

Solange Berchemin | Martin Dunford

111 Places
in Greenwich
That You
Shouldn't Miss

Photographs by Karin Tearle



emons:

Foreword

As the birthplace of Elizabeth I and even time itself, Greenwich – Royal Borough, home to the Prime Meridian, a UNESCO World Heritage Site – is one of London’s most historic neighbourhoods, with some of the capital’s most compelling sights. Unlike much of central London, however, Greenwich is a village at heart, and one that tourists flock to in growing numbers every year. We have of course written this book with them in mind. But, equally, we wrote it for those who call this amazing corner of London home, and who, like us, wouldn’t live anywhere else. We also wrote it for ourselves. The more stories we found, the more we fell in love with Greenwich all over again – with its people, its history, and most of all its ravishing locations. We hope that you will too.

We’ve deliberately included world-famous places such as the *Cutty Sark* and the Painted Hall, going behind the scenes to reveal their lesser-known features and more offbeat tales: after all, what would Greenwich be without its links to the Thames and its naval heroes? But we’ve also included places that are so far off the tourist track as to be almost invisible: street corners that commemorate war heroes, suffragettes and rock-and-rollers; secret places to which we take our friends and families to avoid the crowds – a walk in Maryon Park, a paddle in Deptford Creek, and of course our favourite riverside pubs. And we make no apology for occasionally straying beyond the boundaries of the borough to visit places that remain an integral part of Greenwich’s rich history – places that recall historical figures such as William Morris and Henry VIII, or Tom Cribb, the first-ever world champion bare-knuckle fighter. We even visit London’s most famous sewage plant!

So take the 111 Places Challenge, explore the Royal Borough of Greenwich, and be prepared to fall in love.



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1 Albury Street, Deptford

Pretty street that's a keeper of secrets

Before Henry VIII used the site for his royal dock, Deptford was just a fishing village, but from then on it prospered, and in its heyday the High Street was the Oxford Street of South London. In early 1836, Deptford station was the first railway station to offer rail travel to Central London. The area was badly damaged during World War II, however, and went downhill from then. Demolition firms and unscrupulous developers teamed up to bulldoze entire streets to make way for high-rise tower blocks. In this context, finding an almost intact row of houses dating back to 1707 is nothing short of a miracle. Although Albury Street is geographically in the borough of Lewisham, it's so near the Greenwich boundary, and its own story so very intriguing, that it's one not to miss.

The first things you'll notice on entering the street are the cobbles and doorways, with their distinctive features: wooden canopies and sculpted brackets with cute cherubs. They were carved and restored by the best woodworkers in the land. If they seem to be arranged in a strange order, it's due to a mix-up 20 years ago, when the houses were auctioned. Albury Street's original residents were mostly senior naval officers. Evidence indicates that Lord Nelson would have stayed at number 19 – now 34 – when on leave. There's probably nothing exceptional to read into this – even a hero needs a crash pad – but Lady Hamilton is reputed to have lived next door. Moreover, Deptford is riddled with tunnels, one of which ends at number 34. They were built under the instructions of the sea-captains, who were fed up with their booty being stolen on their way back home. Did Lady Hamilton and Captain Nelson use the tunnels to rendezvous? Fiction or reality, there's no denying that Albury Street is full of charm. Fans of J.K. Rowling will recognise it as Robin's home, in book four of the *Cormoran Strike* series.



Address Albury Street, London, SE8 3PT | **Getting there** Train to Deptford; bus 188 | **Tip** Head to the National Maritime Museum to peruse a collection of objects that belonged to Lord Nelson and Lady Hamilton, along with several portraits among which is a full-length portrait of their daughter Horatia.

48 Monument to a Dead Parrot

A dead parrot?

From naval heroes to perfectly formed mermaids, Greenwich proudly celebrates its remarkable naval history and the life of its seafarers through public art. But even with all the maritime history around, it's still a little surprising to find a monument to a parrot. Especially as this bronze statue of a white cockatoo doesn't bear any resemblance to the kind of feisty bird worthy of a pirate. So why is there such a statue right in the centre of Greenwich? Sadly, nobody can provide a definitive answer, and Jon Reardon, the artist, remains silent on the subject.

We could speculate that the defunct avian, lying on his back with its little black legs in the air, is a nod to Monty Python's celebrated parrot sketch. Except that this creature is not a Norwegian blue, but a sulphur-crested cockatoo. Adding to the mystery, the words 'CHINA' are branded on its stomach. If the aim was to create a feature of interest or talking point, Jon Reardon certainly succeeded. When the bird first appeared in 2009, newspapers speculated that the Dead Parrot was intended to be the Greenwich mascot, to replace Nannie, the Cutty Sark's figurehead. Even more peculiar is the fact that the cockatoo frequently goes unnoticed, it's almost as if it had the gift of invisibility.

If you weren't actively looking for the bird, you could easily miss its white plumage on the white plinth. Indeed, when the Dead Parrot left its plinth in 2012, only the more observant residents noticed its absence. There was no outcry, certainly not on the scale of the Nelson statue or Moore's Knife Edge's incidents (see ch. 36). However, there was some concern about the whereabouts of the sculpture, and questions were asked. It transpired that the parrot had been taken to storage for the duration of the Equestrian Olympic Games, being returned safely to its perch once the horses had left town.

Address Devonport House, London, SE10 9JW, www.devere.co.uk | **Getting there** Boat, DLR or train to the Maritime Museum; the sculpture can be seen through the railings at the corner of King William Walk and Romney Road, or for a closer look head for De Vere Devonport hotel gardens via the National Maritime Museum | **Hours** All year round | **Tip** Greenwich Park is a great site for bird-watching. Nobody knows exactly how parakeets arrived here, but the area is home to large colonies. You'll hear them before you'll see them. Stand still by a tree and look for a flash of green overhead, or listen out for their distinctive squawk (see ch. 32).



49 Mudlarking

Treasure-hunting on the Greenwich foreshore

Greenwich is defined by the Thames, and nowhere more so than along its foreshore, where at low tide the river recedes to reveal patches of sand, pebbles and ancient jetties. These are prime locations for the ancient art of ‘mudlarking’ – basically searching for objects and artefacts lodged in the river mud that have been washed up by the incoming tide. It’s a pastime that takes place all along the river, but for obvious reasons there are particularly rich pickings on the Greenwich stretches, where you can often spot a few figures trudging along the foreshore. To join them, you’ll have to obtain a licence from the Port of London Authority and will need to follow some stringent rules, but you might just land yourself a unique souvenir.

Perhaps the most common finds on the Thames’ foreshore are pieces of disposable clay pipe, which were used from the 16th century right up to Victorian times. But you could find pretty much anything in the river, which has, let’s face it, been a dumping ground for all sorts for hundreds of years. Dedicated mudlarks discover bits of pottery, old bottles, even dog tags (see ch. 6). If you’re really lucky you might even find an old coin from the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. There are several good spots – the area from Cutty Sark towards Deptford Creek, the stretches by the Trafalgar Tavern or Deptford Green, or the pebble beach next to Greenwich Yacht Club, for example. But be careful immediately outside the Naval College, where mudlarking is permitted but strictly monitored.

If you’re planning on mudlarking there are some safety issues to consider. Novices shouldn’t mudlark alone, as the tide turns fast and the mud can be hazardous. It’s also advisable to wear gloves, and although mudlarking is a child-friendly activity with potential for a real living history lesson, you should keep a close eye on little ones at all times when you’re by the river.

Address Along the foreshore but never east of the Thames Barrier | **Getting there** For mudlarking spots in central Greenwich, train to Greenwich; DLR to Cutty Sark or Greenwich; bus 129, 177, 180, 188, 199, 286 or 386 to Greenwich town centre; for Greenwich Yacht Club beach (see ch. 34), take tube to North Greenwich, or bus 129, 132, 161, 335, 472 or 486 to Millennium Village Oval Square, then walk across Ecology Park | **Tip** Obtain a mudlarking licence from Port of London Authority: these are easy to get and cost £90 for a year, or £40 for one visit within a given month. Visit www.pla.co.uk/Environment/Thames-foreshore-permits for more info. Thames Discovery Programme runs a year-round programme of walks and other activities exploring the archaeology of the river on the foreshore: www.thamesdiscovery.org.

