



# Quays and Wharves of Ipswich

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## Quays and Wharves of Ipswich

*The first edition of this Paper, published in 2011, was in part designed to encourage all those involved in the future redevelopment of Ipswich's historic Waterfront to recognise the importance of the old quay names, and of the need to reinstate them in their rightful locations, in preference to new and entirely irrelevant names of no local significance.*

*Following Ipswich Borough Council's welcome decision to reinstate some of those original quay names utilising those adopted during the early years of the Post Office, and still officially recognised today, it now seems appropriate to update the Paper. A new appendix has therefore been added to include some more recent research carried out by Trust colleagues into earlier quay names often reflecting the names of the maritime trader property owners or tenants around the Waterfront in earlier times. The opportunity has also been taken to correct some factual errors in the original paper. Illustrations are from the Trust image archive.*

Before the construction of the Wet Dock in 1839 - 42 there was only one place at which it was legal to land cargoes, and that was the Common Quay in front of the old timber-framed Custom House with its 'Sailors' Walk' lined with wooden columns supporting the upper floor. The overall scene was beautifully captured by the artist John Cleveley in the grand panorama from Stoke Hill which he painted in 1753, a detail of which is reproduced here.

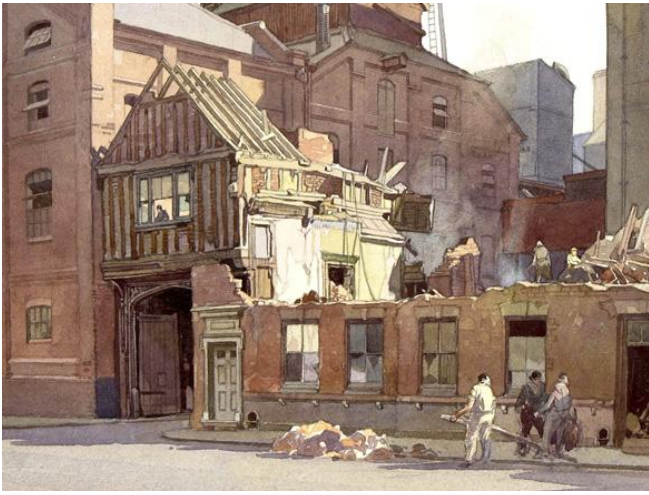


The Common Quay, with its crane, first mentioned in 1477, was the place at which merchants could load and unload goods under the eye of the customs officials. Here is a view of the back of the old Custom House.



Elsewhere along the riverside buildings came right down to the water's edge, though at the rear of their properties some prominent merchants had their own quays at which they might deal with their own goods. An early example of such a private establishment was Bigod's Quay, owned by the Bigod earls of Norfolk whose stone house – a mark of great affluence in a town that was largely composed of timber-framed buildings – stood in Key (Quay) Street.

Isaac Lord's is a complete merchant's establishment with the dwelling house on Fore Street and storage and processing facilities stretching all the way to the quay. The Smarts, father Richard and then son William (died 1599), had similarly impressive premises opposite the Quay church until the final demolition of 1954. Indeed, Bigod's Quay probably became Smart's Wharf in Elizabethan times. Leonard Squirrell's watercolour reproduced below left, shows the impressive north-facing gatehouse just before its end. The right hand sketch, by local architect John Shewell Corder, shows the Wet Dock frontage yard of the same wharf, looking north as it appeared in the late 19th Century.



This photograph by local photographer William Vick, shows yet another Tudor set of wharfside buildings, believed to have been demolished for the construction of Cranfields Mill, now the site of the Trust's Window Museum.

It is sad to realise that much of the best of Tudor Ipswich dockland was lost in relatively recent times. Had they survived, these 'historic waterfront' buildings really would enable the area to live up to its name.

When Henry Palmer designed the Wet Dock, cutting off a section of the Orwell by damming it top and bottom and forming the New Cut to carry the waters of the Gipping to the sea, he proposed the construction of a continuous quay all the way along the north and east sides of the Dock. In fact for reasons of economy the quay was cut short on the east side at what was then known as the Ballast Wharf, and from there to the lower dam there was merely a slope into the water. Even in later times there were only timber stages at the far end, as may be seen in this early (1858) photo by Robert Burrows:



The Ballast Wharf was the place at which sailing ships could take on ballast, gravel dredged from the river, should they be leaving the port without cargo. Until the establishment of the Dock Commission the provision of ballast was the sole and very profitable prerogative of the town's Corporation.

Unsurprisingly the place where ballast was loaded changed from time to time; at the time the Dock was under construction it was just to the north of the gasworks, but it later moved to the river side of the lower dam and then on to the island, just inside the original lock, and where this photograph was taken.

With the construction of the Dock a fairly wide area of river was left between the upper dam and the cast-iron Stoke Bridge that had been erected by William Cubitt and Ransomes after its predecessor had been washed away by a flood in 1818. This area became known as St Peter's Dock, the quay on the north side being known as St Peter's Quay; at that time Stoke tidemill still stood facing downriver on the northern side of the bridge, as may be seen in this late 19th Century photograph.

In 1925, St Peter's Quay was widened by some 20ft at the Stoke Bridge end and by some 30ft. at the Dock end in order to accommodate a third railway line. This widening accounts for the somewhat changed appearance of the area in all pre-1925 photographs showing barges in St Peter's Dock. The last barge to moor at this quay was S.B. Victor in October 2009, to celebrate the completion of the Mill development.



St Peter's Quay had almost certainly existed before the coming of the Dock, and for some years the name was also used for the most westerly quay within the Dock, in later days sometimes called Cranfield's Quay. On the other side of the river beside the maltings that had been converted into a temporary barracks at the time of the Napoleonic Wars, immediately below the bridge, was Stoke Bridge Wharf.

Next to St Peter's Quay, in front of Pauls' Maltings, was Albion Wharf, now given the meaningless name of Regatta Quay by a developer. It is tempting to suggest that this was named from an Albion public house, but no such dockside pub has been traced. The area in front of the New Custom House, opened in 1845, (and now rather inappropriately referred to as the Old Custom House, especially as it still houses the offices of the current Port Authority) retained the name of Common Quay that it had borne for some six hundred years.

White's maps of 1849 and 1867 misleadingly give the name Common Quay to the whole area from the Custom House to the corner where now is Coprolite Street, and plans issued by the Ipswich Dock Commission in the mid-20th Century name the entire length from the Home Warehouse to Coprolite Street as Neptune Quay, clearly named after the Old Neptune pub in Fore Street. However, the western part of this was once known as Wherry Quay, from the sailing wherries that carried on a daily service for passengers and light goods between Ipswich and Harwich. In spite of the 'evidence' supplied by Fred Russel, who depicted a Norfolk wherry lying at this quay, the Orwell wherries were very different from the Broadland variety.

Coprolite Street, a new highway of about 1860, was named after the phosphatic nodules (of dinosaur dung) that were the raw material of the artificial fertiliser industry. From there onwards the quay fronting Orwell Works was Ransomes' Wharf, seen below in the late 19th Century with three barges alongside the foundry; but with the departure of Ransomes, Sims & Jefferies to another site about 1960 it was renamed Orwell Quay.

The name had originally been used for the quay along the east side of the New Cut. Ransomes' Wharf extended to Gasworks Quay, where its two hydraulic cranes used to unload the colliers that brought fuel for the retorts. When the dock was first opened there was a deep inlet with the original gasworks of 1822 at its head; the Gas Dock, as it was known, was eventually filled in to provide space for the extension of the gasworks.



In this photograph, taken by Harry Walters in 1897, the former Steam Packet Tap Inn can be seen behind the quayside barge at the junction of Neptune Quay and Coprolite Street, now the site of the University of Suffolk main building.

Beyond Patteson Road was Eagle Wharf, which presumably took its name from Pauls' Eagle Mill, vessels berthing there lay alongside the timber stages built out into deeper water as there was no quay heading in this area.

In the 19th Century the length between the gasworks and the lower dam was the Marine Promenade, which also extended across the dam and alongside the New Cut as far as the original lock; for the whole distance it was lined with lime trees. The section of the Promenade on the east side of the Dock disappeared quite early, probably with the construction in 1880-81 of a new entrance lock cut through the lower dam. The Promenade that was so well remembered by a past generation of Ipswich people ran only from the new lock to the old one.

The section of roadway on the east of the Dock was named Helena Road, after the former brig-sloop *Helena* which was loaned by the Navy in 1868 to serve as a floating church and was moored in this part of the Dock. She remained at Ipswich until 1880, when she was transferred by the Navy to other duties.

There were originally no quays on the island site between the Dock and the New Cut, much of which was taken up by a large millpond, as it was called on a *Plan of the Proposed Wet Dock* made by Henry Palmer in 1836. It apparently provided a head of water to operate George Tovell's roman cement works on the 'island'. It was later used as a timber pond for the storage of imported timber and then became a branch dock, being filled in between 1923 and 1925.

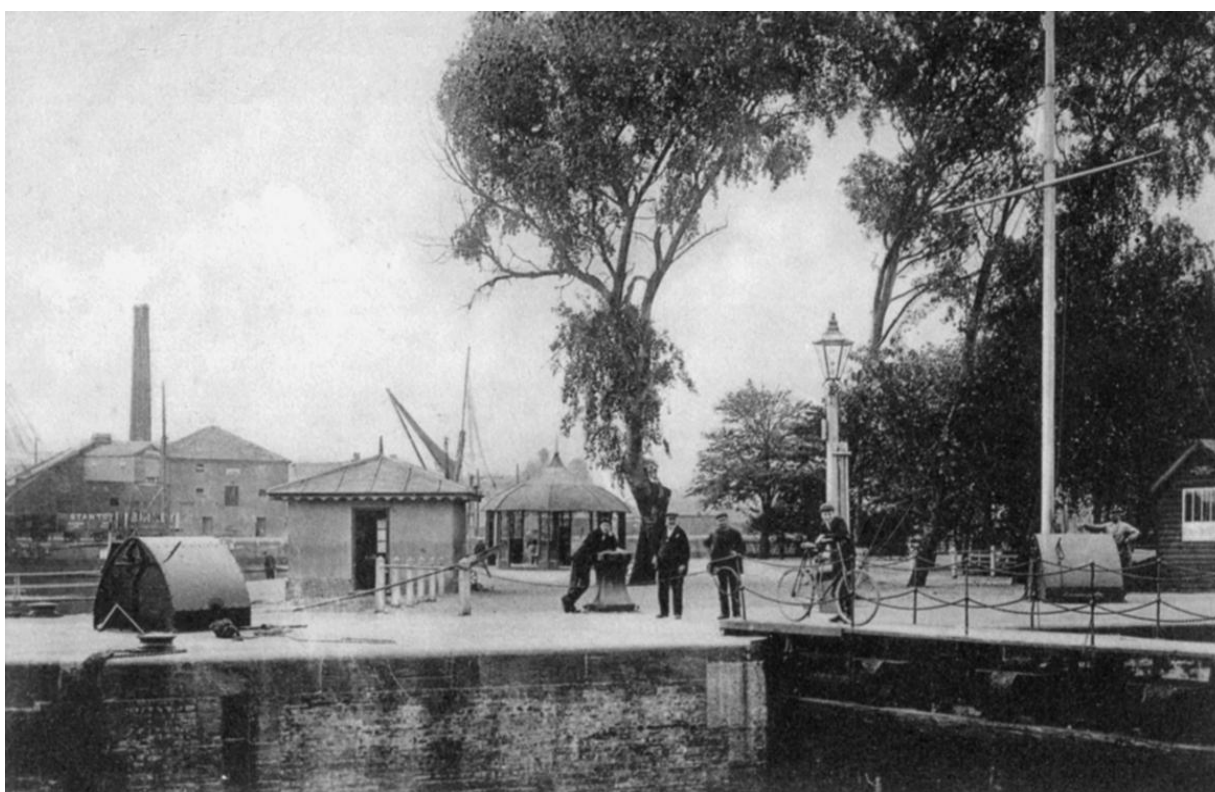
In 1882 an iron-framed public warehouse was built to the north of the original entrance lock, giving its name to Public Warehouse Quay, as seen in the photograph below, taken in the late 1880s. Remarkably, it stills stands today.

By then the new entrance lock had been opened, and in 1904 Timber Quay was constructed across the inner end of the old lock, at the same time that South West Quay replaced the old dolphins (mooring post structures) that had enabled large ships to berth and unload their cargoes into barges and lighters for transfer to the mills higher up the dock; the water at the west end of the dock was too shallow for large vessels.

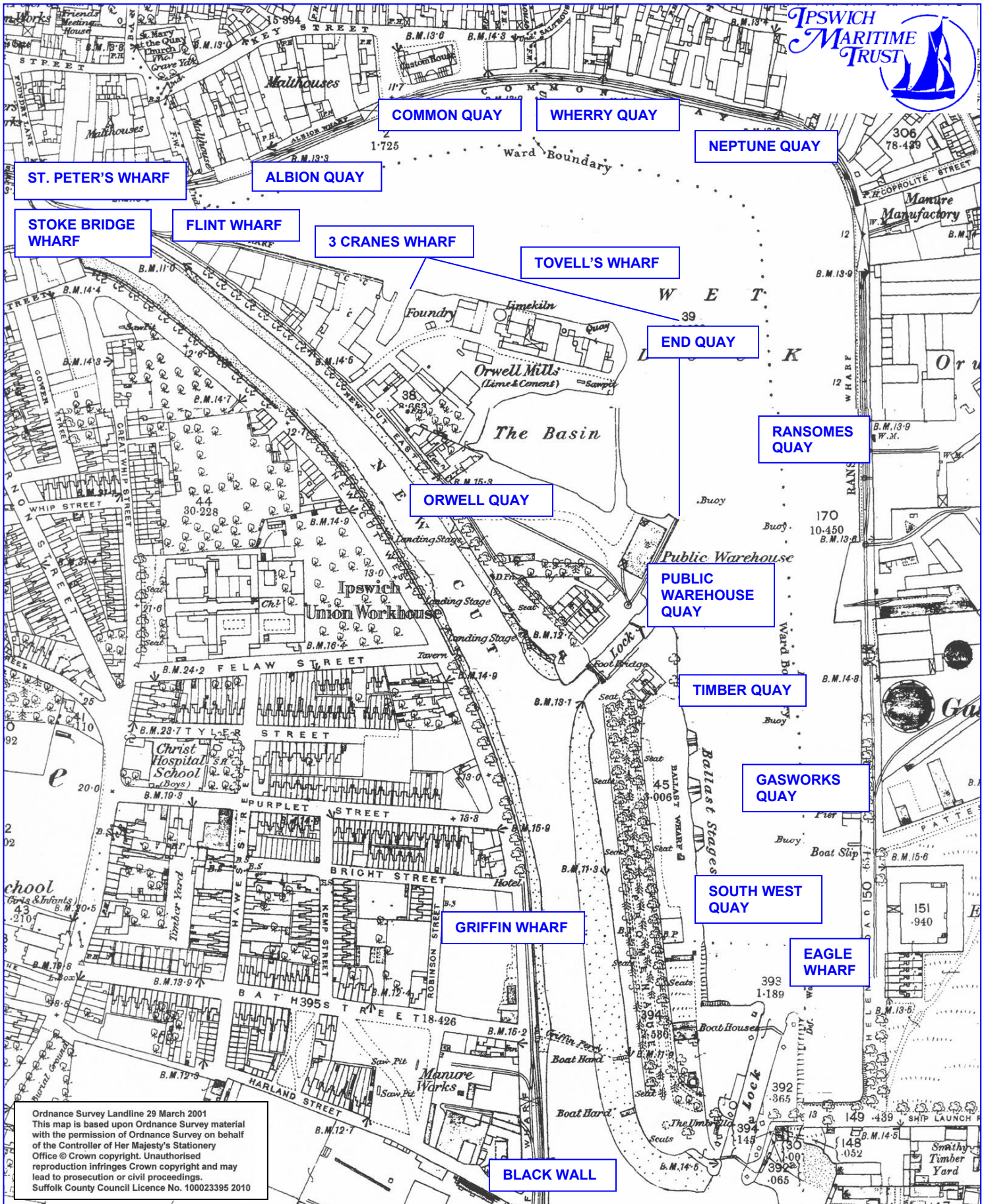


With the filling in of the branch dock in the 1920s End Quay was added to the north of Public Warehouse Quay and Tovell's Wharf, named after the one-time owner of the cement mill and an early dock commissioner, was constructed on the north side of the 'island'. Three Cranes Wharf and Flint Wharf lay to the west of Tovell's Wharf at the upper end of the Dock. The three small cranes shown on the Ordnance Survey large-scale plan of 1884 provide evidence of the origin of Three Cranes Wharf, but Flint Wharf remains something of a mystery. The name could have been derived from the landing of cargoes of flint for Frederick Ransome's artificial stone manufactory, later transferred to Greenwich (on the site of the O2 Stadium), but this is mere speculation.

While the opening of the new lock reduced the number of cargo-carrying vessels in the New Cut, which soon became the centre for both pleasure and ferry paddle steamers, commercial shipping still used the Cut until the late 1960s, trading to the Maltings near Stoke Bridge at the north end, while at the south barges regularly moored on the Black Wall servicing businesses in the vicinity of Ransomes and Rapier. The latter can be seen in this photo looking west across the new lock.







Ordnance Survey Landline 29 March 2001  
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**Quay and Wharf names recognised by the Ipswich Dock Commission during the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century superimposed on the OS map of 1884 with the later (and current) island site quays shown with a blue line.**

## References

*Ipswich Through the Ages*, Lilian J. Redstone, 1948  
*A Victorian Vision – The building of Ipswich Wet Dock*, Robert Malster and Bob Jones, 1992  
*Ships and Shipyards of Ipswich 1700-1970, A contribution to the Maritime history of an Ancient East Coast Port*, Hugh Moffat, 2002  
*The Port of Ipswich – Its Shipping and Trades*, Richard W. Smith and Jill Freestone, 2011

## Illustrations

IMT Image archive  
David Kindred  
Ipswich Museums Collection  
Ipswich School Archive

## Maps

Former Ipswich Dock Commission  
Suffolk County Council

In compiling this paper, the first Occasional Paper to be published by IMT, I am grateful for the help of Bob Malster, Dr John Blatchly, Colchester and Ipswich Museum Service, Suffolk Record Office, and my colleagues at the Trust.

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**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](http://www.ipswichmaritimetrust.org.uk)

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## Appendix 1.

As mentioned in the introduction to this revised Paper, the intervening years and changing face of the Waterfront have enabled Trust members to research the issue in more depth, using sources such as White's Directory of 1844, and a contemporary of Richard White, Mr. R. Wodderspoon, whose 'New Guide to Ipswich' published in 1842 was not only the first published guide of its kind of the town but, more interestingly, provides a detailed description of the then brand-new Wet Dock. This, in turn, provided much useful information for the creation of the Trust's Window Museum display No.20 on the building of the Wet Dock.

These and other sources such as the local newspapers of the Victorian era give us tantalising glimpses of long-lost property and quay names around the Waterfront both before and after construction of the new Wet Dock. These were times before formally recognised addresses became necessary through the establishment of the Post Office. It would have been natural for a ship's captain's orders to quote the name of traders berths using the same name as their premises.

In the case of waterfront inns and taverns, the same principle applied. It is not clear what prompted alternative uses of the word 'Quay' and 'Wharf'. This may simply be changing preferences over time, or may indicate changes brought by the coming of official postal addresses, or both. The same applies to the changing spelling over time of the names of surrounding streets, such as 'Key' Street and 'Quay' Street, 'Duck' Street and 'Duke' Street.

It seems likely that after construction of the Wet Dock, and the creation of a continuous newly built quay both within and outside the new dock in the New Cut, many businesses relocated to newly built premises, leading to a reordering of former quay names and their gradual amalgamation into one new agreed title.

To the Trust's knowledge this is the first attempt to bring the following evidence together. It is therefore incomplete, and may well contain unknown errors, but is presented here as fully as possible. As more evidence is discovered, this can be updated.

The following is a selection of other Quays & Wharf names that are mentioned in various publications. I am grateful to Andy Parker and Des Pawson for researching and compiling this list :-

**Albion Wharf.** <sup>5 & 8</sup>

Dorling's **Alma Wharf.** <sup>10</sup>

**Bigod's Quay and Palace**<sup>12</sup>

**Bridge Wharf,** Dock Street, <sup>1</sup>

**Carpenters Quay** <sup>11</sup>

**Crown & Sceptre Wharf** (named after Crown & Sceptre Inn Quay street). <sup>5</sup>

**E. Curtis Wharf** (Etheridge Curtis). <sup>6 & 7</sup>

**Dockside.** <sup>5</sup>

Griffin Inn at **New Bank** (Stoke) goes on to be **Griffin Wharf.** <sup>5</sup>

**Mr James Hare's Quay,** St Clements. <sup>3</sup>

**Ipswich Navigation Company's Wharf,** <sup>5</sup>

**Mr William Mays Wharf,** St Peters. <sup>4 & 5</sup>

**Packard's Quay** <sup>14</sup>

**Ridley's Quay** the address given for the Pilot Inn, likely to relate to H. G. & W. Ridley, Fore Street. <sup>5</sup>

**Salt Office Quay,** near the Green Man Inn. <sup>2</sup>

**Seekamps Wharf.** <sup>8</sup>

**Smarts Wharf.** <sup>5</sup>

**Stoke Bridge Wharf** <sup>13</sup>

George Tovell, of Lock Road, gave rise to **Tovell's Wharf** named after his business.<sup>5</sup>

Union Jack, public house, **New Quay.** <sup>5</sup>

**Wherry Quay** named after the Wherry Inn. <sup>5</sup>

- <sup>1</sup> The Suffolk Chronicle 01/08/1868
- <sup>2</sup> Ipswich Journal 11/07/1778
- <sup>3</sup> Ipswich Journal 09/12/1786
- <sup>4</sup> Suffolk Chronicle 28/05/1842
- <sup>5</sup> Whites Suffolk Directory 1844
- <sup>6</sup> Robert Malster & Robert Jones, A Victorian Vision, page 54
- <sup>7</sup> Richard Smith, The Port of Ipswich, page 120
- <sup>8</sup> Hugh Moffat, Ships and Shipyards of Ipswich, page 46
- <sup>9</sup> Hugh Moffat Ships and Shipyards of Ipswich page 39 to 41
- <sup>10</sup> A Photograph & Advertisements in newspapers from 1858,1861,1862
- <sup>11</sup> Robson's Ipswich Classification Sailmakers 1839
- <sup>12</sup> Bob Malster and others relating to Hugh Bigod's Ipswich residence in the Middle Ages.
- <sup>13</sup> IDC map c.1960 and earlier sources.
- <sup>14</sup> Henry Palmer's quay design cross section dated 1837

It is not possible to identify the exact locations of many of these lost quay names, although some are possible where photographic evidence exists, such as in the case of Dorling's Alma Wharf on New Cut East, in this very early image from around 1860. Soon after the photograph was taken, the business relocated to Harwich, where the 'new' Alma Inn still trades.



These images, two of the earliest photographs in the Trust's Archive taken in the 1840s soon after construction of the Wet Dock, show vessels lying on Bridge Wharf (left), and Albion Quay (right, and possibly then known as New Quay as listed above by the Union Jack public house)



## **Appendix 2.**

### **Installation of Historic Quay and Wharf Names by IBC**

#### **The Submission made jointly to Ipswich Borough Council by Ipswich Maritime Trust (IMT) and the Ipswich Society.**

1. In 2011 IMT published an Occasional Paper proposing the reinstallation of historic quay and wharf names commonly in use during the commercial life of the Wet Dock, recommending that emphasis be placed on those quay and wharf names recognised by the Ipswich Dock Commission during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
2. New research carried out subsequently by IMT reveals further evidence of the past practice of quays being named after the owner or tenant of dockside premises who held rights to use the quays for the purposes of loading and unloading cargoes across them. This led to frequent changes of name until such time as the establishment of the formal postal address system. IMT current research of this is now set out in updated Occasional Paper No.1. available on [www.ipswichmaritimetrust.org.uk](http://www.ipswichmaritimetrust.org.uk).
3. On the basis of evidence set out in para. 1. above, IBC has now proposed the reinstallation of those names still recognised by the Post Office and for which they can therefore reinstall street plates.
4. IMT therefore now welcomes the placing of the following plates using the new blue plate and crest motif for:
  - New Cut East
  - St. Peter's Wharf
  - Albion Quay
  - Wherry Quay
  - Neptune Quay
  - Patteson Road
  - Helena Road
  - Ship Launch Road
5. With regard to most of IBC's proposed locations for these plates, there can be no doubt as to the obvious locations.
6. However, in respect of the extent of St. Peter's Wharf, Albion Quay, Wherry Quay and Neptune Quay, O.S. Map and other records reveal different start and finish locations depending on the period selected. Consistent throughout almost 1000 years however is the location and identification of Common Quay, although it is understood that this was never a location named by the Post Office. This is surprising, and IBC is urged to review the matter.

7. Of the quays listed in para 4. above St. Peter's Wharf appears the earliest name to be established and retained. Its western extent has remained at Stoke Bridge, but its eastern extent has reached as far as Common Quay. The renaming of part of it as Albion Quay came later in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, probably taken from the then newly constructed Albion Mills. There remains doubt as to the historic western limit of Albion Quay, but the location selected by IBC (Foundry Lane, with the plate on the DanceEast building) appears both logical and appropriate given the extent of redevelopment along its now continuous frontage. A case could be made for its termination at the passageway occupied by the IMT Window Museum, but again this is a new feature offering no historic logic for its selection as marking the boundary of St. Peter's Wharf and Albion Quay, whereas an eastern limit of St. Peter's Wharf coincident with the extent of the tidal St. Peter's dock gives a much clearer logic.
8. Turning to Wherry Quay and Neptune Quay, both names became well established and in common use after construction of the Wet Dock, and the creation of Coprolite St, although Wherry Quay appears to have been 'absorbed' into Neptune Quay by the 1960s. Coprolite St. appears to have been regarded as the eastward limit of Neptune Quay ever since its construction. From this point south the quay then became known as Ransomes Quay for the whole length of the former Ransomes Sims and Jeffries factory premises until its extension out into the dock led to it being given the name Orwell Quay, by which it is commercially known today. The absence of this quay from the naming scheme is therefore regretted, as is Eagle Wharf still in commercial use today by Anglo-Norden Ltd.
9. Debate therefore centres of the evidence for coincident eastern limit of Wherry Quay with the western limit of Neptune Quay, while recognising that Wherry Lane itself has been a fixed location since medieval days. Historically there appears evidence that the former Salthouse (now Salthouse Hotel) marks the western limit of Neptune Quay, while Isaac Lord's (now Isaacs) premises marked the eastern limit of Wherry Quay. This boundary is recognised today by postal code.
10. Ideally therefore this should be reflected in separate plates on both premises, rather than the proposed single location on the wall of the Salthouse Hotel car park. If a plate marking the eastern limit of Wherry Quay on Isaac's is not practicable for listed building reasons, there may be merit in not identifying it at all, rather than positioning both plates in one (arguably incorrect) position.
11. The remaining issue therefore is to identify a logical point for the western limit of Wherry Quay. There is historical evidence that before the construction of the Wet Dock there was no quay in front of properties lying west of Wherry Lane, with medieval properties abutting the water's edge. Construction of the new quay, together with the buildings now occupied by the 'Bistro on the Quay' suggest that this area probably then became part of Wherry Quay, having hitherto been part of Common Quay. IMT therefore supports IBC's proposal to define the western end of Wherry Quay as being coincident with the limits of the highway in front of the Custom House, thereby requiring a name plate on the former 'Home' warehouse.
12. In summary the Ipswich Maritime Trust and the Ipswich Society jointly:

- support the current proposed new quay and wharf name plate locations,
- regret the fact that neither Orwell Quay (formerly Ransomes Quay) nor Eagle Wharf are not to be officially recognised, particularly bearing in mind the number of visitors to the town who are directed to Orwell Quay in publicity, and therefore request that means of informally describing the continued commercial roles of these two quays be further explored, either on relevant buildings or possibly as part of future street furniture on the quay,
- request that consideration be given to marking the existence of Common Quay with a suitable name plate on the Custom House, in view of this quay's important function in the historic development of the town from medieval times up to and including the present day.

N.B. Since the republication of this Paper in 2020, further installation work has been undertaken by IBC. IMT looks forward to further collaboration on this issue.

SG (April 2026)