF: Ch. 80

We suggest booking a berth via the website or by calling the marina. St Katharine's recommends booking a minimum of two to three days in advance, whereupon you will also be prompted to provide an ETA for the lock gates operation.

Lockout times are on the website, but they are approximately two hours before and 1.5 hours after high water.

Visitors receive a copy of the marina guide on arrival, which includes a very handy 'Porter' card offering discounts at many of the restaurants in the docks.

**Fuel:** Thames Marine Services operate a fuel barge moored less than 500m downstream of the marina. Biofuels, HVO and diesel are available. They do advise that you book ahead, though.

T: 020 3935 4814 07827 816004



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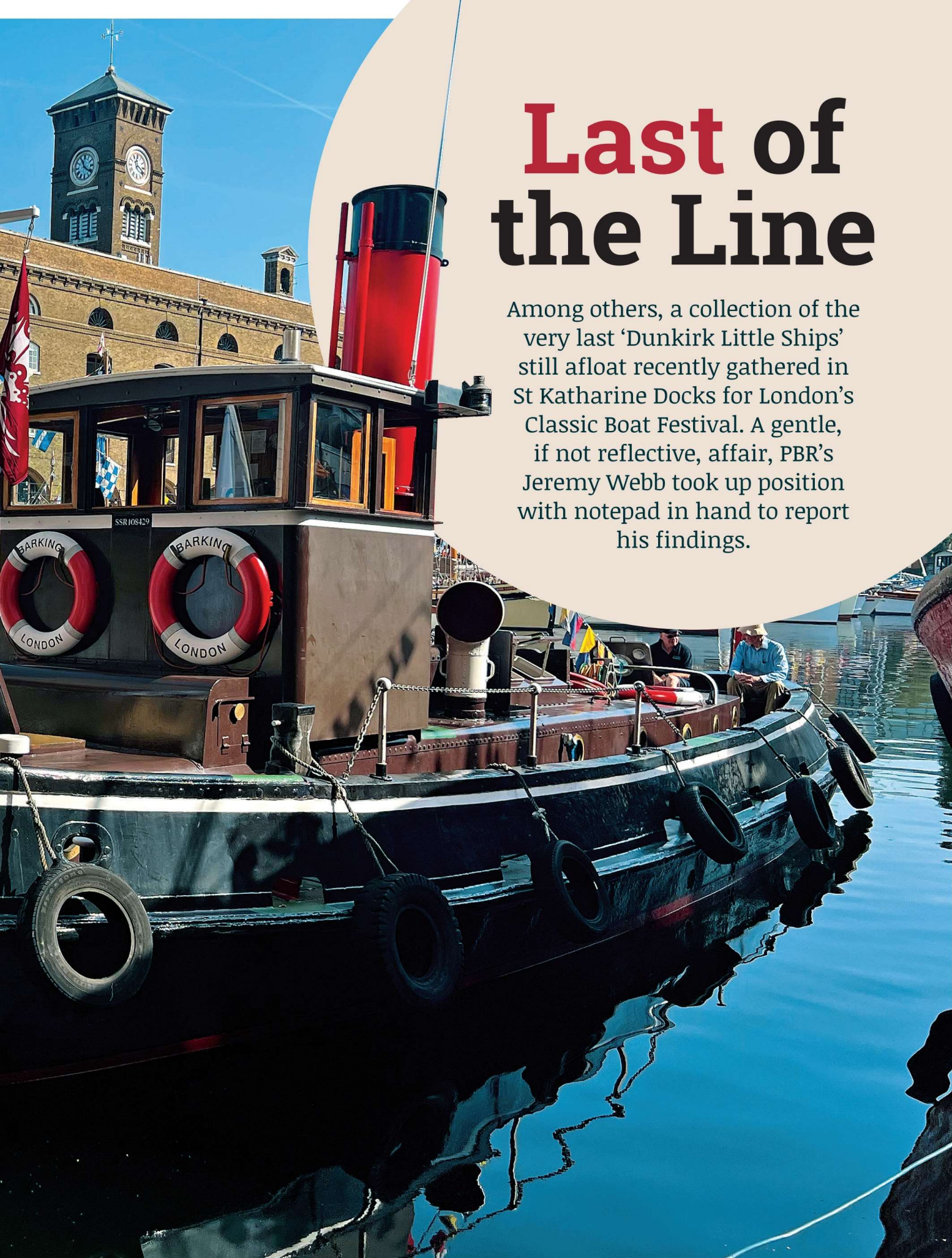






# Last of the Line

Among others, a collection of the very last 'Dunkirk Little Ships' still afloat recently gathered in St Katharine Docks for London's Classic Boat Festival. A gentle, if not reflective, affair, PBR's Jeremy Webb took up position with notepad in hand to report his findings.







## THE 2023 EVENT AT ST KATHARINE DOCKS WELCOMED OVER 20 DUNKIRK LITTLE SHIPS.

In May 1940, the German army was increasingly rapidly cutting through France, forcing the Allied forces to retreat north-west, back toward the Channel coast. Hundreds of thousands of men were backing up onto the windswept dunes near the Port of Dunkirk, which, as history recounts, became the final resting place for so many. But if a full-scale massacre was to be averted, extraordinary measures would need to be taken, and taken fast. In response to the mounting catastrophe, at Churchill's behest, a full-scale operation, codenamed 'Dynamo', was therefore set in motion to evacuate the troops from the beaches of northern France.

The planning of 'Operation Dynamo' started on 20th May 1940 under the direct guidance of Vice-Admiral Bertram Ramsay, working out of his HQ at Dover Castle. Initially, ships gathered at Dover in preparation for the hazardous voyage across

the Channel, but it soon became apparent that there were not only insufficient vessels for the task, but due to their draught, they would need deep water in which to anchor upon reaching the destination. As a result, the decision was made to requisition

craft, and with this in mind, specially appointed 'ministry agents' were charged with the responsibility of searching the area from Dover to the Thames for likely craft. In fact, many vessels were even taken without the owners' consent, but when the

word spread as to why so many boats were needed, a host of private individuals volunteered to join the fleet themselves and, in the process, began hurriedly readying their craft for the forthcoming mass evacuation. The legend of the 'Little Ships' was born.

## Festival fare

In September this year, at the Classic Boat Festival held in St Katharine Docks, London, surviving examples of those original Little Ships, under the auspices of the Little Ships Association, gathered to commemorate their actions during Operation Dynamo and remember the courage of the many crews involved. As well as Dunkirk veteran vessels, many other classic craft were also in attendance – enough, in fact, for a full day's scouting around the festival's pontoons. But besides the boats, it was the people who helped to make this gathering so special –



➊ Duchess May. ➋ Arthur Ransome's yacht. ➌ Havengore 2 (middle)





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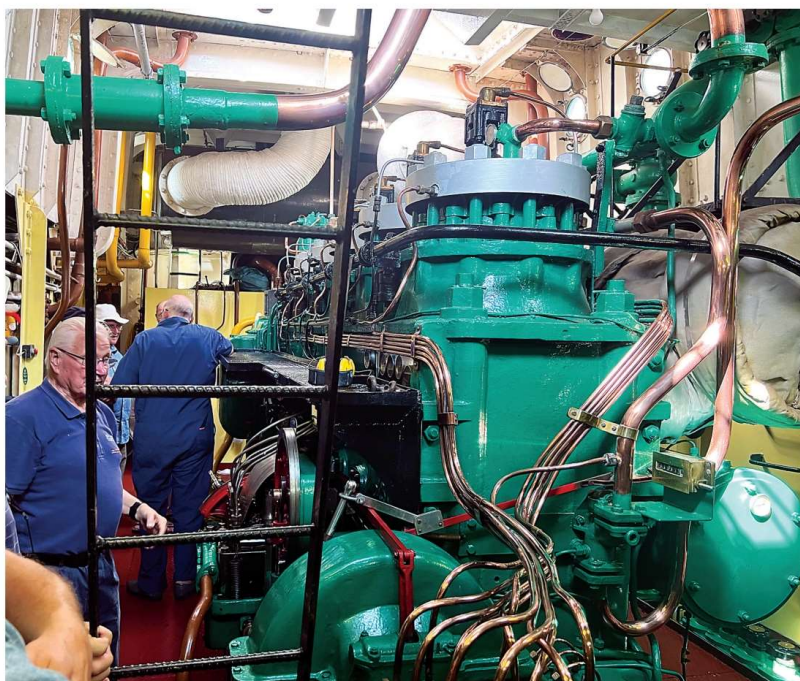


folk such as Judy and Warren, who were visiting all the way from the United States and who'd literally travelled the world's oceans aboard their motor yacht. I recall Judy saying to me: 'You can't buy happiness, but you can buy a boat.' I think there must be some truth in that statement because certainly everyone I met at the festival who were liveaboard owners seemed, above all, just that – happy!

### BUT BESIDES THE BOATS, IT WAS THE PEOPLE WHO HELPED TO MAKE THIS GATHERING SO SPECIAL

This was the festival's 14th year and it attracted over 40 boats of all sizes, from the sturdy and purposeful lines of Winston Churchill's funeral barge Havengore to the author Arthur Ransome's favourite sailing yacht, Nancy Blackett.

The 2023 event at St Katharine



Docks welcomed over 20 Dunkirk Little Ships. The Association of Dunkirk Little Ships, to which these 'last of the line' survivors belong, is a not-for-profit organisation started in 1964 after Raymond Baxter, the

BBC Tomorrow's World presenter, purchased a Little Ship and planned to sail her back to France in 1965. Through connections and an article in the Sunday Times that reached out to other Dunkirk Little Ship owners, Baxter garnered some 43 participants in all, and together, in June that year, they crossed the English Channel as a flotilla – only this time without the unwelcome attention of U-boats and Stuka dive bombers!

### Stars of the show

Among the many standout craft attending the festival were the fine contributions made by Delphi, Duchess May II and Glitterwake.

Delphi is a Bates Star Craft built by William Bates & Son in Chertsey in 1960. She has a double diagonal hull made from mahogany with an interior of English oak. Over the last 63 years, she's cruised the Thames and moored at various locations along its banks. During the course of her life, Delphi has been fully restored twice, with the last occasion being in 2021. This year, she won the Bates Wheel prize at the Traditional Boat Festival at Henley for best restoration, maintenance and presentation of a Bates Star Craft river cruiser.

Duchess May II is another beauty. A private motor yacht built for a certain gentleman of Chiswick, little is known of her early life. It



➔ Havengore

is thought she was at Dunkirk for Operation Dynamo, but no records of that period survive to fully confirm this. Since she was on the Thames at the time and most boats of her length were taken across, it's thought that Duchess May II would very likely have gone to France in 1940 to play her part in the evacuation.

Since 1960, the Duchess has been around the Windsor area, happily cruising the upper reaches of the Thames. In the 1980s, she received a brand-new pair of diesel engines, but sadly, the entire vessel went into dilapidation in the 90s. Since then, however, a programme of restoration has extended over many years, to the point where she is now a beautiful lady once again!

With the unusual name of Glitterwake, I couldn't help but be attracted to this lovely boat from Norfolk. Built by Jack Powles of Wrexham in 1937, Glitterwake is a Star Class design, bought by boatbuilder John Eastick of Acle.

Star Class boats were mainly built for hire fleets, and traditionally



➔ 1: The Little ships. 2: Highland Beauty, Southampton





each vessel bore a prefix to the name 'Star'. It is believed that Glitterwake was the only privately commissioned boat built to this design. She is a Norfolk Broads cruiser and originally had a folding wheelhouse, which is typical for vessels from the area of this vintage. A six-cylinder Austin Tornado petrol engine once powered this elegant soul, but now she sports a BMC 2.2 diesel engine, while her decks flaunt a handsome, fixed wheelhouse.

Glitterwake has spent most of her life on the Norfolk Broads, but she also spent time plying the waters of the River Severn and River Cleddau in Wales. Now, though, you'll find her gracing a mooring on the Thames at Romney Lock, with Windsor Castle as her backdrop. ■

1: The tug 'Barking' engine room (featured on lead spread)

2: MY Glitterwake.

## Special thanks

Special thanks to Claire Frew of the festival organisation team for looking after me during my visit, and to all the staff at St Katharine Docks for an incredible event.

<https://www.skdocks.co.uk/marina>



## 'The Italian Job'

'The Italian Job' model was built when the country was placed in lockdown in March 2022 and took 18 months to complete.

The project was conceived as a tribute to Carlo Riva's centenary 1922-2022 and is a scale copy of the most famous of the Riva marques - AQUARAMA.

The original Riva Aquarama was a luxury wooden runabout built by Italian yachtbuilder, Riva. Production of it and its derivatives (the Lungo, Super, and Special) ran from 1962 until 1996. The hull was based on the Riva Tritone, an earlier model speedboat by Riva, which in turn was inspired by the American mahogany Chris-Craft runabouts. The boat's speed, beauty, and craftsmanship earned it praise as the Ferrari of the boat world. The company was founded by Pietro Riva in 1842, and run by Carlo Riva through its 1969 sale to the American Whittaker Corporation.