



# Royal Borough of Greenwich

## Cutty Sark Clipper Ship



The ship was named after the clothing worn by the character Nannie in the Robert Burns poem *Tam O'Shanter*. A cutty sark is a wee slip worn by a wee slip of a girl who grew up to be a naughty witch. Who went dancing in the moonlight wearing only that.

*Her cutty-sark, o' Paisley harn  
That while a lassie she had worn,  
In longitude tho' sorely scanty,  
It was her best, and she was vauntie,-  
Ah! little ken'd thy reverend grannie,  
That sark she coft for he wee Nannie,  
Wi' twa pund Scots, ('twas a' her riches),  
Wad ever grac'd a dance of witches!*

The sight a drunk Tam sees is Alloway Kirk, ablaze with light, where a weird hallucinatory dance involving witches and warlocks, open coffins and even the Devil himself is in full swing. The scene is told with grimly enthusiastic gothic attention to detail. Tam manages to watch silently until, the dancing witches having cast off most of their clothes, he is beguiled by one particularly comely female witch, Nannie, whose shirt (cutty-sark) is too small for her. He cannot help shouting out in passion:

*Weel done, Cutty-sark! And in an instant all was dark:*

Nannie the witch chases the drunk Tam, but the evident pride in the ability of his horse is justified as she is able to help him to "win the key-stone o' the brig". (The Devil, Witches and warlocks cannot cross running water.) They only just make it though, as Nannie, first among the "hellish legion" chasing, grabs the horse's tail, which comes off. In fine, tongue-in-cheek moralistic mode, the poem concludes:

*Now, wha this tale o' truth shall read,  
Ilk man and mother's son, take heed:  
Whene'er to Drink you are inclin'd,  
Or Cutty-sarks rin in your mind,  
Think ye may buy the joys o'er dear;  
Remember Tam o' Shanter's mare*



*And here she is today, tail still in hand.*

# History

## Construction



Jock Willis



Hercules Linton

**On the afternoon of Monday 22 November 1869, a beautiful little clipper ship of 963 tons gross was launched at Dumbarton on the River Leven. On that day, she was given a name that was to become renowned throughout the seafaring world.**

*Cutty Sark* was built for John 'Jock' Willis, a seasoned sailing ship master who had taken over his father's firm of ship owners in the port of London. Here he became better known as "White Hat Willis" because he always wore a white top hat. His ambition was for *Cutty Sark* to be the fastest ship in the annual race to bring home the first of the new season's tea from China.

The ship was designed by Hercules Linton, a partner in the Dumbarton firm of Scott & Linton. It is believed that he moulded the bowlines of Willis's earlier vessel the *Tweed* into the midship attributes of Firth of Forth fishing boats, creating a beautiful new hull shape that was stronger, could take more sail, and be driven harder than any other.

The company had never built a ship of this size before and ran into financial difficulties, eventually going bankrupt before the ship was completed. The final details of the fitting out had to be completed by William Denny & Brothers, Scott & Linton's landlords and the guarantors for the completion of the work on the original contract.

The ship was towed to Greenock for final work on her masts and rigging. She was then brought to London to load her first cargo for China.

*Cutty Sark* is 280ft (85.4m) long overall and her beam measures 36ft (11m). Her moulded depth is 22.5ft (6.7m) and she weighs 963 tons (978.5 tonnes) gross. The height of the main mast from the main deck to the top is 152ft.

*Cutty Sark* was a working cargo ship, enduring high seas and heavy weather, from 1869 until 1922. Throughout her working life, numerous repairs and alterations were carried out to the vessel to ensure she continued to perform her function effectively and safely.

## 1870-78: The China Tea Years



*Cutty Sark* by a Chinese artist

On 16 February 1870, *Cutty Sark* left London bound for Shanghai, via the Cape of Good Hope, on her first voyage. Commanded by Captain George Moodie, she carried "large amounts of wine, spirits and beer" (Captain's abstract log). The arrival of the ship at Shanghai, with "manufactured goods", is listed in *The North China Herald* of 2 June 1870. Departing with around 1450 tons of tea on 25 June, she arrived back in London on 13 October 1870.

This is the first of eight voyages the ship successfully made to China in pursuit of tea. However, *Cutty Sark* never became the fastest ship on the tea trade. Dogged by bad winds and misfortune, she never lived up to the high expectations of her owner during these years. The closest the ship came to winning the tea race was in 1872, when she had the opportunity to race rival clipper ship *Thermopylae* head-to-head for the first time.

After arriving at Shanghai in late May 1872, she met *Thermopylae* when loading her tea cargo. With both sailing from Woosung on 17 June 1872, the two ships closely matched each other through the China Sea and into the Indian Ocean. By 7 August, and with a good tail wind, *Cutty Sark* found herself a good 400 miles ahead of *Thermopylae*. On 15 August, disaster struck when *Cutty Sark*'s rudder gave way. After reconstructing the rudder twice in heavy seas, the ship arrived back at London on 19 October, around 7 days after her rival. The courage and determination of Captain Moodie and his crew won *Cutty Sark* great credit, but Moodie retired from his command of the ship due to stress. The ship was never to get this close to winning the tea race again.

## 1878-83: Tramping for cargoes



*Cutty Sark* by Chapelet

*Cutty Sark* successfully collected her last Chinese tea cargo in 1877. In December of that year, the ship departed London bound for Sydney for a coal cargo, and then went onto Shanghai. Arriving at China in April 1878, the ship's master, Captain Tiptaft, could not consign a tea cargo. By this time, steam ships had taken over this trade.

Steam ships had arrived onto this market with the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. The Canal gave the steam ships a quick and direct route from the Mediterranean into the Red Sea, whilst the sailing ships were unable to access the Canal because of their reliance on the trade winds that gusted around the coast of Africa.

Unable to find a tea cargo, Captain Tiptaft died at Shanghai in October 1878. His First Mate, James Wallace, was promoted to the command of the *Cutty Sark*.

With tea no longer available, the ship started to take different cargoes of various qualities around the world. For example, she took coal from Nagasaki in Japan to Shanghai; jute from Manila to New York; and jute, castor oil, tea and the Australian mail from Calcutta to Melbourne in March 1881.

In 1880, the ship's First Mate, Sidney Smith, by all accounts a bully and disliked by the crew, killed (with considerable provocation) seaman John Francis. Smith was confined to quarters, but at Anjer Captain Wallace connived at his escape. The crew, incensed, downed tools and refused to work leaving just six apprentices and four tradesmen to sail the ship. On 5 September the ship was becalmed in the Java Sea for three days. With the guilt, calm, steaming heat and realisation that his career was finished, Wallace jumped overboard. Although a rescue attempt was mounted, the only sign of Wallace was the number of sharks swimming furiously about.

To make matters worse, on arrival at Anjer, William Bruce was transferred from the *Hallowe'en* and appointed Master of *Cutty Sark*. By all accounts, Bruce was an incompetent, drunken master who connived with the Mate to remove the expensive Australian crew members, pocketing their wages. He was also negligent, failing to pick up enough provisions, resulting in the crew becoming half starved. On arrival at New York in April 1882, it appears that an inquiry was held into the conduct of the Master and the First Mate, resulting in them being suspended from service and the crew were given a discharge.

As a result, Captain F. Moore and his Mate were transferred from the *Blackadder* to *Cutty Sark* and it was under his command that the ship embarked upon her most successful period of working life.

# 1883-95: The Australian Wool Years



**Cutty Sark under sail, 1880s**

In July 1883, *Cutty Sark* left Gravesend bound for Newcastle N.S.W, arriving in October. After loading 4289 bales of wool and 12 casks of tallow, she departed in December 1883 and arrived back in London in March 1884. Her return passage of 83 days was the best of the year, beating every ship sailing at about the same time by 25 days to over a month. This was a remarkable feat, considering that *Cutty Sark* was now 14 years old, almost halfway through her expected working life of 30 years.

Captain Moore left the ship in 1885, and was replaced by the most successful Master who ever commanded *Cutty Sark*; Richard Woodget. Captain Woodget's skill lay as a successful man-manager and fearless navigator, getting the best out of both the ship and his crew. In order to catch the Roaring Forties trade winds, encountering some of the most violent gales and seas on Earth, Woodget would travel further south than any previous commander. This was perilous, as the ship came into frequent contact with icebergs around Cape Horn (the southern tip of South America). Woodget was also a keen photographer and he has left many striking images of the ship passing icebergs as well as shots of her in Sydney harbour.

Fortunately, the ship survived and produced stunning passage times. On his first voyage in command, the ship sailed from England to Sydney in 77 days, and returned to the UK from Australia in 73 days. This was the start of 10 years domination by *Cutty Sark* in the wool trade. The ship soon established herself as the fastest vessel, the 'last chance' ship to make the English January wool sales.

In July 1889, *Cutty Sark* was involved in a famous incident with the crack P&O steam ship *Britannia*. On the night of 25 July, *Britannia*, doing between 14.5 and 16 knots, was overhauled by *Cutty Sark* doing a good 17 knots. Robert Olivey, Second Officer on *Britannia*, watched the lights of the sailing ship overhauling his vessel with amazement and called Captain Hector. Neither could have known it was *Cutty Sark*, and *Britannia*'s log read with great amazement, "Sailing ship overhauled and passed us!"

In January 2006, letters written by Clarence Ray (apprentice on board *Cutty Sark* in 1894) were brought to light by Dick Ray, his great-nephew. This important archive reveals how a fifteen year old boy lived and worked alongside his shipmates. In particular, he writes to his mother about the food on board the ship (including the delights of "Salt Tram Horse", "Leu Pie" and "Junk and Spuds"), dodging Captain Woodget's vicious collie-dogs, how the ship was swamped by the sea in bad weather and his duties, which included rowing the Master ashore for picnics, while the ship was in harbour.

As steam-ships moved further into the wool trade in the 1890s, *Cutty Sark* began to make less money for her owner. After the ship returned to the UK from Brisbane in 1895, *Cutty Sark* was sold to a Portuguese firm, J. Ferreira & Co., for £2100. Woodget transferred to the Coldinghame, and *Cutty Sark* left British ownership.

## 1895-1922: The Portuguese Years



*Ferreira* at Birkenhead, c1910

After being sold to J. Ferreira & Co. *Cutty Sark* was renamed the *Ferreira*. Reminiscent of her days in the late 1870s and early 1880s, *Ferreira* tramped various cargoes mainly between Portugal and her empire, and was a regular visitor to Rio, New Orleans, Mozambique, Angola and the UK. In the twentieth century she traded regularly between Oporto, Rio, New Orleans and Lisbon, and her crew claimed she was still capable of doing sixteen knots.

In October 1915 Portugal declared war on Germany which meant that the ship was in constant danger of being sunk by enemy naval activity. She survived unscathed until May 1916, when the rolling of the ship in bad weather led to the dismasting of the main mast and everything above the fore lowermast and the mizzen top-masts. Badly damaged, *Ferreira* was towed into port, arriving at Table Bay, South Africa. The cost and rarity of adequate masts and yards due to the war meant that she was converted into a barquentine (fore and aft rig) over an eighteen month period at Cape Town.



By January 1922 *Ferreira* ran into a Channel gale, and the captain put into Falmouth harbour to repair the damage. Wilfred Dowman, a retired windjammer skipper and owner of the training ship *Lady of Avenel*, saw the ship and set out to buy her. However, she returned to Lisbon without further mishap and was sold to a new Portuguese owner who changed her name to *Maria do Amparo*. But Dowman still wanted the ship, and at a price of £3750 (more than what she was worth even in 1895) it was brought back to Falmouth.

In 1923 her old name and nationality was restored; *Cutty Sark* had returned to British ownership.

# 1922 to present: from Falmouth to Greenwich

## 1922-38: The Falmouth Years



After saving *Cutty Sark* for the nation, Wilfred Dowman restored the ship to a close approximation of her appearance as a tea and wool clipper. This was a considerable feat, due to the shortage of necessary materials caused by the First World War. She was also the first historic vessel since Drake's *Golden Hind* in the sixteenth century to be opened to the public, and oral history interviews have revealed how boatmen used to take many visitors out to the ship.

*Cutty Sark* was used as a cadet training ship, where half a dozen boys from different backgrounds would live on board and train for a career in either the Royal Navy or the Merchant Marine.

However, Captain Dowman died in 1936, and his widow decided that she was unable to maintain the ship at her own cost. *Cutty Sark* was gifted to the Incorporated Thames Nautical Training College, Greenhithe, and left Falmouth in 1938 accompanied by cheers from well-wishers and hoots from vessels in the harbour. This was the last time that she went to sea.

## 1938-54: The Greenhithe Years



*Cutty Sark* alongside  
HMS Worcester,  
Greenhithe, c1938

In 1938, *Cutty Sark* arrived in Greenhithe, Kent, as an auxiliary vessel for the cadet training ship HMS Worcester. The ship continued to be used as a training ship, a role she played in Falmouth. Officers were trained for service in the Royal and Merchant Navies, which was soon to be vital with the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939.

In her early days at Kent, the ship was regularly used for sail-training drill and was lovingly maintained by cadets who were inspired by the ship's record-breaking history. However, by the early 1950s, the College acquired a newer training vessel which needed maintenance upkeep and so were unwilling to keep *Cutty Sark*.

In 1951, the ship was sent to London, to be moored in the Thames as part of the Festival of Britain celebrations. Returning to Greenhithe, it was not long before her plight became noticed by those determined to save her from the scrap-yard.

The Cutty Sark Society was formed by Frank Carr, Director of the National Maritime Museum, and patronised by HRH The Duke of Edinburgh. In a special ceremony, just before the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, Prince Philip took possession of *Cutty Sark* on behalf of the the society.



## 1954 to the present: The Greenwich Years



In December 1954, in an event of such significance it was captured by BBC cameras, *Cutty Sark* was towed into a specially constructed dry dock at Greenwich. Three years of painstaking restoration work followed, taking the ship back to her tea clipper appearance. She has remained in Greenwich, in her dry-dock, to this day.

Since her official opening in 1957 by HM The Queen (broadcast live on the BBC), *Cutty Sark* has been visited by over 15 million people from all over the world. She closed to the public in November 2006 and re-opens on 26 April 2012 after a period of extensive conservation work which will ensure that she survives for future generations to enjoy.

### Conservation and fire



On the morning of 21 May 2007, the *Cutty Sark*, which had been closed and partly dismantled for conservation work, caught fire, and burned for several hours before the London Fire Brigade could bring the fire under control. Initial reports indicated that the damage was extensive, with most of the wooden structure in the centre having been lost.

In an interview the next day, Richard Doughty, the chief executive of the *Cutty Sark* Trust, revealed that at least half of the "fabric" (timbers, etc.) of the ship had not been on site as it had been removed during the preservation work. Doughty stated that the trust was most worried about the state of iron framework to which the fabric was attached

### Royal re-opening of *Cutty Sark*, 25 April 2012

On 25 April 2012 Her Majesty The Queen, accompanied by His Royal Highness The Duke of Edinburgh, officially re-opened *Cutty Sark*. Later the same day the Queen also officially opened the exhibition *Royal River: Power, Pageantry & the Thames* at the National Maritime Museum.

**Opening hours:** Mon–Sun 10.00–17.00, last admission 16.00.



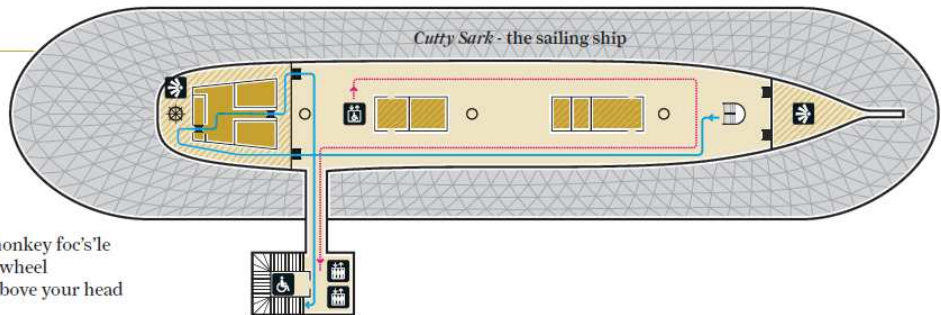
# CUTTY SARK *Visitor map*

ROYAL  
MUSEUMS  
GREENWICH



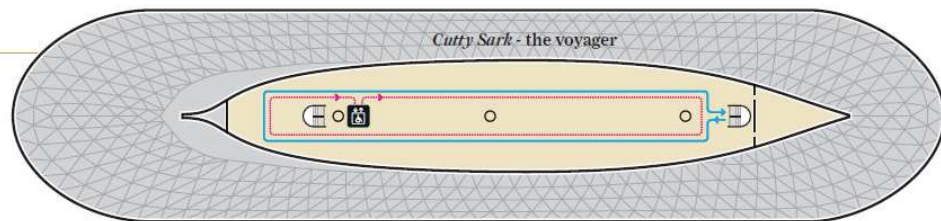
## Level 2 Main Deck

**Highlights:**  
Take in the views from the monkey foc's'le  
Steer *Cutty Sark* at the ship's wheel  
View the 11 miles of rigging above your head



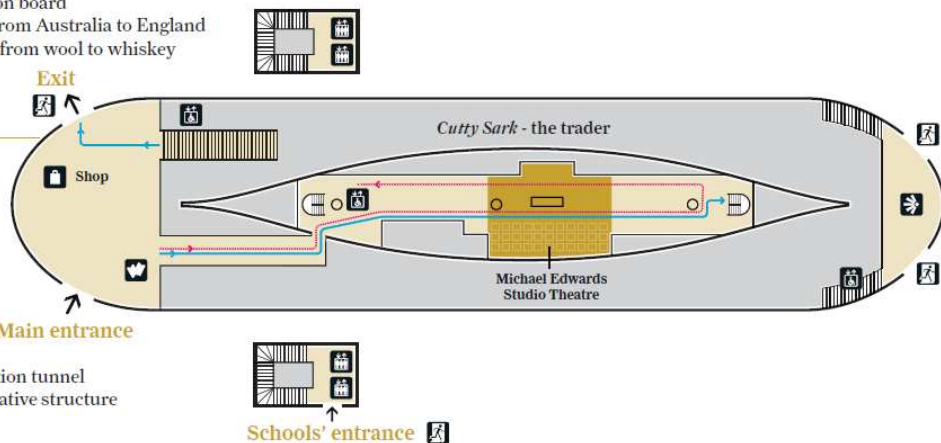
## Level 1 'Tween Deck

**Highlights:**  
Meet the crew who worked on board  
Attempt to steer *Cutty Sark* from Australia to England  
Explore the various cargoes from wool to whiskey



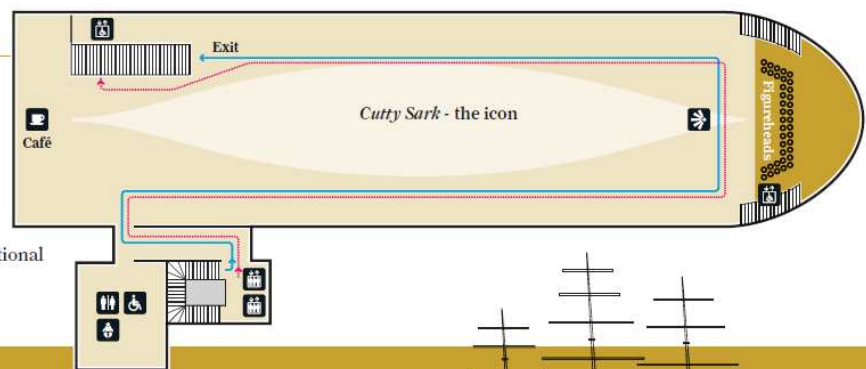
## Ground level Lower Hold

**Highlights:**  
See how tea was loaded on board  
Enter the children's exploration tunnel  
Understand the ship's innovative structure



## Lower ground level Sammy Ofer Gallery

**Highlights:**  
Marvel as you balance the 963 tonne national treasure on just one hand  
Enjoy a cup of *Cutty Sark*-inspired Twinings tea



- Visitor route
- Step-free route
- Café
- Ticket desk
- Lift
- Accessible lift
- Shop
- Photo opportunity
- Toilet
- Accessible toilet
- Baby changing
- Emergency exit
- No wheelchair access



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