

ROTHERHITHE SHIPBUILDING

The shipyards at Greenland Dock dated from the 17th and early 18th centuries; a number of interesting vessels were built here, including pioneer steam warships for the Chilean and Greek navies; also the Union Line steamer which inaugurated the mail service to the Cape. Both yards disappeared when Greenland Dock was extended early this century. The yard at Barnard's Wharf preserves the name of a well-known family of Deptford shipbuilders, who were the last to carry on business here until closure in the 1840's. Earlier occupants included the Wells brothers and Thomas Stanton.

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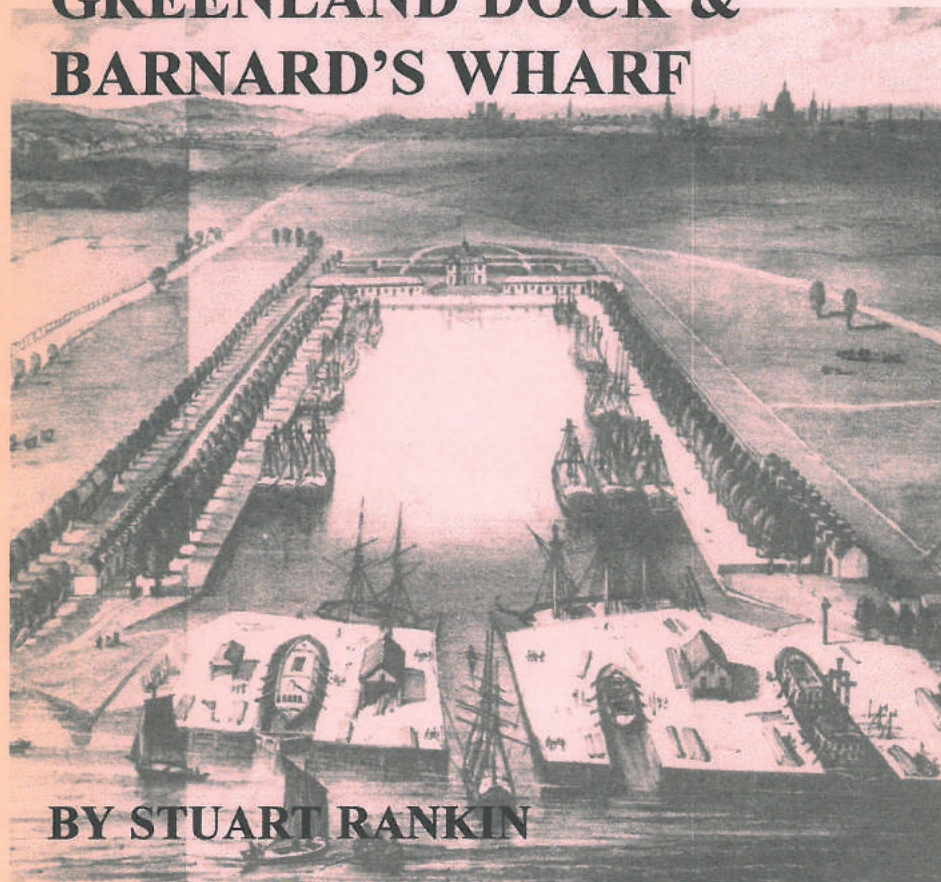
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Printed & Published by Dockside Studio, Second [Revised] Edition
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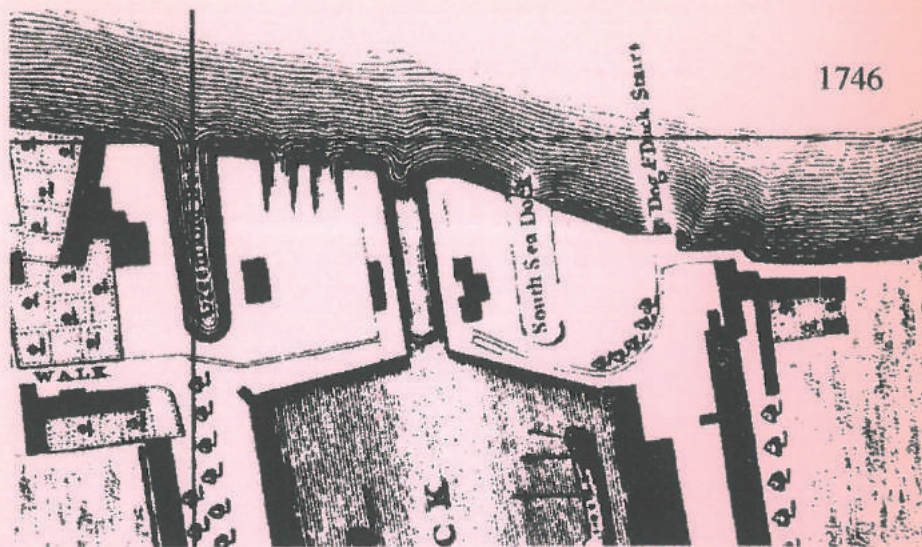
SHIPBUILDING IN ROTHERHITHE - GREENLAND DOCK & BARNARD'S WHARF



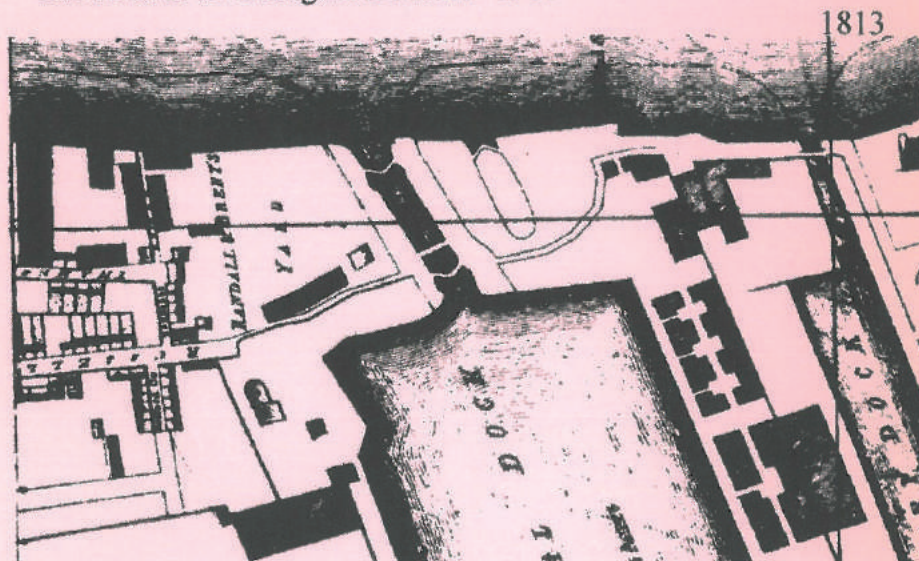
BY STUART RANKIN

ROTHERHITHE LOCAL HISTORY PAPER NO.3

REVISED EDITION, 1999



The Greenland Dock Shipyards from John Rocque's Map.
"The A to Z of Georgian London" 1981



The same area from Richard Horwood's Map.
"The A to Z of Regency London" 1985. Both reproduced
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GREENLAND DOCK & BARNARD'S WHARF - INTRODUCTION & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

These two sites are being dealt with in one booklet, because both were at one time or another occupied by members of the Wells family, who also built at the Grove Street yard in Deptford. Amongst their successors at Grove Street were the Barnards, who were originally from Harwich. Their name became attached to a site near the Acorn public house in Rotherhithe early in the 19th century, previously known as "Mr. Wells' Yard". By this time, the Barnards main yard was at Deptford Green, but for a brief period, demand for ships was so great that they took over the Rotherhithe site soon after John and William Wells had merged their business with Perry and Green of Blackwall (and transferred their activities to the north bank). Part of the Rotherhithe site is still shown on recent Ordnance Survey maps as "Barnard's Wharf", although at its peak period of activity "South Wharf" (now the Surrey Docks Farm) was also included in the yard.

There were two shipyards at what is now Greenland (formerly Howland Great Wet) Dock. The first, and oldest, was to the north of the present entrance lock; it is now partly covered by King Frederik IXth Tower. The second was south of the entrance lock, and lies under Princes Court. Until they disappeared in the early 20th century reconstruction of Greenland Dock, they had a variety of names (see table of occupancy), but they are referred to throughout this text as "Greenland North" and "Greenland South". In order to set these Rotherhithe yards in their proper context, and because in some cases it is not possible to say if particular vessels were constructed at the builder's Rotherhithe or Deptford yards, it has been necessary to tell something of the history of private shipyards in Deptford, with occasional digressions further afield. However, this work does not seek to cover shipbuilding in Deptford in any detail, save where it impinges on the Rotherhithe story. There are no visible remains at either site, the sole reminders that shipbuilding once took place here being the layout of streets in the vicinity of Barnard's Wharf, from which successive expansions of the yard can be inferred, and the narrow alley called Randall's Rents, near Greenland Dock, which once contained a row of small houses occupied by some of Randall & Brent's workers.

Further research during the last two years, particularly as a result of a very fruitful exchange of information with Roger Barrington, has thrown new light on the final years of Randall & Brent and of the Brent family as shipbuilders. The legal problems faced by the firm can now be covered more fully in the second edition of the *Nelson Dockyard* booklet; events (which it has emerged centred on Greenland Dock) surrounding the death of John Randall, are dealt with in this work. Much more is also known about early steamship building at Greenland Dock; (the reason why the yards suddenly reopened in the second half of 1825 can now be told) and Peter Newall has generously shared the results of his research into the first Union Line steamers, prior to publication of his own book on the subject. Roger Owen is currently researching a book on the first Post Office Packets; he has not only tipped me of about (often obscure) sources of information, but has also generously given of his time, when visiting far-flung libraries, which I would find difficult to reach, in copying useful documents for me. I must also thank the following organisations and individuals for information and help:- Bob Aspinall, The Burrell Collection - Glasgow Museums & Art Galleries, the late Con Delay, Christopher Gray, Greenwich Local History Library, Guildhall Library, London, Derek Kearey, John Lewcock, Lewisham Local Studies Library, The London Library, Harry Margary, The Museum of London - Museum in Docklands Project; National Maritime Museum - Maritime Information Centre and Picture Library; Amy Robinson, Anthony and Setitia Simmonds (Maritime Books, Greenwich), Southwark Local Studies Library, Winnie Tyrrel, Mike Wilce.

Illustrations are individually credited; the following books have been cited in the text.

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Times:- *The Times* newspaper

GREENLAND DOCKYARDS - OCCUPANCY

(Derived from rate records, trade directories, individual shipbuilding contracts, maps and other published sources. Where there are contradictions or overlaps in dates, I have not attempted to choose between sources of apparently equal reliability. Information from early maps is suspect; "Mr. Wells' Dockyard" continued to be shown on some maps 45 years after the family had ceased all connection with shipbuilding in Rotherhithe !)

NORTH		SOUTH	
Abraham Wells	?c.1660 - c. 1700	(Not yet built)	
Richard Wells	c.1700 - c. 1737	J. & R. Burchett	c.1700 - c. 1711
		? South Sea Co.	c.1725 - c. 1730
Elias Bird	c. 1739 - 1759	Elias Bird	c.1739 - 1759
John Randall	1760 - c.1794	John Randall	1760 - c. 1794
(Also running the site later known as Nelson Dockyard from 1754)			
Randall, Grey & Brent	1782 - ?	Randall, Grey & Brent	1782 - ?
John Randall	1793 - 1794	John Randall	1793 - 1794
Randall & Brent	1792 - 1796	Randall & Brent	1792 - 1796
John & William Wells	1796 - ?	John & William Wells	1796 - ?
William & Jno. Wells	1803 - ?	William & Jno. Wells	1803 - ?
(It is not clear at present if the Wells brothers were actually operating the yards, or if rate payments merely indicate acquisition of the freehold from the Bedford estate).			
Messrs. Brents	1805 - 1819	Messrs. Brents	1805 - 1819
(From 1815 Daniel Brent gave up the Nelson Dockyard, and concentrated business here).			
Danl. Brent	1820 - 1824	Danl. Brent	1820 - 1824
Empty	May 1825	Empty	May 1825
Danl. Brent	Aug. - 1825	Danl. Brent	Aug. - 1825
	(Danl. Brent, part empty by 20 October 1827)		
Wm. Thompson	June - 1828	Wm. Thompson	June - 1828

NORTH		SOUTH	
G.W. Castle	1829 - ?	Empty	1829
George Castle	1832 - ?	Joseph Horatio Ritchie	1832 - c. 1842
("Shipbuilder" at Millwall by 1838)			
Thompson's	1837		
Com. St. Packet Company	1838 - 1843	Late Ritchie's Dock (empty)	1843
Wm. Thompson, Esq., M.P.	1848-1850	George Waters Sweeting	1848 - c. 1860
(Mast house and slip only from 1850)			
Jonathan Hall & Henry Cater	1850 - ?		
Charles Lungley	1854 - 1865	G. W. Sweeting & Son	c.1860 - c. 1870
G. H. Harrington	1867 - ?		
Ole Morland }	1870 - ?		
Joseph Watson }	1870 - ?		
General Iron Screw Collier Company	c.1873 - c. 1879	G. W. Sweeting; Fred. Jno. Christ. Sweeting	c.1873 - c.1879
		G. W. Sweeting & Co. }	1879 - ?
		William Denman }	1879 - c. 1881
		F. J. Sweeting	1885
John Brodie Jun.	1881 - 1885		
(also at Princes Dock)			
Dry Docks Corporation of London Ltd.	1887 - 1890	Lindwall & Co., Shipwrights	1887 - 1895

(Closed and filled in sometime between 1898 and 1904, rebuilding of Greenland Dock Entrance).

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In early years, the yards were usually referred to by their occupiers' names. Elias Bird was stated in documents to be located at the "Great Wet Dock". John Rocque's map of 1746 (see inside front cover) named the north yard as "Greenland Dock" and the south as "South Sea Dock" - probably reflecting associations with different branches of the whaling trade. The south yard was usually referred to as "Clyde Dock" from around 1848, but the name could have been used from Ritchie's time. "Stanford's Library Map", of 1862, shows the north yard as "Licensed Victuallers' Dock"; it is known that the Licensed Victuallers' Company operated a short lived steamer service between London and Boulogne, so there may be a connection. From 1870, it was usually called the "Commercial Dry Dock", but that name could date from earlier - either from the Commercial Dock Co., or the Commercial Steam Packet Co.



The Union Steamship Company *Dane*, built by Charles Lungley at Rotherhithe in 1854. (From:- "Merchant Fleets" by Duncan Haws, 1990).