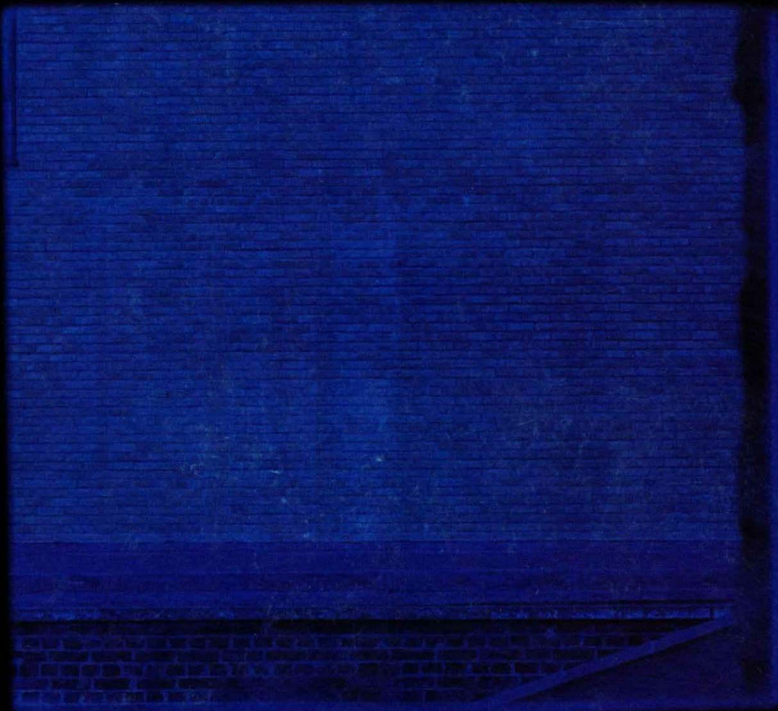


LOFTS OF LONDON



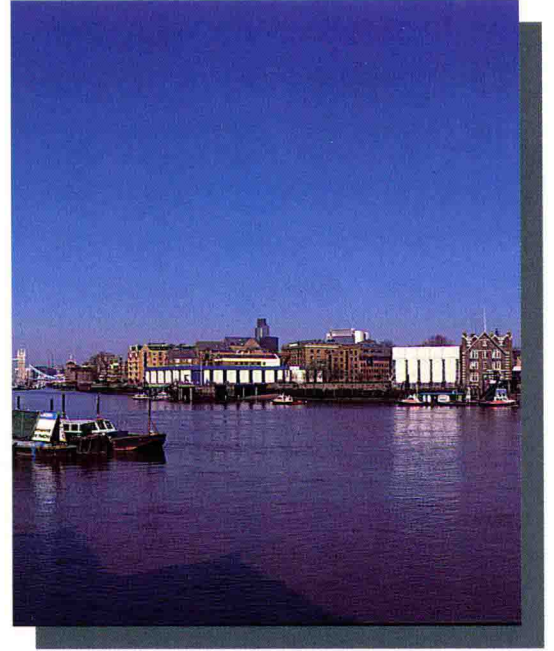
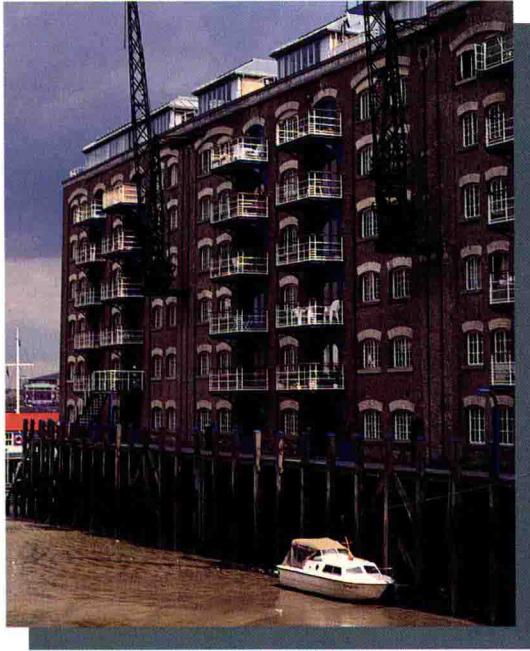
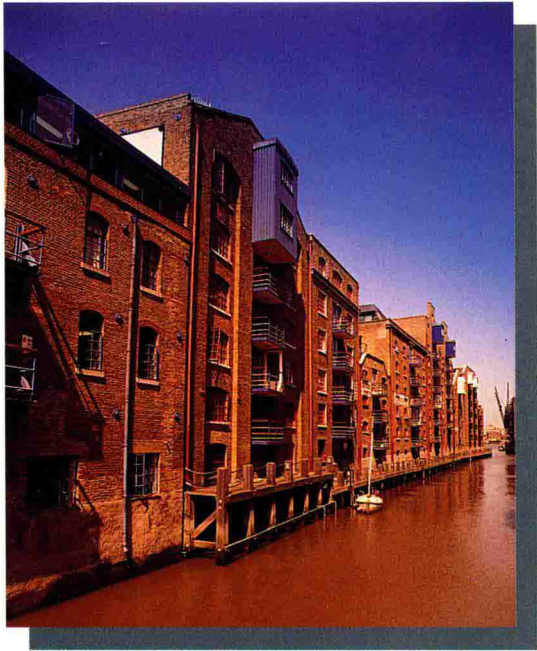
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LOFTS OF LONDON



PHOTOGRAPHY BY MATTHEW WEINREB

TEXT BY DAVID SPITTLES AND PENNY MCGUIRE



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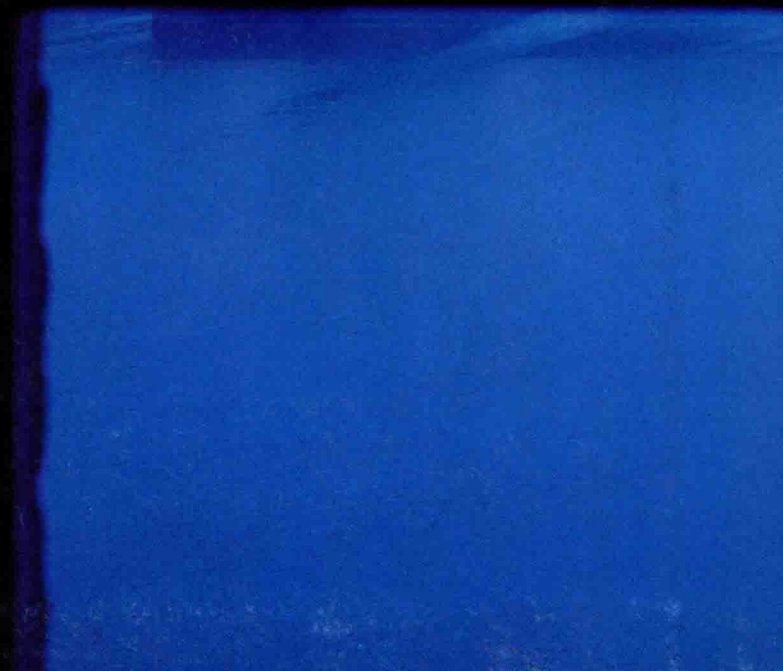
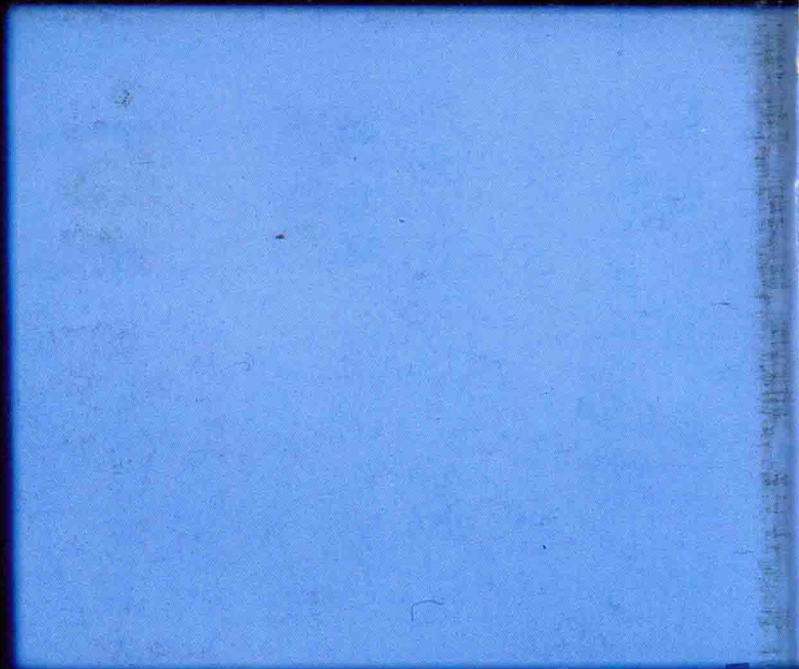
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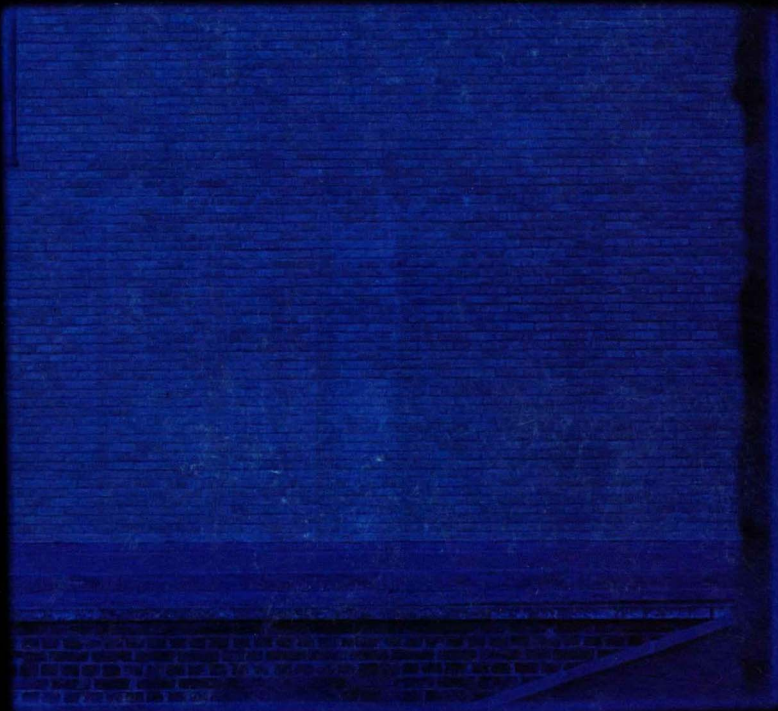
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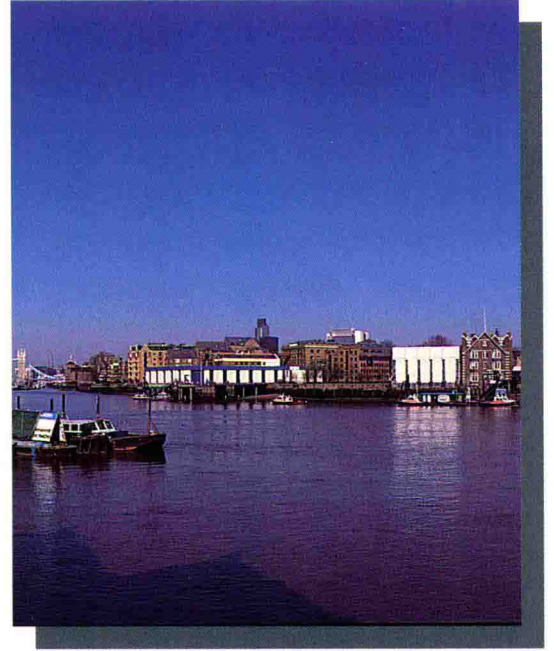
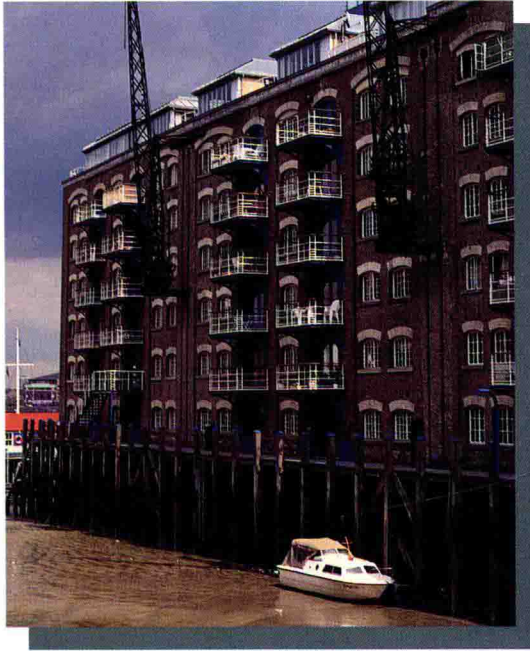
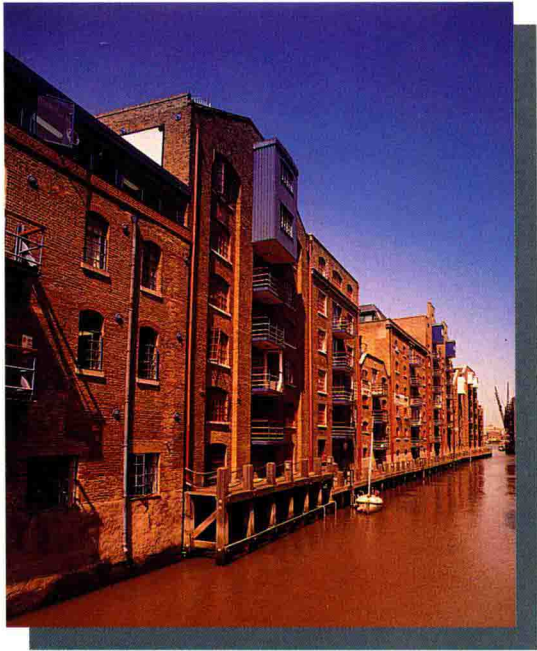
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PREFACE

THE blurred boundaries between personal space, social space and work space are a key feature of London in the 'New Era'. Loft culture has had a massive impact on the way we live and helped create a design aesthetic that is here to stay.

Just look at the fashionable cafes and clubs, boutiques and bars that have emerged in recent years: the architectural influence of lofts is unmistakable – the materials, the fittings, the imaginative use of space, the design flair.

This creative spirit helps make London the world's style capital and cements its reputation as a dynamic city always ready to embrace new opportunities.

Of course, we should not forget that lofts are as much about the past as about the present and future. Every riverside warehouse and inner-city factory has a unique story to tell.

This magnificent architectural heritage is a constant reminder of the industrial past – the rise and fall of Empire, the toil and ingenuity of our workers.

For a time, this legacy seemed in danger. By the early Eighties many of these wonderful buildings have become neglected. It was a period of dramatic, economic and social change but inner-city regeneration was not part of the central government agenda.

The loft pioneers of that time deserve much praise for their vision and tenacity. They helped trigger the renewal of buildings and whole areas. It is no coincidence that regeneration is now a political and planning priority.

Loft neighbourhoods are now among the most vibrant and tolerant communities in London. As a Londoner, I am proud to have witnessed that transformation. The following pages are a visual treat as well as an important record of a key phase in the capital's history.



KEN LIVINGSTONE
Mayor of London

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BUTLERS WH

Tectum Publishers are especially grateful to Interalu n.v., whose contribution helped make it possible to publish this book.

INTRODUCTION

Lofts of London is the third in a series of books looking at the transformation of industrial spaces. It shows 47 London lofts and the process describes the changing face of the city. Part of the fascination for new loft dwellers lies in a sense of adventure, the colonisation of areas abandoned to dereliction as industry for various reasons has moved elsewhere.

Many of the buildings left behind are magnificent – if often intractable – structures, belonging to the great age of the industrial revolution. Undoubtedly, the romance attached to these repositories of history has contributed to the present enormous popularity of lofts.

In London, as in other cities with an important maritime past, the early colonisation of industrial buildings was concentrated in the docklands. In particular, along the eastern reaches of the Thames, great warehouses left stranded by the decline of maritime trading, provided cheap (if not free) space for growing numbers of alternative communities – artists, craftsmen, actors and performers who, fired by the melancholy romance of the empty riverside buildings, began occupying them in the 1970s.

Their often militant occupation saved the buildings from the demolition threat by seventies planners, and brought them to the attention of a few enterprising young developers.

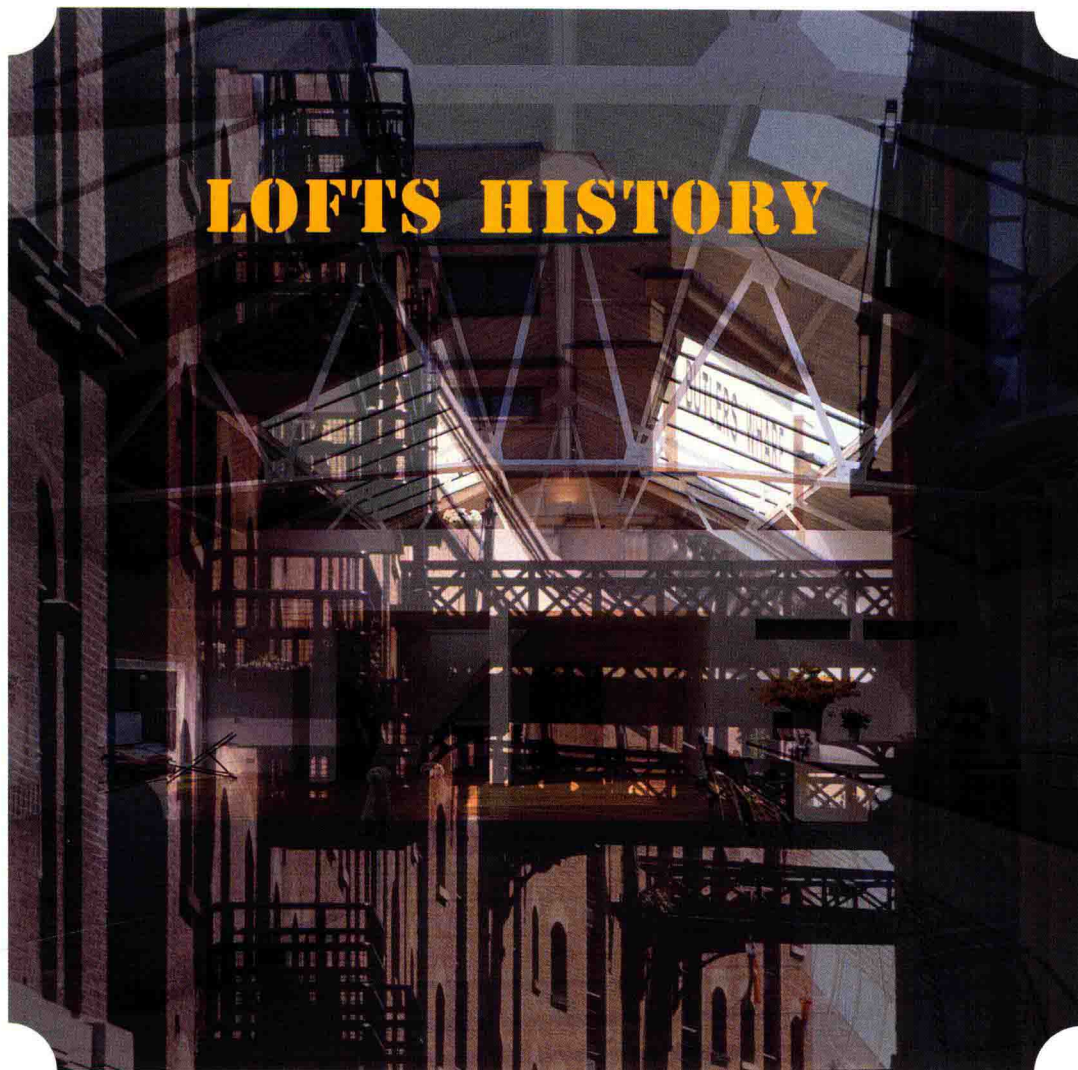
The proximity of the old warehouses to the City of London, growing rapidly as an international financial capital, suggested an altogether different potential and inspired by the New York example of loft dwelling, these entrepreneurs began to convert them.

They showed Londoners how to transform amorphous spaces into habitable, even magnificent dwellings, as, in a crowded city, space is the greatest luxury.

Industrial buildings being converted now in London are immensely varied – ranging from 19th century factories and warehouses to redundant Victorian schools, thirties' print works, and even early fire stations. The City is the focus of Britain's prosperity and there has emerged a new breed of urban dwellers – mostly youthful, professional and affluent – who have positively embraced the prospect of living in lofts. Enthusiastically eclectic, their designs leave the essential character and texture of the building intact, while they layer space vertically and horizontally by subtle means – mezzanine galleries, translucent screens, changes of materials, lighting – so that volumetric grandeur is not lost. Curiously, the spare language of Modernism which took so long to take root in Britain and which has been seen popularly as a foreign invention, has come into its own as people have realised how well it adapts itself to spare industrial architecture.

Furnished with Matthew Weinreb's eloquent photographs, this book explores a rich field. Loft spaces, however they are contained by the various buildings, permit individual expression. In taking the reader on a tour through nearly fifty London lofts, it gives a glimpse of the invention, vigour and pride employed in converting amorphous space into spectacular dwellings.





HUGUENOT migrants who settled in 17th-century Spitalfields can be called London's first loft dwellers. Weaving silk from cramped attic workrooms above their domestic space, and maintaining strong cultural traditions in the local community, they are the forerunners of the new generation of live-workers now colonising this pocket of London.

Today the typical East End loft dweller is more likely to be a dotcom entrepreneur or graphic designer. And the space they inhabit is palatial by comparison. But the historical reference shows the continuing vitality and reinvention of inner London. From its Georgian heyday to its imperial twilight, from Thatcherite upheaval to New Labour resurgence, London has always been about dynamic change.

We can chart that story through its commercial buildings – their creation, conversion

and reuse. Loft-living is a sub-plot to the rise and fall of the greatest empire of modern times. Depending on your view, London is a city of unexpected contrasts or a hotch-potch of architectural styles. But in terms of the sheer variety of its property heritage, there is no equal.

Empire has left an indelible mark on the capital, not least the legacy of warehouses and factories which spawned the loft movement that is now so firmly rooted. Overseas trade built England's economic muscle, and the heart of the exchange network was the Port.

Presiding over the empire upon which the sun never set, London lived by its river. In 1700, London's quays were handling a staggering 80 per cent of the country's imports.

Everything came to London and the car-



Above left. 'Washing day' at the North Quay Warehouses, West India Docks, around 1930, using electric platform trucks.

Below left. Busy scene at the North Quay Warehouses, West India Dock, around 1900, with hundreds of barrels of molasses laid out on the quayside.

Above right. 'Gun Wharves in Wapping, shortly before closure. One of the largest riverside wharves, it had 300,000 cubic feet of storage space and specialised in handling tea, coffee, cocoa, shellac, gums, rubber and colonial goods.

Below right. Sacs of raw West Indian sugar being loaded into the North Quay Warehouses, West India Docks, around 1930, using electric platform trucks.

go was unloaded at a mass of wharves lining both banks of the Thames between London Bridge and Limehouse.

Trade trebled between 1720 and 1800. In the Upper Pool, up to 1,800 vessels packed into mooring space for 500.

Thames-side trade fuelled industries inland. Distillers went to Clerkenwell to take advantage of the high quality well-water. Tanneries opened in Bermondsey, breweries in East Smithfield. There were porcelain factories in Bow, cabinet making in Shoreditch.

The workshop of the world triggered an

unprecedented building boom and led to the complex sprawl London is today.

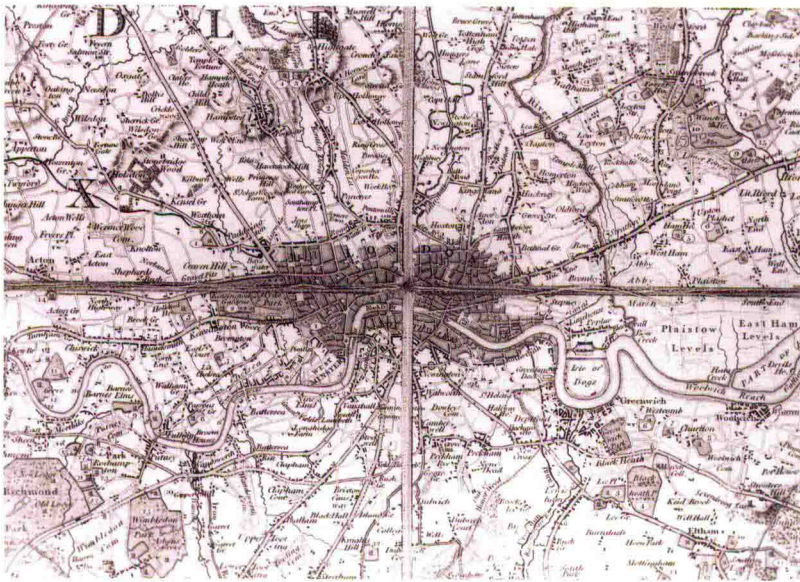
Trade was further boosted in the early 19th-century by massive capital investment in docks.

The West India Company built a vast dock complex with warehouses (some built by Napoleonic prisoners of war) on the Isle of Dogs: half a mile long, 24 acres in total and large enough to berth over 600 big ships.

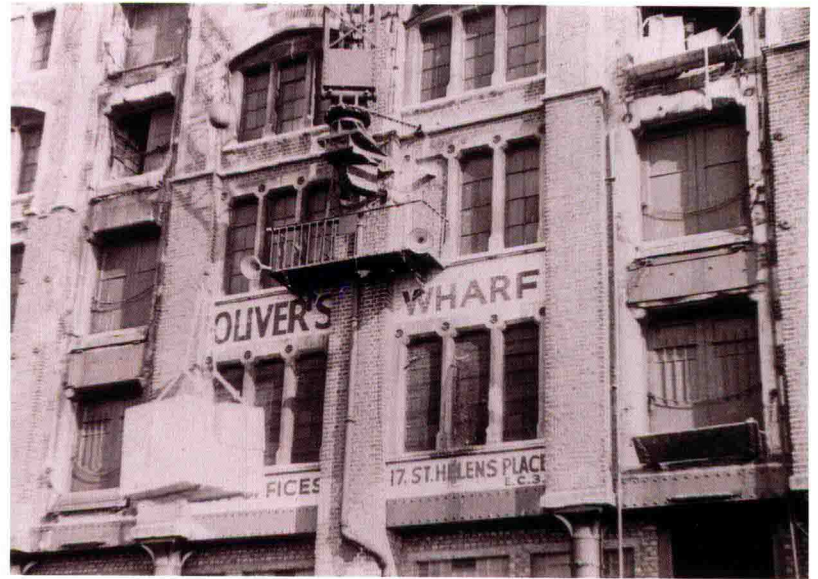
Other docks followed. At Wapping, at Blackwall (the East India Dock buildings

were designed by John Rennie), at Rotherhithe (Surrey Docks). Substitution of steam for sail required further construction. Royal Victoria Dock opened in 1855, Millwall Dock in 1868, and in 1886, Tilbury, some 26 miles downstream.

It was a marvel of engineering and the warehouses were singled out by Baedeker, of travel guide fame, as one of the sights of the city: 'Nothing will convey to the visitor a better idea of the vast activity and stupendous wealth of London than a visit to the warehouses, filled to overflowing with



Map of London and its environs by Patterson around 1804.



The river frontage of Oliver's Wharf, Wapping, in 1962. Built in the Gothic style in 1870, this wharf handled general cargo, although it had extensive facilities for handling tea. Oliver's Wharf was one of the first of the dockland warehouses to be converted into luxury apartments.

interminable stores of every kind of foreign and colonial products.'

Dockside warehouses, such as Butler's Wharf, had elaborate gantry networks for transferring merchandise to buildings beyond. This part of Southwark was dominated by a tangle of works and warehouses and infilled with slums. One location, Jacob's Island, in the now fashionable Shad Thames, was made notorious by Dickens in *Oliver Twist*.

Riverside areas teemed with distilling, boiling, refining and chemical industries and factories specialising in trades such as soap, confectionery, rubber, dye, engineering, rope-making and printing.

Canals also made their contribution to London's economy, ringing more warehouses, coal wharves, builders' yards and industry. In 1801, the Grand Junction Canal was extended from Uxbridge to Paddington. From 1820, the Regent's Canal joined it, going east by way of Camden, Islington and Hackney to join the Thames at Limehouse.

Timber transported by canal to Battle Bridge Wharf led to furniture and piano manufacturing around St Pancras. Huge railway yards completed the area's industrial make up, still highly visible today.

In 1800, London's population had been around one million. By 1881 it had soared to 4.5 million and by 1911 to over seven million.

At the outbreak of the Second World War, the population was nearly nine million.

But this disguised demographic subtleties. Railway expansion, while worsening the housing problem in inner London, created new life and new areas, especially for the middle classes in leafy suburbs.

In fact, suburbia marked the end of the old London and the birth of the new. The allure of urban living faded and only now is city-centre living re-emerging as a desirable lifestyle. Arterial road building resulted in factories on the outskirts, particularly in west and north west London, accelerating the decline of the inner-city industrial base. Then the Blitz took its toll. Some 3.5 million homes were destroyed or damaged, about nine million sq ft of office space lost and a third of the City devastated. The impact was worse than the Great Fire in 1666.

The immediate post-war period could be called old London's Indian summer. The docks still thrived, but the underlying currents, as with the river itself, were treacherous.

Britain no longer ruled the waves, and with imperial decline, London's industries began to contract. In the decade after 1966 London lost half a million factory jobs. Manufacturing employment fell by almost a third between 1971 and 1976. By the mid Seventies, 70 per cent of London's jobs were in services.

Most drastic was the death of the docks. World trade patterns had changed profoundly. From a peak of 30,000 in the 1950s, dock employment dropped to 2,000 by 1981. The Port of London invested dramatically in containerisation at Tilbury and closed the old inner docks. Not just factories but commerce too began moving out of central London to avoid spiralling rents, inflated wages and transport snarl-ups.

This really marks the start of the modern loft movement in London. As in other capitals – New York, Berlin, Amsterdam – it were artists, architects and academics who first started to colonise the empty buildings.

Sometimes it was a conservationist protest movement. In the Seventies, many prized warehouses were threatened with demolition and squatters took on rapacious office developers. The loft pioneers were the first to spot the potential of the buildings themselves and the opportunity for an alternative way of living. Then, lofts offered maximum space at minimum cost. Bridget Riley founded Space Studios at St Katherine's Dock as early as 1968 and before long an artists' colony formed in Wapping. Oliver's Wharf, a Victorian gem, was the first of the old warehouses to be converted into residential. It presaged the transformation that was to take place during the next two decades in the Docklands.

The large open-plan interiors with