

# Peckham - The Grand Surrey Canal

The story of Peckham and The Grand Surrey Canal 1806 - 2017

- **Our Hut** Peckham THI Resources

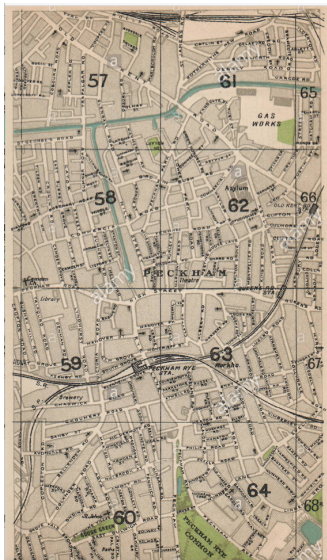




## Route of Grand Surrey Canal 1806

The Grand Surrey Canal was built in 1806. It began at what is now known as The Surrey Quays before winding down through Deptford, Bermondsey and Camberwell. Its' original engineer was a man called Ralph Dodd.





## Route of Grand Surrey Canal 1927

The Grand Surrey Canal was opened as far as Camberwell Road in 1809 but was never built any further except for a 1000 metre extension to Peckham, opened in 1826. A large canal basin at the end of the extension allowed barges to turn round.

The Surrey Commercial Docks specialized in timber, and dockers known as deal porters lugged huge baulks of wood on their shoulders. It was hazardous work and men wore protective leather headgear and aprons to guard against splinters.



As a result of the timber specialization in the Commercial Docks, Whitten Timber began in 1919. It is a family run business and is one of the longest serving timber traders in Peckham. Starting first from barrows and later shops, Whittens moved to a timber yard on the Peckham branch of the canal (now Peckham Square) and then Eagle Wharf. Timber from the Baltic, Scandinavia and around the world is still sold by Whittens today.

The company was originally founded by Mr. Whitten Senior on Sumner Road, and initially sold firewood collected from the vast numbers of empty wooden ammunition boxes that came back from the First World War. The business soon progressed to selling softwoods, which arrived in horse drawn Thames barges along the canal towpaths from the Surrey Docks at Rotherhithe, but by 1935 WH Whittens was registered as a limited company trading from Canal Head warehouse – now the site of Peckham Pulse leisure centre.



By the 1960s, business in the area was affected by the decline of Surrey Docks, and this had a severe impact on the Grand Surrey Canal which was closed and in 1972 filled in. Despite the canal's closure, Whittens continued to thrive commercially, helped by the expanding DIY market. In 1980, business moved again to a nearby retail warehouse in Eagle Wharf, and Whitten's final move in 1982 was next door to their current Eagle Wharf Warehouse.





The canal head at Peckham is now grassed over and a park is now sited on the former Camberwell Basin, but there are a few traces of the Grand Surrey Canal left along its route.

