

# London Borough of Lewisham Local History and Archives Centre

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## History of Deptford

The 'deep ford' which gave Deptford its name crossed the River Ravensbourne at what is now Deptford Bridge. It was on the ancient road from London to Dover and Canterbury, and Deptford is mentioned in Chaucer's 'Canterbury Tales'.

One part of Deptford grew up here, beside the ford and the later bridge. The other part was beside the Thames, and was called Deptford Strand.

In 1513 Henry VIII founded a dockyard at Deptford to build ships for the Royal Navy. In the 18th century a Victualling Yard was established alongside, where ships' stores and provisions were assembled.

The Dockyard closed in 1869; Convoy's Wharf now occupies its site. The Victualling Yard remained until 1961, and its site is now occupied by the Pepys Estate. Samuel Pepys often visited the Dockyard when he was Clerk to the Navy Board, and his friend and fellow-diarist John Evelyn lived here, in the manor house called Sayes Court.

The Royal Dockyard, other shipbuilding yards and maritime industries made Deptford a prosperous place, particularly in time of war. Many fine houses were built, of which some survive in Deptford High Street and Albury Street.

Margaret and Rachel McMillan, the pioneers of nursery education, established a nursery school in Deptford a century ago. Margaret later founded a training college for nursery teachers, named after Rachel. They believed that early years' education could counter some of the effects of poverty.

London's first railway, from London to Greenwich, was built through Deptford in 1836. John Penn II (1805-1878), marine engineer, had factories in Deptford and Greenwich making ships' engines. The novelist Joyce Cary (1888-1957) lived in Deptford. Peter the Great, Tsar of Russia, lived in Deptford for a few months in 1698. He was studying shipbuilding at the Dockyard.



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