

London Thameside [Rotherhithe] Youth Hostel 1991 to present

20 Salter Road, London SE16 5PR

Historic County: Surrey

GR: TQ 356802

A new-build youth hostel was part of the far-reaching plan to revitalise London's East Docks south of the Thames in the late twentieth-century. Rotherhithe youth hostel was built on a wedge-shaped piece of land in the former Stave Dock area, reclaimed from the huge Surrey Docks complex. It opened for business on 25th November 1991. An official opening ceremony by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth followed much later, on 24th March 1993. The property is held freehold. The first manager was Frank Velandar.



An early transparency image of what was originally called London Rotherhithe youth hostel (author's collection)

A flier from the official opening advertised features that, though taken for granted in many of today's city youth hostels, were new or unusual at the time. These included: reception open from 07.00 to 23.30, 24-hour access and night security, CCTV security, a common room and lounge with a soft drinks bar, a full meals service, self-catering kitchen and vending service, bureau de change, theatre and attraction bookings, launderette and central heating.

The *Los Angeles Times* explained that it was YHA's first hostel with a bar available to guests who order food. Other modern hostel provision was exemplified by the use of magnetic keys to allow 24-hour access, security lockers, lifts, and en suite facilities in each bedroom.

The design features a striking central drum tower on five floors, from which two wings of London brown brick emerge. Fully-glazed end stair wells are a further feature in keeping with modern London Docklands styling.

There are 320 beds, mostly arranged in more than 60 four-or six-bedded rooms. Numbers staying annually increased rapidly through the 1990s, from 46,000 in 1991-92 to 77,000 in 2000. The world events of 11th September 2001 had a profound effect on tourism in London, and YHA was hard-hit in the capital. From the mid-2000s, however, numbers here picked up very rapidly, rising to a meteoric 87,759 in 2014.



1 2



3 4



5 6



Images from August 2012 (author's photographs).

1-3: the central tower and accommodation wings; 4: secure gated entrance on Salter Road;
5-6: the hostel in its Surrey Water setting. Pleasant waterside walks connect with the Canada Water transport hub

Richard Stackhouse, Peter Clarke and David Meagher followed Frank Velander as managers over the change of millennium.



1: the central drum tower features this attractive café-restaurant on its ground floor;
2: the impressive ground floor steel structure and glass ceiling in the fork of the two side wings
(author's photographs, August 2012 and May 2016)



Bev Robinson has been in charge since July 2005. The name of the hostel was changed from YHA London Rotherhithe to YHA London Thameside in 2007. During her time at Thameside there have been many innovations, not least in the way in which the hostel attracts a great variety of group activities, special events and new training practices and partnerships. A few examples are given here.

Left: YHA stamp, 2016

In 2011 YHA Thameside gained HIQ accreditation, one of 15 large YHA premises to gain recognition under Hostelling International's Quality Management System, which takes 'best practice' from quality systems around the world and tailors them to the specific needs of hostels.

Also in 2011 Breaks4Kids benefited from the efforts of YHA staff who ran the Virgin London Marathon. The route ran right past the hostel and BBC Television covered a crowd of YHA supporters and their large arch of green YHA balloons in Rotherhithe. This gave the runners a huge boost as they rounded the corner on the hostel approach. Such Marathon events have been a regular feature of the hostel. Later in the year 25 young wounded servicemen and women rehearsed and performed their own production *Masterclass* at the Royal Haymarket Theatre. YHA Thameside was the chosen accommodation provider.

In 2012, YHA Thameside had an exceptional year, hosting events and accommodation for the London Marathon, the Queens Diamond Jubilee and, with volunteers ('Games Makers'), the International Olympics.

Calderdale Council brought down a group of young volunteers over the year on pre-training and familiarisation visits. On each occasion the young people were exemplary in their conduct. They then put all the training in to practice and worked tirelessly over the 10 weeks of Olympics and Paralympics. Before becoming Games Makers these young people had not been to London before and not stayed at a youth hostel. These are some of their comments:

An experience of a lifetime...
Nice and friendly staff at the YHA...
An enjoyable stay...
Diverse number of guests...
Comfortable and clean environment...
TV lounge was a good room to chill out in...
Good atmosphere, feels like home

Also in 2012, YHA's Business Development team, working in partnership with First Travel Solutions, developed an all-inclusive package for the schools market. In only three months the scheme brought over 2,200 overnight stays to the seven YHA hostels in the scheme, including new schools business. In the summer Thameside staff had their annual stall at the Rotherhithe Music Festival to promote Breaks4Kids and other features of their work.

In August 2013, Breaks4Kids was again highlighted by staff competitors in the first ever Prudential Ride London 100 cycle event on Sunday 4th August. This event was one of several cycling events over this weekend that came about as a legacy of the Olympic Games.

YHA's AAA team of eight entered the 34th Virgin London Marathon in April 2014, again to raise money for Breaks4Kids. YHA's Council Bulletin the following month described the event:

Everyone had an early night on the Saturday at YHA London Thameside and arose at 6am on Sunday for an early breakfast and another photo call. After this their supporters escorted them to Canada Water and they tripped off full of nervous excitement down the stairs to get the underground to Greenwich. It was a chilly morning at 7am but the signs were for a warmer than ideal day for those taking part in a 26-mile run.

After the AAA team had left YHA Thameside it was all hands to the pump to create a real party scene outside on Salter Road. The children all wanted to help and made balloon arches and clusters which they loved taking outside to be added to the growing sea of white and green.

YHA London Thameside carried out an extensive renovation programme in 2017.



London Thameside youth hostel at Rotherhithe: a modern welcome. Like YHA Lee Valley, the hostel is ideally suited to travelling parties as well as individuals, as it lies outside the London Congestion Zone and coaches can be accommodated (YHA images)

Overnights – inclusive periods each year as follows									
1992: Nov 1991 to Feb 1993; 1993-present: Mar to following Feb									
*: 17month period from October 1991									
1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
...	...	46077*	57974	67859	69503	71980	76937	77148	76513
2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
77916	55277	55177	52120	53436	53051	69297	72479	73490	74238
2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
78942	80713	84470	83965	87759	84933	78651	80113	84315	86448

John Martin, 2020. YHA Profiles are intended to be adaptable in the light of new materials gained by YHA Archive