

Heritage News

August 2026

Hello Everyone,

I hope that you are all recovering from the hot spell. I find it difficult to cope with excessive heat, but now the weather has cooled down I have been able to concentrate on Heritage News and our programme for the next six months. This edition of Heritage News is rather longer than usual so I apologise to those of you that try and read Heritage News on your phones.

Programme from September 2026 to March 2027

We have a wide range of subjects so I hope there will be something for everyone. All meetings start at 10:15 with refreshments and talks then start at 10:30 .The venue is the Bowls Room at Horn Park [Horn Park - South East London](#) There is ample parking and a range of buses that stop outside use the Weigall Road stops. Heritage meetings are open to all U3A SEL members, there is no need to book.

25th September: Educating Deptford - the Ragged School and its place in the community

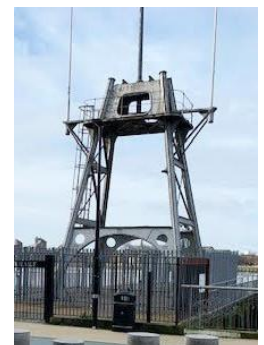
We start this season with a talk by Dr John Price. The Deptford Ragged School, founded in 1844, was situated at the heart of working-class Victorian Deptford. Very few families in the district were unconnected to the institution, yet very little is widely known about those families, or the children who attended, or the communities they lived within. In this talk, John who is the Consultant Historian for the Educating Deptford project, will outline the history of the school, discuss some of the work it undertook, and reveal what impact it had on the neighbourhoods around it.



30th October: Greenwich and Charlton and the global communications system

Our speaker today is Alan Burkitt-Gray, who was for some 50 years involved as an editor and journalist reporting on the communications industry. Alan lives locally and is acknowledged to be the expert on the role that Greenwich industries played in the development of the modern world of communications. He will tell the story of the company in Greenwich that designed and made the first subsea cables that connected continents, first for telegrams and then for telephone calls.

Alan was responsible for getting the cable loading gear at Enderby Wharf listed as a Scheduled Monument (List Entry 1490823) by Historic England.



Cable loading gear

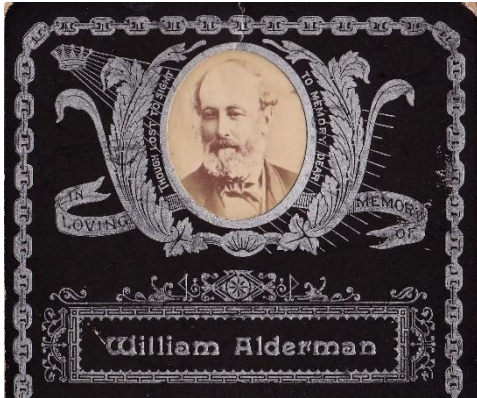
November 27th : Trinity House by David Whitehead

The safety of shipping and the well-being of seafarers have been the prime concerns of Trinity House since being incorporated by Royal Charter on 20th May 1514. Its original name was *The Master Wardens and Assistants of the Guild Fraternity or Brotherhood of the Most Glorious and Undivided Trinity and of Saint Clement in the Parish of Deptford Strond in the County of Kent*, so it is perhaps just as well that it is now referred to simply as “Trinity House”.

Our speaker David Whitehead OBE is a former Director of the British Ports Association (1993 to 2016) David was heavily involved in the development of the Port Marine Safety Code, which was the navigational safety policy for the entire maritime sector. He is an Ambassador for Trinity House.

December no meeting

January 29th : Lynne Dixon concludes the saga of her family history



Lynne continues the fascinating story of her family featuring amongst other things transportation and bigamy (or even trigamy, depending on those counting....)

William Alderman memorial card from Australia.

February 26th : St Margarets Churchyard – by Paul Wright



Our popular speaker Paul Wright returns to tell us about some very interesting figures who are buried in the 12th century churchyard of St Margarets Blackheath, Lee Terrace

Please note March 2027 meeting date moved because the last Friday is Good Friday

Friday March 19th: A WHOLE LIFE AT SEA John Freestone

We return to a maritime subject for this talk by one of our U3A members John Freestone, who tells us of his interesting life at sea.

He writes: *"I had no other plans than going to sea as I was influenced by my grandfather having served on HMS New Zealand at the Battle of Jutland and my Uncle serving in the Royal Navy throughout the Second World War. I joined the London Nautical School at 10, left at 15 and then spent the rest of my life at sea until becoming a Master Mariner and finally a Port of London River and Bridge Pilot and retiring in 2013 age 70."*

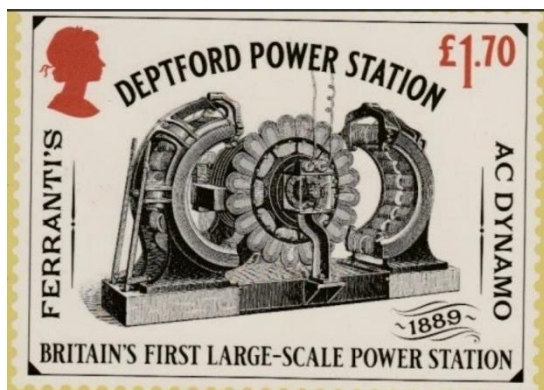


Other News

Lewisham Heritage Archive - Open Day. Saturday 12th September 10:30 till 16:00

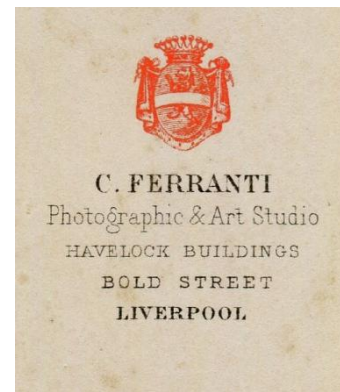
The Lewisham Archive Collection has had a confusing time of late and is now situated in Catford Library. On this Open Day here will be a display of material from the Archive and it will be possible to tour the reading room. The Exhibition is accessible, but the Reading Room tours each hour are on the third floor and there is no lift. Catford Library 23-4 Winslade Way SE6 4JU, Holbeach Road Car Park or numerous buses.

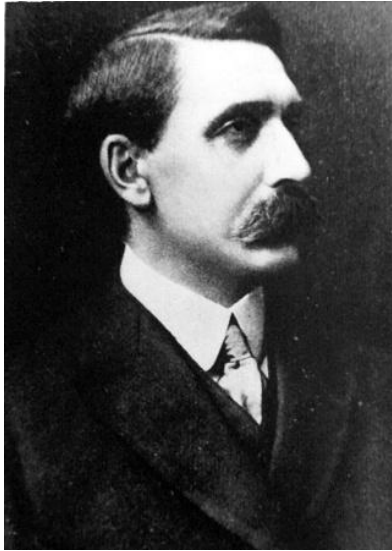
Deptford Power Station designed and built by Sebastian Ziani de Ferranti



No series of articles about Deptford would be complete without mentioning Sebastian Ziani de Ferranti. He was a pioneer in the field of generation and supply of electricity and designed and built Deptford Power Station.

Sebastian Ziani de Ferranti was born in Liverpool and those of you that know my interests will understand that I was delighted to see that his father was a well-known professional photographer with a studio in Bold Street, Liverpool.





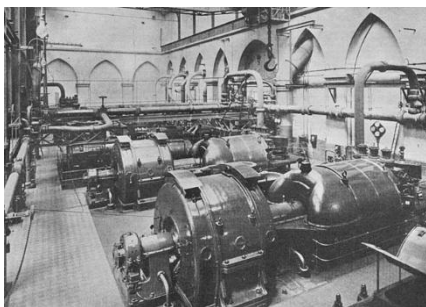
Sebastian had an interest in electricity from a young age, and he is credited with advising his father on the introduction of electricity into the photographic studio when he was just 13. Soon afterward when he was 16 he worked with Lord Kelvin (of ° Kelvin colour temperature fame) and patented a dynamo.

He moved to South East London when he was just 17 and worked for various local companies including Siemens at Charlton, where he worked as an assistant to the Chief Research Engineer. He also assisted Sir William Siemens with electric furnace and dynamo experiments.

At the age of just 22 he was the Chief Engineer of the London Electrical Supply Corporation, LESCO. Ferranti recognized that Alternating Current (AC) was the future. Instead of building numerous small, dirty coal plants inside London, Ferranti proposed a singular, massive "central" power station located miles away in Deptford, along the River Thames.



Deptford Power Station on the side of Deptford Creek



This site at the mouth of Deptford Creek was on cheap land and allowed for easy coal delivery via river jetties and access to water. His power station needed copious quantities of water from the Thames. By the mid 20's they had installed 5 pumps each with a capacity of 1.5 million gallons of water per hour sucking water out of the Thames through 10ft diameter pipes.

He designed and built Deptford Power station on this western edge of Deptford Creek in 1890 a world leader at the time. His system generated power at 10,000 volts. The high voltage electricity would then be transmitted over long distances and stepped down locally in substations to 240 volts for onwards distribution to consumers. Eventually there were two power stations on the site Deptford East and Deptford West. The power Station was visited by Thomas Edison who until that time had been a staunch supporter of DC current.

The power was distributed by running cables alongside the railways and underground into central London thus avoiding the cost of digging up roads.

Ferranti was frustrated by his employer, LESCO, who scaled down his original vision and he left the company in 1891. However he was vindicated as the power stations were still running on his equipment until 1957, they eventually closed in 1983.

Needless to say, once the power stations were demolished there were no tangible signs of Ferranti and his work, no plaque, nothing on the site that recognises the place in Industrial History of the Power Station and Sebastian Ferranti. Incidentally nor of the East India



Demolition in 1984

Company or General Steam Navigation who originally occupied the site. To the south of the power station site there is a pocket park called Ferranti Park as a token tribute to this world pioneer but there is no information panel telling the story of the world's premier power station.



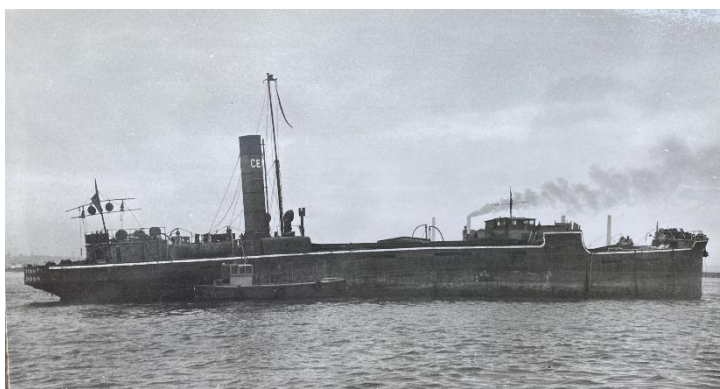
The power station site as it is now showing Greenfell Mansions.

Incidentally the road on the estate is Glaisher Street named after James Glaisher, who was a one-time employee of the Royal Observatory and a famous balloonist who founded the Aeronautical Society. It would have been good to see it named Ferranti Street but that did not seem to cross the minds of Lewisham Council.



P.S. Maritime History an interesting link to our story:

From time to time interesting links come across my laptop one of these is the Lloyds Register Heritage collection. It has more than a million entries about specific vessels. So if you have a family member who was a mariner and want to know about their ships this is the site to go to see: [Collections | Heritage](#)



I used the site to look up the SS.Ferranti which was owned by the London Power Company. It was one of their ships that delivered coal to the Deptford Power station



SS Ferranti (1,315GRT) (see above) was launched in October 1932 at Burntisland, Fife. She was named after our Sebastian de Ferranti (1864–1930), who designed Deptford Power Station.

The Lloyds Register site had these reports of a collision in the Thames off Tilbury and her eventual sinking on 25th July 1955

London, June 8 — British steamer Ferranti sank in the River Thames near the Essex shore a little above Tilbury early to-day after being in collision with steamer AMERICAN JURIST. The crew of the Ferranti is remaining on board the vessel, which was holed forward. She is lying in shallow water with her stem awash. Tugs are trying to pull her further in-shore.—Exchange Telegraph Company.

WRECK SECTION **REPORT OF TOTAL LOSS, CASUALTY, &c.** Wreck Report No. 14346

No. 60002 in R.B. Wreck Book, p. 58/55 Date of writing this report 25th July, 19 55.

Ship's Name S.S. "FERRANTI" of London Tons Gross 1317 Net 729

Built at Burntisland When 1932 11 Casualty notice sent to Owner --- Owner's reply ---

Owners Central Electricity Authority

Managers Stephenson Clarke Ltd.

Address 4, Fenchurch Avenue, London, E.C.3.

RETAIN

SOURCE OF INFORMATION

FERRANTI: On 25th July 1955, Steamer AMERICAN JURIST, on bound, was in collision with the Ferranti, inward bound, at about 1 mile from Tilbury.

I would be interested in hearing as to whether you were able to use this site for your own maritime research.

Postscript

I hope you enjoyed this edition – feedback is welcome, as are suggestions for future meetings.

Roger