

LOCAL HISTORY MONTH



FRIDAY 1 MAY 1886 – ROYAL ARSENAL & FOOTBALL



- On the 1st of May 1886, workers at the Royal Arsenal in Woolwich formed a football team known as Dial Square. The men were engineers and munitions workers employed at Britain's largest weapons factory. The club later became Woolwich Arsenal before moving north of the river and becoming Arsenal FC. This shows how industrial communities in Woolwich shaped global sporting culture.
- Did you know? Arsenal FC is the only major English club founded inside a military weapons factory.



MONDAY 4 MAY 1308 – WOOLWICH FERRY



- On the 4th of May 1308, medieval records first mention the Woolwich Ferry operating across the River Thames. The ferry linked Woolwich with north London long before bridges existed, making the town a key transport and trading point. Its continued use shows Woolwich's long-term importance to London's economy.
- Did you know? The Woolwich Ferry has operated for over 700 years.



TUESDAY 5 MAY 1178 — LESNES ABBEY FOUNDED



- On the 5th of May 1178, Lesnes Abbey was founded by Richard de Luci near modern Abbey Wood and Thamesmead. The monks drained marshland, managed flood defences, and farmed the land. Their work shaped the local landscape and allowed later settlement to develop.
- Did you know? Lesnes Abbey controlled large areas of land across Erith and Plumstead.



WEDNESDAY 6 MAY 1512 – WOOLWICH DOCKYARD

- On the 6th of May 1512, Henry VIII established a royal dockyard at Woolwich. Warships were built and repaired here, linking Woolwich directly to the growth of England's navy. This helped England challenge European rivals such as Spain.
- The ship, The Great Harry, named after Henry III was commissioned to be built in Woolwich.
- Did you know? Henry VIII personally visited Woolwich Dockyard.



THURSDAY 7 MAY 1849 – ABBEY WOOD STATION



- On the 7th of May 1849, Abbey Wood railway station opened, transforming the area from rural marshland into a growing commuter settlement. Rail links allowed Arsenal workers to live further from their workplace and changed local population patterns.
- Did you know? Railways caused Abbey Wood's population to rapidly increase.



FRIDAY 8 MAY 1945 — VE DAY



- On the 8th of May 1945, people in Woolwich, Plumstead and Erith celebrated Victory in Europe Day. Many residents had worked at the Royal Arsenal or served in the armed forces. Celebrations reflected relief, pride and remembrance after six years of war.
- Did you know? Rationing continued in Woolwich even after VE Day.



MONDAY 11 MAY 1865 – CROSSNESS PUMPING STATION



- On the 11th of May 1865, Crossness Pumping Station in Belvedere became fully operational. Designed by Sir Joseph Bazalgette, it removed sewage from London and helped prevent cholera outbreaks, protecting communities across east and south-east London.
- Did you know? The building is often called the 'Cathedral of Sewage'.



TUESDAY 12 MAY 1908 – ELECTRIC TRAMS



- On the 12th of May 1908, electric trams reached Abbey Wood, linking it with Woolwich. Cheap public transport allowed working-class families to travel easily for work and leisure, reshaping daily life in the borough.
- Did you know? Trams were cheaper than trains for most workers.



WEDNESDAY 13 MAY 1381 — PEASANTS' REVOLT



- On the 13th of May 1381, men from Erith and Plumstead joined the Peasants' Revolt. Rebels attacked Lesnes Abbey, protesting against unfair taxes and feudal control. This shows that resistance to authority has deep roots in the local area.
- Did you know? Lesnes Abbey was targeted because it symbolised power and wealth.



THURSDAY 14 MAY 1805 – ROYAL ARSENAL NAMED



- On the 14th of May 1805, the Woolwich Warren was officially renamed the Royal Arsenal after a visit by King George III. It became the centre of British weapons production, supplying the army and navy during major wars.
- Did you know? The Arsenal once employed over 80,000 workers.



FRIDAY 15 MAY 1536 - ANNE BOLEYN ON TRIAL IN THE TOWER OF LONDON



- On the 15th of May 1536, Anne Boleyn was put on trial in the Tower of London, accused of adultery and treason under Henry VIII. The verdict was predetermined, and she was executed four days later.
- Did you know? You can still see the spot where Anne Boleyn was executed at the Tower of London today.



MONDAY 18TH MAY 1886 – EVACUATION PREPARATIONS



- On the 18th of May 1940, Britain was facing a serious crisis as German forces advanced rapidly through France and Belgium. With invasion seeming increasingly possible, the British government and London authorities began preparing for mass civilian evacuation and air defence. In London, public buildings and underground stations were identified for use as shelters, air-raid precautions were reinforced, and local councils reviewed plans to move children and vulnerable people out of the capital if necessary. Kent and south-east England were especially important, both as potential front-line areas and as regions already shaped by earlier wartime evacuation. These preparations show how civilian life in London was reorganised as Britain braced itself for total war.
- **Did you know?** Some London children were evacuated more than once during the war as the threat of bombing and invasion changed.



TUESDAY 19 MAY 1618 – SHOOTERS HILL DEFENCE



- On the 19th of May 1618, Shooters Hill was identified as a strategic defence and transport route protecting London from the south-east. Its height made it ideal for signaling and troop movement.
- Did you know? Shooters Hill is one of the highest points in London.



WEDNESDAY 20 MAY 1675 — ROYAL OBSERVATORY CONSTRUCTION BEGINS IN GREENWICH PARK



- On the 20th of May 1675, work began on the Royal Observatory at Greenwich after King Charles II ordered it to be built in Greenwich Park. The Observatory was designed to solve one of the most dangerous problems of the age: how to calculate longitude at sea. Without this knowledge, ships often became lost, leading to wrecks, lost cargo, and thousands of deaths. Charles II appointed John Flamsteed as the first Astronomer Royal, tasking him with creating accurate star charts to improve navigation. This meant that Greenwich became a centre for science, navigation, and naval power, linking the local area directly to Britain's growing global influence.
- Did you know? The Royal Observatory was Britain's first purpose-built scientific institution created specifically to help protect sailors' lives and strengthen the Royal Navy.

THURSDAY 21 MAY 1902 – WOOLWICH TOWN HALL



- On the 21st of May 1902, the newly completed Woolwich Town Hall was formally prepared for its opening later that year, symbolising Woolwich's growing importance as a centre of local government. Built during a period of rapid population growth driven by the Royal Arsenal and other industries along the Thames, the building represented civic pride and political power shifting towards local communities. Woolwich Town Hall became the place where decisions about housing, health, education and public services were debated, reflecting how industrial towns demanded greater political representation at the start of the twentieth century.
- **Did you know?** Woolwich Town Hall was deliberately designed to rival civic buildings in central London, showing how powerful the borough had become.



FRIDAY 22 MAY 1969 – THAMESMEAD OPENS



- On the 22nd of May 1969, the first residents moved into Thamesmead. Built on former Arsenal and marshland, it was designed as a modern ‘town of the future’ to solve London’s housing crisis.
- Did you know? Thamesmead featured in *A Clockwork Orange*.



MONDAY 25 MAY 1914 – WWI INDUSTRY



Royal Arsenal, Woolwich. Small Arms Factory 3. women workers finishing s

- On the 25th of May 1914, thousands of men in Woolwich were employed in arms production as war approached. The Royal Arsenal became central to Britain's war effort during the First World War.
- Did you know? Many workers laboured 12-hour shifts.



TUESDAY 26 MAY 1213 – KING JOHN SUBMITS ENGLAND TO THE POPE



- On the 26th of May 1213, King John of England formally submitted himself and the kingdom to the authority of Pope Innocent III. John had been excommunicated after disagreeing with the Pope over the appointment of the Archbishop of Canterbury, which weakened his position at home and abroad. Fearing rebellion from his barons and the threat of invasion from France, John surrendered England as a papal possession in order to regain the Church's support. Although this decision temporarily strengthened his rule, it angered many nobles and further damaged his reputation, contributing directly to the crisis that would lead to the signing of Magna Carta in 1215.
- **Did you know?** By submitting to the Pope, King John agreed that England would pay an annual tribute to Rome — effectively making the country a papal state.



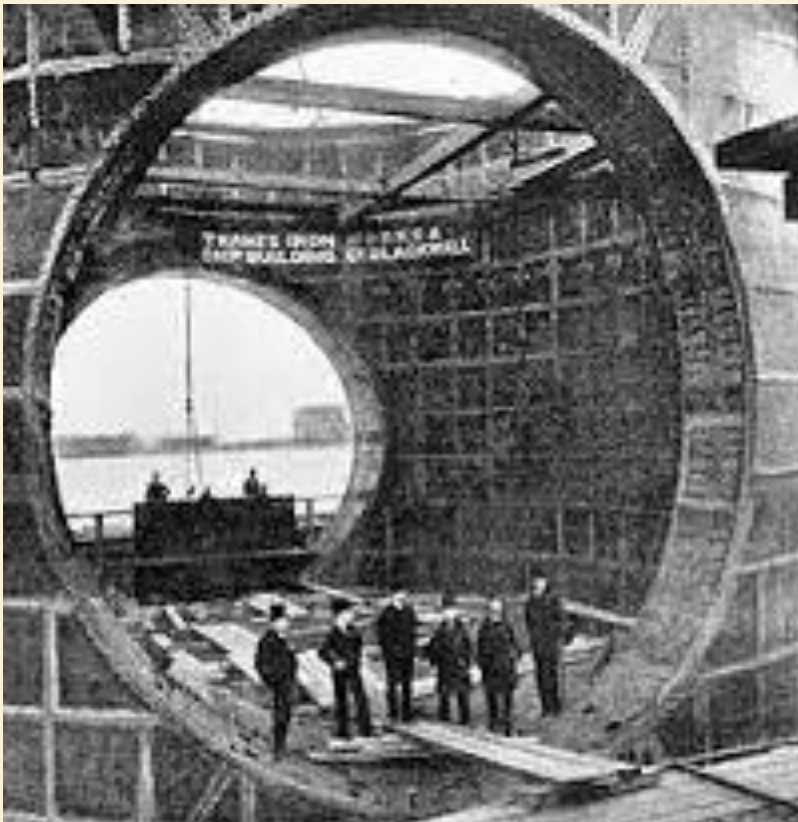
WEDNESDAY 27 MAY 1940 – DUNKIRK SUPPORT



- On the 27th of May 1940, Britain launched Operation Dynamo, the evacuation of Allied troops from Dunkirk. Although the evacuation took place across the English Channel, the River Thames played a vital supporting role. Docks, factories and workshops along the Thames in South London and Kent worked around the clock repairing ships, manufacturing equipment and organising supplies. River transport was essential for moving materials quickly, showing how the Thames remained a lifeline in times of national emergency.
- Did you know? Many vessels repaired along the Thames returned to service within days, allowing them to take part in the Dunkirk evacuation.



THURSDAY 28 MAY 1897 – BLACKWALL TUNNEL OPENS



- On the 28th of May 1897, the Blackwall Tunnel was opened to traffic beneath the River Thames. It was the largest underwater road tunnel in the world at the time and transformed movement between north and south London. The tunnel showed how engineers were finding new ways to overcome the challenge of the Thames, allowing workers and goods to travel more easily and supporting London's rapid expansion.
- **Did you know?** Early buses had to be pushed through the Blackwall Tunnel by special tunnel engines due to steep entrances.



FRIDAY 29 MAY 1553 – LADY JANE GREY BECOMES QUEEN

- On the 29th of May 1553, preparations were underway in London for the succession crisis following the failing health of Edward VI. Political factions attempted to control the future of the monarchy, leading to Lady Jane Grey briefly being proclaimed queen later in June. These events highlight how fragile royal power could be and how quickly political loyalties in London shifted.
- **Did you know?** Lady Jane Grey ruled for just nine days, earning her the nickname “the Nine-Day Queen”.



WHERE WOULD YOU RECOMMEND IN THE LOCAL AREA WHICH IS PACKED FULL OF HISTORY?

We are asking for your recommendations in the local area to see and explore. This can be a festival, an event or a historical place. For example, Ms. Tuckwell LOVES the History of Lesness Abbey in Abbeywood

