

An Introduction

The London borough of Barking and Dagenham has a rich and diverse history that spans thousands of years. From the discovery of an ancient idol which dates to the Stone Age, right up to 21st century with the Ford Factory and other industries. In this study, children will gain a sense of the borough's past and how it became the place we know and love today. Barking and Dagenham were originally a part of Essex. Barking became a municipal borough in 1931 and Dagenham became one in 1938. They were linked together when the London Borough of Barking was formed in 1965 incorporating both areas. A campaign began for a name that reflected the heritage of both Barking and Dagenham and in 1980, the borough officially became the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham.

What you need to know

People have been living in the Barking and Dagenham area for thousands of years, in fact some of the earliest artefacts found could be at least 50,000 years old. Hunter-gatherers relied upon the rivers and streams that flow into the River Thames. The remarkable, Dagenham Idol is just one example of a prehistoric artefact that was discovered locally.

One place that holds a particularly special place in the heart of Barking's inhabitants is Barking Abbey. Originally founded in the 7th century by a priest named Erkenwald, the abbey was built for his sister, Ethelburga, to create a collective place for both nuns and monks to pray, learn and support those in need. The original abbey was then attacked by fierce Viking invaders and destroyed – highlighting that nowhere was safe during this time in British history.

The abbey was eventually rebuilt, and it became a central part of life within the Barking and Dagenham area, with royal links (including a stay by William the Conqueror) to kings and queens. Unfortunately, once Henry VIII came into power, he ordered the closure of many places of worship in the country and the abbey was once again destroyed. Today all that remains of this once beautiful and important place are a few ruins and a tower which leads to the current church.

Equally important was Valence House built in the 13th Century. Owned by Barking Abbey and leased to its inhabitants, the manor house was home to many important residents over the centuries. Agnes de Valence – distant relative of Henry III – gave the house its name. Many other families, including the Fanshawes who played an important role in the English Civil War, lived there until the home was compulsorily purchased from the May family in 1921 by London County Council. The building was used by the council for a variety of purposes until 1974 when it was turned into the museum that it is today.

A vitally important part of Barking's past is its role as a forerunner in the fishing industry. Largely due to the Hewett family, Barking became one of the most important fishing ports in the world with the largest operating fleet of fishing smacks. Between the 17th century and the 19th century, the fishing industry became the main source of income for the people of Barking and innovators like Samuel Hewett put the town on the map.

As the 19th century ended, the landscape of Britain had changed drastically due to the industrial revolution. One man that had a large impact on the area was Samuel Williams. With the help of his sons, they built up the Dagenham dock area and created factory space that allowed a range of different companies to come and make the area their base of operations.

One company that cannot be ignored is the Ford Motor business. Dagenham once had the largest car manufacturing facility in Europe. Ford employed thousands of workers many from Ireland and Manchester, who came to live in the borough. The company made headlines in the 1960s and 80s when groups of female sewing machinists went on strike for fair pay – kickstarting a movement that is still in play today, to achieve equality for women in the workplace.

With such a rich history, Barking and Dagenham have incredible links to important political and social movements in our country's history. Today the borough continues to add to this legacy in new and exciting ways.

Resources

Our key enquiry questions, sources, PowerPoints, activities, and other resources will help to build children's understanding of the local area of Barking and Dagenham and answer the question "How has Barking and Dagenham changed for the people who have lived there?"

Get in touch

Is there an area of local history you'd love to see on our Local History Hub? Get in touch to learn how we can work together! Email

LocalHistory@tpet.co.uk
to find out more.



Teacher's Pet



Historic England



Local History

Historic England and Teacher's Pet have come together to bring you a collection of free resources that you can use in your local history teaching.



Historic England



Teacher's Pet

Who are Teacher's Pet?

Teacher's Pet have been providing downloadable and playable educational content to early years and primary school teachers for over 14 years. We cover all areas of the curriculum and use a team of in-house teachers and designers to create engaging and memorable concepts, that the children will love.

Why local history?

At [Teacher's Pet](#) we want to empower primary school teachers by giving them the tools they need to deliver inspiring and thoughtful lessons about the local area and its history. We believe local history teaching has such an important part to play in a child's wellbeing – helping to give children a sense of pride in where they live.

Our Local History project is designed to provide teachers across the UK with everything they need to successfully carry out a full scheme of teaching about their local area, through key enquiry questions and source led activities.

Working with [Historic England](#) gives us access to archived maps and photos for resources and information from knowledgeable local historians, as well helping us to provide the content to you free of charge.

For more information about our Local History project or to find out more about Teacher's Pet Classroom Resources, please visit our website.