

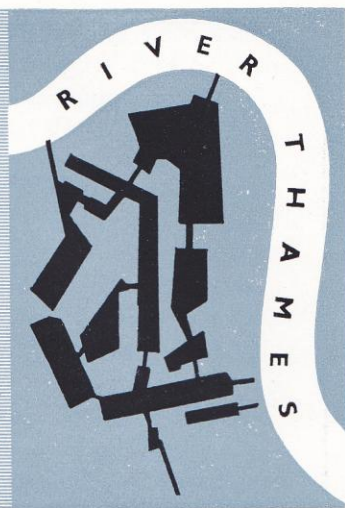
Unloading Timber in the Docks.

**T**HE GROUP known as the Surrey Commercial Docks, which gives employment to a large proportion of local labour, consists of 11 basins interconnected by cuttings, the whole enclosed within the bend of the Thames on the south side between the Lower Pool and the lower end of Limehouse Reach. There are two ship entrances, the Greenland and the Surrey, and these give access to the docks and to the Grand Surrey Canal which leads from the Greenland Dock to Camberwell and Peckham.

The Surrey Commercial Docks are unlike any of the other groups in the Port of London. Each of those other systems was built following an Act of Parliament, and the present outline is approximately that referred to in the parent Act. For example, the directors of the West India Dock Company set out to build a dock which could be easily identified today against the original drawing prepared over 150 years ago. The present Surrey Commercial Docks have been produced by 250 years of construction, amalgamations and alterations.

When the Port of London Authority assumed control of the Port in 1909, a comprehensive improvement scheme was formulated in which the requirements of the continually expanding softwood trade were given due

# SURREY COMMERCIAL DOCKS



consideration. As a result of this, several ponds formerly used for storing floated timber were absorbed into a new deep-water dock called the Quebec Dock. This dock, brought into use in 1926, provided additional discharging berths sufficient for six timber-carrying vessels. The adjacent sheds, with the appropriate working area, provided about  $8\frac{1}{2}$  acres of additional under-cover storage. New sheds were later built adjacent to Russia and Canada Docks, and in 1930-31 the Lavender and Acorn Ponds were deepened and three new sheds and a new quay 1,580 feet long were constructed.

These docks took the brunt of the severe air attacks in September, 1940, and damage was continuous throughout the war. One hundred and seventy-six sheds were burnt down, and 57 have had to be demolished since. In addition, most of the warehouse space and all the cold-store accommodation in the general-cargo part of the docks were destroyed, and the South Dock Entrance put out of action. In 1939 there was room under cover for 80,000 standards of softwood timber; in 1952 only space for 24,000 standards remained or had been reconstructed. In the Greenland Docks some war time sheds had been erected in order to meet the demand for ship-discharging berths.

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One of the difficulties the Authority have had to face since their inception has been the differing and, consequently constricting dimensions of lock entrances and cuttings, often in the same dock system. This is particularly so in the Surrey Commercial Docks where, for example, the Greenland lock is 80 feet wide and about 35 feet deep, whereas the cutting between the Greenland Canada Docks is 59 feet 6 inches wide with a depth of 27 feet on the sill. Furthermore this cutting, built nearly 100 years ago as an invert cutting with the sides sloping inwards, restricted the passage of ships to those with not more than 57 feet beam and a maximum draft of 23 feet 6 inches. Large vessels for overside discharge have thus had to be kept in the Greenland Dock at berths equipped for the reception of general cargo.

A new scheme provides for widening the cutting between these two docks at an estimated cost of £365,000, and is a step towards the provision of additional berthing accommodation for some of the larger vessels using the system.

Control of the importations of softwood remained until 1953, and during this time the opportunity was taken to review the requirements of the timber trade for under-cover accommodation. Whilst the quantity of timber imported into London is considerable, experience since 1945 has shown that only about 20 per cent of the total tonnage discharged is handed to the Authority for storage. The demands made by the building and other industries on timber are heavy, and many parcels go into consumption very quickly after arrival. New sheds have been built since the war, sufficient to house in all some 27,300 standards of both hardwood and softwood, and further shed accommodation for softwood in the Albion Yard is now under construction. In addition, concrete alleyways have been put down over much of the ground on which timber sheds once stood, and large storage areas have been brought back into use.

There is a popular misconception that the Surrey Commercial Docks deal solely with ships carrying timber mainly from Baltic countries, but the Greenland Dock has always been used by ships discharging or loading general cargoes from and to various countries overseas. For dealing with general cargo at these docks, a new transit shed with an upper floor (No. 8 Warehouse), 350 feet long and 150 feet wide, has been built on the south side of the Greenland Docks. The ground floor allows cargoes to be piled mechanically 20 feet high, and deliveries made by hoists from the upper floor. A unique feature of this new building is that there is water access on both sides, enabling cargo for sorting and craft delivery to be taken direct through the shed to the South Dock. Modern 3-ton electric luffing cranes meet the discharging and loading needs on the Greenland Dock side.

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**AND ALL DOCKS**



Interior  
of  
New  
Warehouse

On the opposite side of the Greenland-South Dock Cutting and within a few feet of the new No. 8 Shed, is the recently built No. 2 Shed. Standing on a site previously occupied by a general warehouse, this shed, which is 325 feet long by 90 feet wide, is devoted to immediate-delivery traffic from the Continent. At the west end of the Greenland Dock the work of rebuilding 12a Shed, similarly destroyed during the war, has now finished, and this shed is mainly used for general cargo from Yugoslavian ships. In both these new sheds the roofs have been raised to allow for high-piling of general cargo.

Since 1945 there has been a continual movement towards the introduction of mechanised equipment for timber and general cargo. Mobile cranes, tractors and trailers have now been introduced and have cut out distance and reduced fatigue. Cargo intended for handling by the Authority can be received directly from the ship and conveyed some hundreds of yards to the rear for piling, thus leaving the berth clear. On the other hand, if the barge position should become difficult during the season there is a large area equipped for dumping softwood so as to free craft for further cargo. The handling of hardwood too has been mechanised by employing the same equipment.

Quay cranes varying from 1 to 3 tons capacity are provided on the quays of the Greenland and South Docks, and these facilities are also being augmented and modernised.