



A Brief Tour of Ipswich Wet Dock in Photographs

Illustrated with images from the IMT Image Archive

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Stuart Grimwade

Most of the earliest known photographs to survive are of scenes in London and Paris, or in the homes of their inventors, and so it is remarkable that those taken in and around the then new Wet Dock in Ipswich are among the rarest images ever taken. This is thanks in large part to the work of the local artist and pioneering photographer, Robert Burrows. To his legacy we may now add John Wiggin, a local chemist, whose early wax paper negatives of Ipswich are now recognised as some of the most remarkable surviving examples of early image-making.

Robert Burrows was born in the town in 1810. He worked as a silversmith in the family business in Fore Street, but was also an artist, painting views along the banks of the Orwell and Gipping. The advent of photography inspired him to take up this new technology, and he soon became known for producing the first photographs of Ipswich and its people. It is remarkable that these very early images have survived. The exact dates on which the images were taken are not known, but most are believed to have been made between 1850 and 1858, using a 'wet paper negative' process. This is a self-portrait of him, taken in his Fore St. studio using a bulb pump to open the camera shutter under his foot and the carpet!

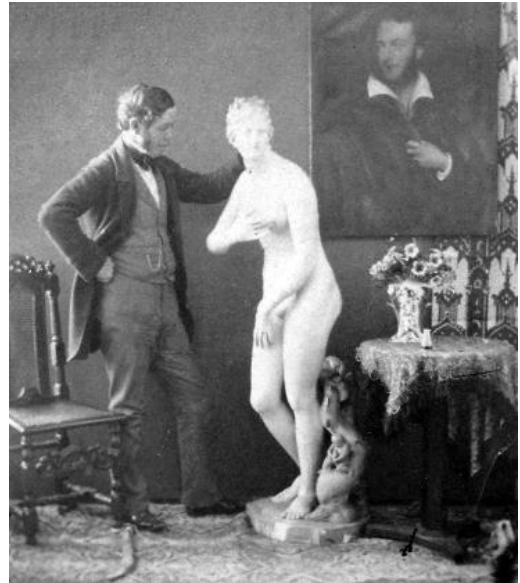


Image 1

A Burrows image of a brigantine coming alongside the Common Quay in front of the Custom House - just visible through the iron columns of Palmer's warehouse. In spite of major redevelopment in recent years, these columns still stand today.

Near the bows of the vessel is a building with large white lettering across the frontage, The British Flag, one of a number of public houses along the quay that catered largely for dockworkers and visiting seamen.

Most of the buildings have long since been replaced, in some cases a number of times, with the exception of the Isaac Lord's group of warehouses and maltings, now 'Isaacs'.



Image 2

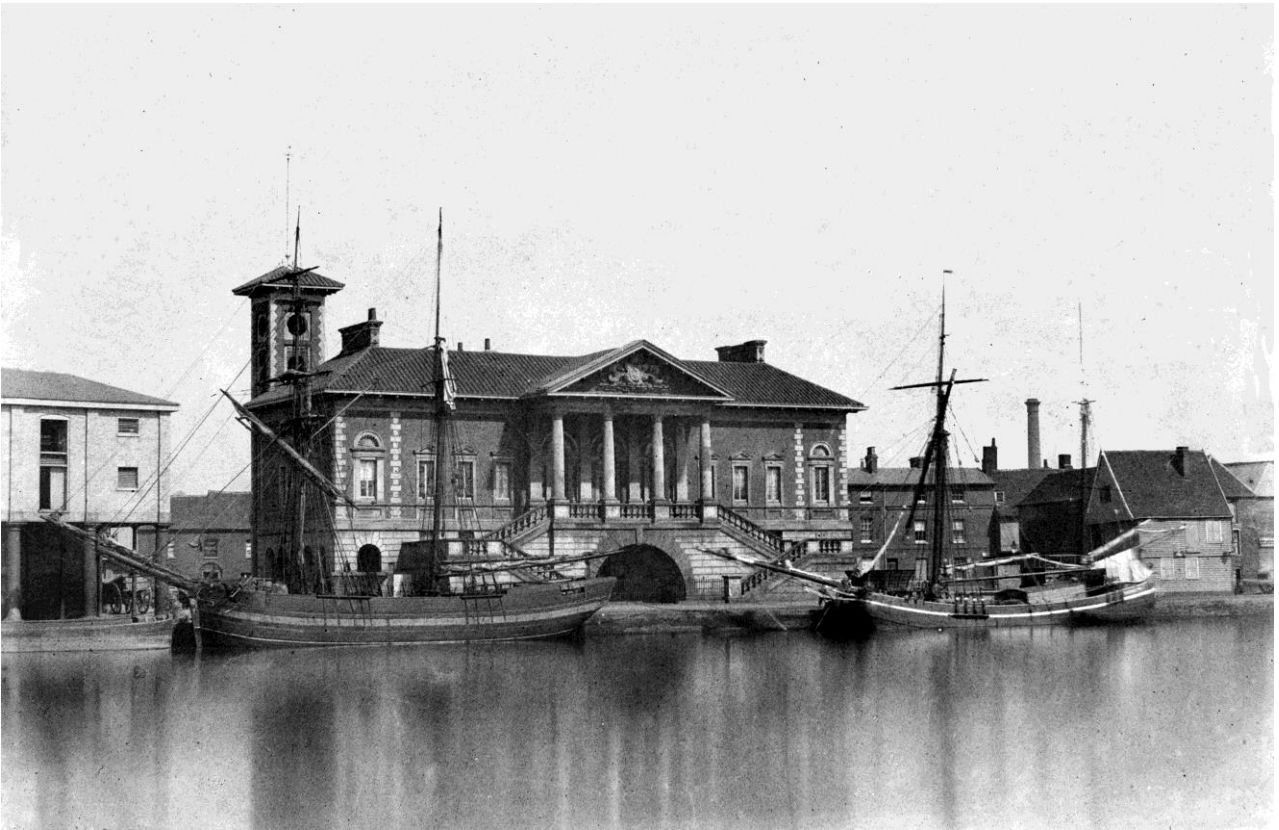


Image 3

John Wiggin's photograph shown here copied directly from the original wax paper negative shows the remarkable quality of his work, which brought him an award when shown in the London Salon in 1852. The negative has been identified as one of the most important surviving examples of its kind in the history of photography. It was probably made in the late 1840s, and shows the newly completed Custom House before the new clock had been inserted into the tower.

A late 19th century scene looking west towards Stoke Mill on the left (beside Stoke Bridge), now demolished, and Burtons and Cranfields Mills on the right, now DanceEast.



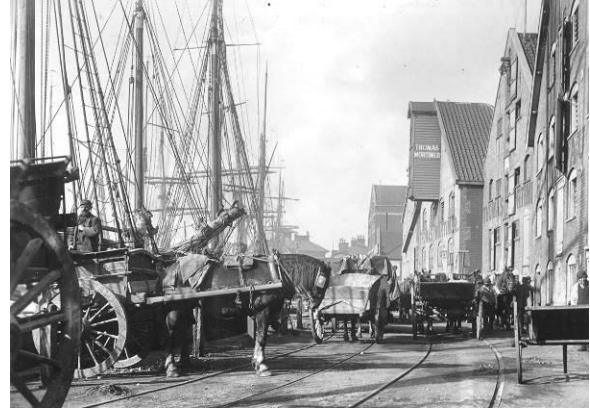
Image 4

Before WWI the public enjoyed free access to the whole of the dock, sharing the quays with the dock tramway which linked every quay to the main railway line to the west of Ipswich Station via the 'lower' and 'upper' shunting yards.

Cranfields Mill was a major part of the Ipswich skyline for a large part of the 19th and 20th centuries, milling flour from all over the world. Affectionately known locally as the 'castles in the air', the mill is seen here at perhaps its busiest period when coasters and barges

were constantly discharging or loading flour alongside. These two photographs (images 5 and 6) were taken by Trust director Stuart Grimwade in the late 1950s.





Images 7,8 and 9

These two sets of pictures were all taken from the same point, now the forecourt of the University of Suffolk main building. The view in the left-hand pair, taken in 1890 and 1960 respectively, show the same distance view, while the closer two views on the right show in more detail the buildings on Neptune Quay, now mostly demolished.

Prominent buildings from right to left in the left-hand colour photograph in 1960 are Meux's Brewery, Whitmore's Sailmakers (now the site of the recent Salthouse Hotel extension), Wm. Paul's 'Home' warehouse (now Ashtons Legal offices), Albion Mills (now converted into flats), and Cranfields Mill (now the Mill and Winerack developments, and DanceEast). The majority of the Wet Dock's shipping trade by this time was by Thames Sailing barges, perhaps marking the gradual decline in the numbers of larger vessels using the dock as more and more trade was carried out in the tidal river on Cliff Quay. The 19th century scene emphasises the mixture of rail and horse drawn transport which distinguished the local from the regional origin and destinations of the cargoes. The horse-drawn cart on which the man is standing proudly states 'George Whitson, Carter, Ipswich'.

Another image from around 1890 looking east along Common Quay in front of the ivy-clad Custom House, showing Paul's 'Home' warehouse, now converted into the offices of Ashtons legal, Solicitors.

A schoolboy is clearly keen to get himself in the centre of the picture!



Images 10

A scene taken in 1894 from Ransomes Quay looking north to the site of the current University of Suffolk main building. The gas lamp on the extreme right edge of the image marks the corner of Coprolite St. on the wall of Ransomes Foundry. Notices on the wall of the public house behind the right-hand barge name local sail and rope makers. The stone pod of the crane can still be seen today in front of 'Coffeelink' café.



Image 11

The barges could have been trading iron and steel, or foundry sand directly into the adjacent Ransomes Foundry, for forging parts for their ploughs and a huge array of agricultural machinery and steam engines, aeroplanes and armaments during WWI, and later, battery driven electric vehicles and trams pioneered in Ipswich in the early 20th century.



Image 12

A scene at Stoke Bridge taken by Harry Walters around 1895 (the iron bridge shown was designed by local engineer Robert Ransome). St. Peter's Dock was located on the tidal New Cut in front of what is now DanceEast, and was a regular meeting place for dockers, sailors, businessmen, and local boys hoping to get a slice of the action.

The original designs of the new Wet Dock envisaged brick-faced and stone capped quays all around the impounded water area, but with the inevitable escalation of construction costs, savings had to be made. Much discussion took place regarding the risk to the integrity of the dock that might be involved if only a clay embankment was used at the southern end of the dock.

Only one photograph exists showing this bank in its original state before the new lock was cut through it in 1880. The image was taken from the roof of the Ransomes Ironworks looking southwest. The three sailing ships lined up on the right would have been loading ballast to give them stability when leaving the dock after discharging their cargoes.



Image 13



It was not until 1902 that this part of the dock received its proper quay, seen in the centre of this photograph (left) taken from the Cobbold Brewery by the then dock engineer responsible for the construction of this new S.W. Quay.

In the foreground is Dock End yard where a slipway continued to be used until the early years of this century for repairs to a variety of vessels, including of course Thames barges.

Image 14



Ipswich Maritime Trust
Registered Charity No. 286603

The Trust began life in 1982 at a time when the Wet Dock was in serious decline with very few vessels and many redundant historic buildings. Its aim was to find ways of bringing life back to the Wet Dock, and its success in this endeavour was largely achieved when its 'Sail Ipswich' event in 1997 drew over 35,000 people to the Waterfront over a single week-end. Today, the principal aim of the Trust is to bring to everyone's attention the astonishing maritime history of the Orwell and its Port, reaching back to before the 7th Century, enabling Ipswich to claim to be the oldest English town. We undertake a wide range of activities which includes holding a series of winter and spring talks on a maritime related theme, and running the Window Museum on Albion Wharf for which we are always keen to collect and display maritime artefacts. More details on the Trust can be found at the IMT website www.ipswichmaritimetrust.org.uk, or by contacting Des Pawson on 01473 690090.

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