

Welcome to *Dead Men in Deptford* – a literary walk. It was devised by Anna Sayburn Lane, a thriller writer and journalist. Anna lived close to here for about ten years, working on the local newspaper, and her mystery thriller novels are partly set in Deptford. The literary history of Deptford was a big inspiration for Anna, especially for her first novel *Unlawful Things* which looks at the mysterious death of playwright Christopher Marlowe.

The walk is about three miles and leads down Deptford High Street to the river, along the river front and through Greenland Dock to Surrey Quays. We finish at Surrey Quays station, where you can hop on an overground train back to New Cross, or catch a local bus back to Deptford.

Throughout this tour Anna will provide directions to take you from location to location. Do make sure to pay attention to traffic and other pedestrians as you follow the walk and keep safe.

An audio-guide of the walk, read by Anna is available at www.spreadtheword.org.uk/deptfordlitfest-walking-tour.
A map is available on the final page of this document.



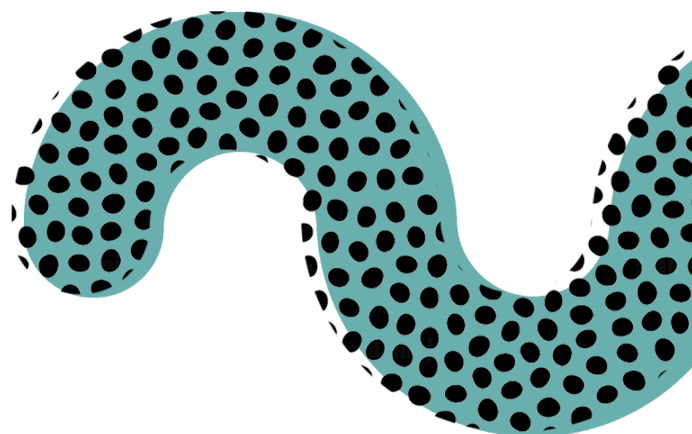
START

We start outside Deptford Lounge on Giffin Street. Stand with your back to the Deptford Lounge building, at the junction with Deptford High Street.

Our first writer today is Charles Dickens, who rented a flat in New Cross Road, which is up the other end of Deptford High Street, looking left. This was at the time when Dickens was writing his great novel about the Thames, *Our Mutual Friend*, which begins with Lizzie Hexham and her father in their little rowing boat, dragging a drowned man from the water at Limehouse, a couple of miles North from here.

Dickens used the flat to write, and also possibly for his young mistress Nellie Ternan. He described the area as: 'the flat country tending to the Thames, where Kent and Surrey meet, and where the railways still bestride the market gardens that will soon die under them.'

Now, turn right along Deptford High Street and continue under the railway bridge, past Deptford Station. After 200 yards, at Crossfield Street, turn right into St Paul's Church graveyard.





STOP 1

St Paul's Church was built in 1730 and is considered one of the best baroque churches in Britain. It was built by Thomas Archer, who also built St John's Smith Square, which is mentioned by Dickens in *Our Mutual Friend*. Dickens didn't admire St John's, describing it as 'some petrified monster, frightful and gigantic, on its back with its legs in the air.'

Take some time to explore the church and churchyard before we head to our second church, where we will encounter some very gothic skulls and another literary giant.

Walk through the church yard from Deptford High Street. With the church on your right, walk past the church and out the other side of the graveyard onto Deptford Church Street. Turn left heading up Deptford Creek Road. Use the pedestrian crossings over the busy Creek Road to keep going straight on up McMillan Street, past the Rachel McMillan Nursery School. Keep straight on to Deptford Green and St Nicholas Church, which will be on your right hand side.



STOP 2

Stop for a minute outside the gates of St Nicholas churchyard and look up at the skulls on the gateposts. The skulls are thought to identify a church yard where plague victims were buried. There is also a story that the skull and crossbones here inspired Elizabethan-era pirates to create the Jolly Roger flag – but that might be a myth.

You can see from here the Saxon-era church tower, the oldest part of the church and the only part that looks as it would have looked in Elizabethan times.

Walk into the graveyard, keeping the church to your left. Walk to the brick wall at the east end of the garden and follow it left to the Christopher Marlowe plaque.

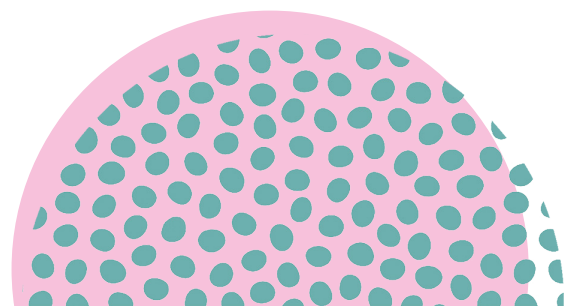


STOP 3

The plaque here commemorates the burial of the Elizabethan playwright Christopher Marlowe, a contemporary of Shakespeare. Marlowe was buried here after his violent and mysterious death in Deptford Strand at the age of just 29.

The words on the plaque are taken from his best-known play, *Doctor Faustus*.

*Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight
And burned is Apollo's laurel bough
That sometime grew within this learned man.
Faustus is gone: Regard his hellish fall
Whose fiendful fortune may exhort the wise
Only to wonder at unlawful things
Whose deepness doth entice such forward wits
To practice more than heavenly power permits*



What does it all mean? In the play, Dr Faustus' friends are mourning his death, after he is claimed by the devil having sold his soul for earthly power. Cut is the branch – his life is cut short; he was worthy of Apollo's laurel bough because of his knowledge, but his fiendful fortune, his terrible fate, reminds us 'only to wonder at unlawful things' or things beyond lawful enquiry. Faustus' great sin was conjuring up the devil and practising magic, which is not allowed by heavenly power.

So why is this quote on Marlowe's memorial? Marlowe died young – aged just 29 – and in a pretty nasty way. Had he lived, he might have written more great plays – as it was, he has been out-shone by Shakespeare. Marlowe was also accused of all sorts of bad behaviour, including atheism and black magic.

The parish register of St Nicolas includes Marlowe's burial. The vicar, Thomas Macander, recorded on Friday 1 June 1592: "Christopher Marlow slain by Francis Fraser". We don't know exactly where Marlowe is buried – tradition says near the Saxon tower. He may have been thrown into a plague pit, which was in use at the time because 1592 was a plague year. Marlowe's friend, the printer Edward Blount, wrote to Marlowe's patron Thomas Walsingham about how 'we brought the breathless body to the earth'.

It was discovering Marlowe's grave here in Deptford that sparked the idea that eventually became my first novel, *Unlawful Things*. How did Marlowe die? We'll find out soon. But now we're going down to the river.

Retrace your steps back out of the church yard, then turn right and continue along Deptford Green. As we go, pause briefly at Benbow Street on your left.

STOP 4

John Benbow was a 17th century Admiral, much feted for his courage fighting the French and also fighting pirates. He was for a time employed as Master Attendant for the navy at Deptford. He died in Kingston, Jamaica, after his leg was injured in a sea battle. He was famous for his courage. Robert Louis Stevenson named the tavern in Treasure Island the Admiral Benbow – and many real-life pubs are also named after him.

Continue another 100 yards along Deptford Green before turning left along Borthwick Street. Then take a right down Wharf Street towards the waterfront. Walk up the steps and onto the riverside walk.

STOP 5

From our spot by the river, you can see the top of the Master Shipwright's Palace on the very far left, over the wall at the end of the walkway. It's the oldest building still standing from the Tudor boatyard built for Henry VIII. The house dates from 1503.

Looking right, down the river towards Greenwich, you can just see the Royal Observatory, which was the target of the Russian spy and terrorist in Joseph Conrad's short novel *The Secret Agent*. It was inspired by a true story of a French anarchist who died while planning to blow up the observatory in 1894. Conrad was a Polish sailor, and worked in the merchant navy for 8 years before coming ashore in London and starting to work as a writer.

Joseph Conrad sailed all over the world, but he clearly knew the Eastern reaches of the Thames well. His most famous novella, *Heart of Darkness*, was published in 1899. It starts with the narrator and sailor Marlow, telling stories on a boat moored in the Thames at Gravesend.

'The old river in its broad reach rested unruffled at the decline of day, spread out in the tranquil dignity of a waterway leading to the uttermost ends of the earth... It had borne all the ships whose names are like jewels flashing in the night of time, from the Golden Hind returning with her round flanks full of treasure, to be visited by the Queen's Highness, to the Erebus and Terror, bound on other conquests—and that never returned. They had sailed from Deptford, from Greenwich, from Erith—the adventurers and the settlers; kings' ships and the ships of men on 'Change; captains, admirals, the dark "interlopers" of the Eastern trade, and the commissioned "generals" of East India fleets... "And this also," said Marlow suddenly, "has been one of the dark places of the earth."

The area around us was connected with ship building, wharves and docks for centuries – most recently, commercial docks. We're going inland now around the commercial wharves to meet a very interesting man who wrote a diary – but not the one you might be expecting.

Retrace your steps away from the river down Wharf Street, but this time turn right along Borthwick Street and then left down Watergate Street. Turn right at the pedestrianised Prince Street, past the Dog and Bell pub. At the end of the pedestrianised section, continue straight ahead on Prince Street for another 500 yards. Just before you get to the main road with a mini-roundabout, turn right along Sayes Court and into Sayes Park. Stop by a mulberry tree with a protective fence around it in the middle of the garden.

STOP 6

This mulberry tree is 300 years old and was planted by the Russian Tsar, Peter the Great. Why? Sayes Court was the country house of John Evelyn, writer, gardener and diarist. He lived a long life, from 1620 to 1706, and kept a diary from the age of 20. It covered historical events including the execution of Charles I, the interregnum of Oliver Cromwell and the Restoration of Charles II, the Great Plague and the Great Fire of London in 1666. From 1652, he lived in Sayes Court in Deptford, next to the Royal Dockyard, in a property belonging to his wife's family.

He was interested in natural sciences and helped found the Royal Society. He was a very keen gardener and made a celebrated garden at Sayes Court, of which this is the rather sad remains.

Evelyn had some surprisingly modern interests – in 1660 he wrote *The Inconvenience of the Aer and Smoak of London Dissipated*, the first book written on the growing air pollution problem in London, and in 1664 *Sylva, or A Discourse of Forest-Trees*, written as an encouragement to landowners to plant trees. He also wrote about vegetarianism. He was a courtier to Charles II and rented his house to Peter the Great when the king was on a tour of Europe. There is a story that Peter the Great wasn't great as a house guest – he apparently wrecked the garden and made a mess of the house. Maybe this mulberry tree was a peace offering to Evelyn.

Here's an extract from Evelyn's diary about a particularly unusual day in Deptford:

3rd June, 1658.

A large whale was taken between my land abutting on the Thames and Greenwich, which drew an infinite concourse to see it, by water, horse, coach, and on foot... It appeared first below Greenwich at low water, for at high water it would have destroyed all the boats, but lying now in shallow water, after a long conflict, it was killed with a harping iron, struck in the head, out of which spouted blood and water by two tunnels; and after a horrid groan, it ran quite on shore, and died.

Continue past the mulberry through the park and take the exit to the left by the main gate onto Grove Street. Turn right and continue for 300 yards on Grove Street until you reach the open ground of Lower Pepys Park on the right. Take the path through Lower Pepys Park, cross Millard Road and go up the steps into Pepys Park.

STOP 7

This whole area was once the headquarters of the Royal Navy, with lots of stores, contractors and docks for the ships down by the river.

Samuel Pepys – for whom the Pepys Estate is named – was appointed Clerk of Works for the Navy Board, shortly after Charles II was restored to the throne. He became very rich in the process – not just through his salary of £350 a year, but because of the bribes he took for granting contracts to supply the navy. He records many visits to Deptford, often to deal with supplies at the stores, or to pay off ships – which meant paying the sailors when they came ashore after a voyage. He was very friendly with John Evelyn and there are several records of him enjoying a good dinner and gossip about King Charles II at Sayes Court.

Here's an extract from Pepys diary:

Tuesday 9 October 1660

"This morning to Deptford, to pay off two ships. To Whitehall, where I met with Sir W. Pen, and so with him to Redriffe [an old name for Rotherhithe] by water, and from thence walked over the fields to Deptford (the first pleasant walk I have had a great while), and in our way had a great deal of merry discourse, and find him to be a merry fellow and pretty good natured, and sings very bawdy songs."

There are also several mentions of a Mrs Bagwell, wife of the Deptford ship yard carpenter William Bagwell. Pepys used a strange mixture of French, Spanish and English when talking about sex – he referred to visiting Mrs Bagwell and "hazer tout que je voudrais con ella", or did all I wanted with her.

But it wasn't all bawdy songs and enjoying the company of Mrs Bagwell. Pepys too lived through the worst year of the plague:

Saturday 12 August 1665

"The people die so, that now it seems they are fain to carry the dead to be buried by day-light, the nights not sufficing to do it in. There is one also dead out of one of our ships at Deptford, which troubles us mightily; the Providence fire-ship, which was just fitted to go to sea. But they tell me to-day no more sick on board."

Walk through Pepys park down to the river front and turn left walking along the riverside past the old store buildings. Pause at Drake's Steps, the gated steps that lead down to the river. There is a plaque on the wall of the building opposite recording Drakes' voyage.

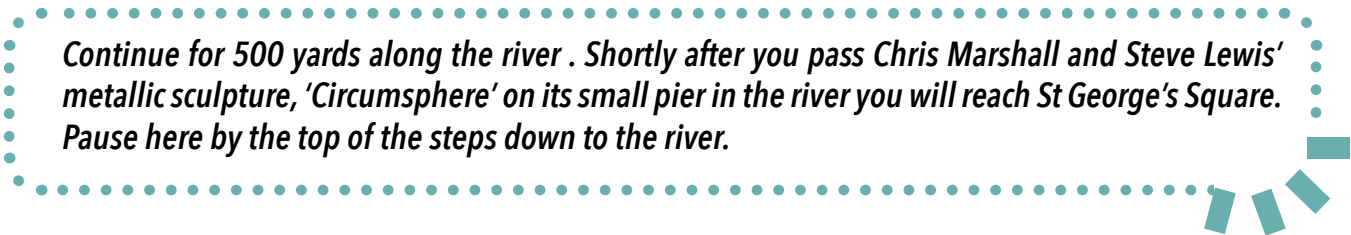


STOP 8

Elizabeth I visited Deptford on 4 April 1581, and knighted Sir Francis Drake aboard his ship, the Golden Hind, which had completed its 3-year circumnavigation of the world the year before. The ship remained in dry dock at Deptford, a tourist attraction, and lots of people visited and cut pieces off as souvenirs.

Drake's voyages opened up the world to English writers. You can see the influence of this in the plays of Shakespeare and Marlowe – suddenly they could imagine worlds beyond Europe. Perilous sea voyages – for example in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* or *The Tempest* – and non-European characters like Marlowe's Tamburlaine The Great and Shakespeare's Othello became fashionable. Ships from this spot travelled all over the world, bringing back money, goods and stories.

The next stop – our last-but-one – takes us back to the heart of the mystery about Christopher Marlowe's death.



Continue for 500 yards along the river . Shortly after you pass Chris Marshall and Steve Lewis' metallic sculpture, 'Circumsphere' on its small pier in the river you will reach St George's Square. Pause here by the top of the steps down to the river.



STOP 9

So what happened to Christopher Marlowe? We know from the inquest that he spent the last day of his life, 30th May 1593, in a house owned by a widow called Eleanor Bull, somewhere along Deptford Strand, which is this stretch of river we've just walked.

In this house he met three men: Ingram Frizer, a money-lender; Nicolas Skeres, a conman and extortionist; and Robert Poley, a political informer. All three had links to the Elizabethan secret service. Marlowe too had been employed by Francis Walsingham, Elizabeth I's spymaster – and that is the link between them.

They spent the morning talking, then had lunch and walked in the garden. At six in the evening, they came in and had supper. The story goes that there was an argument, a quarrel about 'the sum of pence owed' for 'the reckonyng,' or bill.

Ingram Frizer was sitting at the table. He had his back to Marlowe, who lay on a bed. Marlowe leapt up in anger, took Frizer's dagger and hit him about the head. Frizer struggled with Marlowe for the dagger.

The Coroner's report said: 'And so it befell, in that affray, that the said Ingram in defence of his life, with the dagger aforesaid of the value of 12 pence, gave the said Christopher a mortal wound above his right eye of the depth of two inches and the width of one inch.' Marlowe 'then and there instantly died.'

The inquest was held the next day, Friday 1 June, at the site of the crime, and included a viewing of Marlowe's body. Coroner William Danby concluded that Frizer killed Marlowe 'in the defence and saving of his own life'. Marlowe was buried the same day, in an unmarked grave in St Nicholas Churchyard, which we visited earlier.

Immediately along the river, you may be able to see the boat yard - boat-building continues at Deptford to this day. And fiction set in Deptford also continues, some of it exploring the many theories that have circulated over the centuries about Marlowe's death, and whether he actually died at all.

The story of Marlowe and his horrible death at Deptford inspired my novel *Unlawful Things*. I started to wonder not about how he died, but why. Did he perhaps know a secret, something unlawful or forbidden, that meant he had to be silenced? But I'm not the only one to have found inspiration from Marlowe's story.

Anthony Burgess wrote a novel about Marlowe's life and death, *A Dead Man in Deptford*, published in 1993, 400 years after Marlowe's murder. He imagined Marlowe arriving here: "Morning Deptford and the shipbuilders early awork. The chandler's shops busy. Hounds from the Queen's kennels howled bitterly. A faint stink from the Queen's slaughterhouse. But was not the whole land her slaughterhouse? Inland gulls wove over the waters and craked. Sails, sails, a wilderness of them... And there the Golden Hind lay, to be chipped of its timber by new pilgrims. Kit walked in the clean air to the house of Widow Eleanor Bull. She greeted him at the door in her plain black. She said: "They are already come. They wait on you."

More recently, Ros Barber's *The Marlowe Papers*, a novel in blank verse, has Marlowe's Deptford murder at the middle of the book. In her imagining, Marlowe's death is staged, with a freshly-executed body brought into the house of Widow Bull. Marlowe swaps his clothes with the corpse and takes a ship to Flanders, leaving his Secret Service colleagues to run a dagger through its eye and present the body to the coroner as Marlowe's own corpse.

She writes: "*The eastern pier
is poking its sullen finger through the flow
that now sweeps swiftly seawards. There, the boat
Poley had named jerks hard against its ropes
as though concerned to leave, knocked by a breeze
still keen for France.*"

The second half of the book describes his life in exile – and how he writes the plays that are produced in London under the name of William Shakespeare.

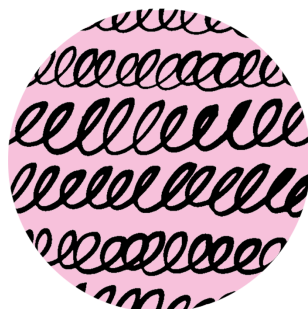
Whatever you believe about the strange story of Christopher Marlowe and Deptford, you can see how this stretch of water has inspired writers – and continues to do so. Whether it was the site of Marlowe's death, or of his escape to France, it continues to haunt the imagination.



This is the end of the guided part of the walk. You have two choices, depending on whether you want to walk through the docks to Surrey Quays and pick up transport there, or take the bus back to Deptford.

To take the bus: walk inland down the right hand side of St George's Square and along Plough Way. Turn left into Grove Street where you can take a 199 bus back to Deptford.

To get to Surrey Quays: continue on the riverside and cross the footbridge over South Dock. After crossing the bridge, turn left and continue along Rope Street. As you reach the end of Rope Street head right and walk around the side of Greenland Dock to the underpass into Surrey Quays shopping centre. Here you can get the bus or overground from Surrey Quays station.





Scan this QR Code with your phone to open up the *Dead Men in Deptford* route in Google Maps:

