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# **MILES AND MILES—AND STILL MORE MILES**

## *An Impression of London Docks*

(From an Educational Session Talk by Dr. W. B. SUTCH, from 2YA)

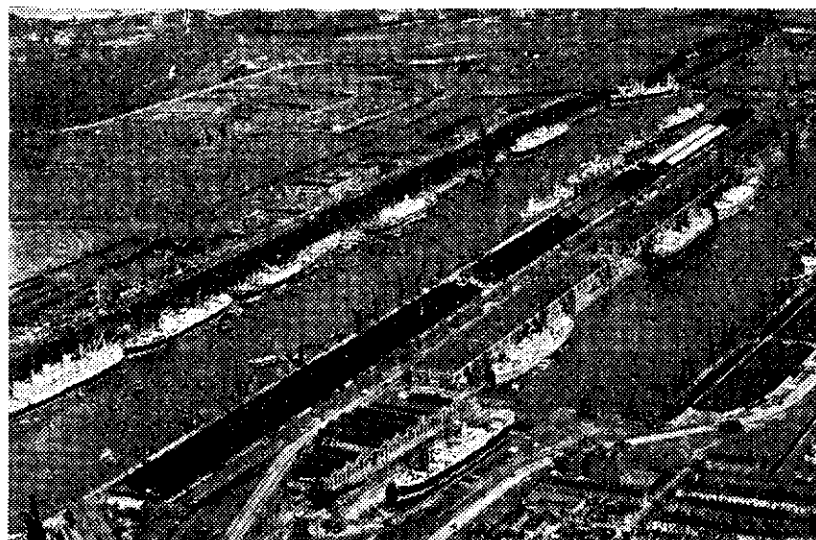
**L**ONDON has not a harbour in the sense that Wellington or Lyttelton or Otago or Auckland or Nelson have harbours. The ships that arrive to unload or load must do this loading or unloading on the banks of the River Thames itself. But so many ships arrive that the river would be choked with them, even if it were possible for them to tie up to a wharf, on the river side. But generally they

going down to Tilbury Docks at the River Mouth, and you would see stretching for miles these inland lakes on the river bends containing the ships..

If you flew over the whole of the 26 miles, you would fly over little barges, little river steamers, big cargo steamers, steamers which carry wheat only, steamers which carry oil only—they call them tankers. You would see passenger vessels and the greatest liners of the world, P. & O. boats, Cunarders, White Star. Particularly would you see these at Tilbury Docks, where the ships come up to a landing stage which is really a huge

In these docks timber and grain and cheese and bacon from Canada are landed. A good deal of the timber is kept in huge timber ponds, while cool stores hold the food products.

Another set of docks is the West India Docks. At these docks such things as sugar, rum, hops, grain, frozen meat, are landed. Further down the river come the Victoria Docks and the Albert Docks, named of course after Queen Victoria and her husband. These have been excavated out and extended over a distance of nearly three miles. They will admit huge ships because of their depth and the great size of the entrance locks. At these docks are great warehouses containing tobacco—thousands of tons of it. There are huge granaries containing wheat, and close handy flour mills turning the wheat into flour, and again there is cold storage accommodation for millions of frozen carcasses. A good deal of New Zealand's butter is landed at these docks and is taken up the river to warehouses. If you were standing on London Bridge and looking down the river, you would see the New Zealand Government's Marketing Department, and quite close to it you would see cool stores and buildings that contain cheese and butter. The butter would be perhaps unloaded from the barges which, dozens at a time, had been pulled up the river by a small steamer.



**LONDON DOCKS:** A relatively small section of London's vast dockside space. The majority of the ships shown are engaged in New Zealand and Australian trade

### **The People**

At the Tilbury Docks end—that is, the River Mouth end—there are great stretches of bare country with an occasional cement works or soap factory or margarine factory, but as you get up the river to the West India Docks, or the London Docks, then you come into an area where perhaps millions of people live. Close packed in small houses with narrow streets are the people who do the work on the docks—those who unload the ships, those who work in the storehouses — those who provide the meals for the workers. Here you will find thousands of Chinamen, thousands of Lascars — peoples from all countries, ships' crews, seamen who are waiting to be taken on for another ship. The chief excitement would be to see the ships that come in from Australia and New Zealand, from Rio de Janeiro, from Montreal, from Capetown, from India. This is the sort of thing that most visitors like to watch. What I liked watching was the New Zealand butter coming up the London Bridge. This was only one tiny part of the activity that went on, but if I could multiply the products of New Zealand to arrive at a sum which would give the products of all countries, and multiply the ships from New Zealand to include the ships of all countries, then I could multiply my impressions and get some idea really of what London's vast docks were like.

do not do this because the rising and falling of the tide makes it almost impossible.

The River Thames is not a very big river and if you look at it on the map as it flows through London to the sea it will look like a thin wriggling snake with a lot of bends in it. On most of these bends huge holes have been dug out of the ground and the material carted away. These holes are shaped like long oblongs. They are connected with a short canal to the river, and by this means the water comes in and fills up the excavation. It then becomes a dock. This means that because London did not have a harbour, the people of London had to dig out huge lakes and in these lakes they built wharves, and on the wharves or near at hand they build great warehouses to hold the goods which were being imported.

### **Bird's-eye View**

If you were a bird looking down on London towards the sea, you would not see a lot of ships collected in one big basin and wharves all in a row as they are in Wellington. You would see from London Bridge 26 miles of winding river

floating wharf connected by a hinged arm to the dry land. As the tide rises, the ship and the wharf rise too. But that is only the landing stage. To get into the docks themselves, the ship generally sails into a little canal. Big gates close behind it. The gates open up ahead and the ship sails in, to the little inland sea that they call the docks, and ties up at one of the wharves which has been built.

### **An Idea of the Size**

To give you some idea of the great size of the various docks, I could tell you of the St. Katherine Docks which were excavated over 100 years ago. To make room for the docks, 1250 houses were pulled down and over 11,000 people had to find somewhere else to live. Next to the St. Katherine Docks are what are called the London Docks. They have an area of 100 acres and here you will find in the warehouses stored thousands of tons of tea, great casks of wine and spirits. Each of the docks specialises in a particular kind of commodity. For example, in the London Docks too you will find rubber and great floors of ivory. On the south side of the river are the Surrey Docks, which occupy 380 acres for 165 acres of water.