

## Thames Tour

What to see when rowing the Thames

Christopher Dodd

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This guide was written for an International Rowing Federation (FISA) seven-day rowing tour of the Thames in 2003, starting in Godstow near Oxford and progressing downstream to Putney in London. It uses the terms 'port' and 'starboard' to describe the location of sights. As seen from the cox's seat, 'port' (stroke side) is to the left of boat, 'starboard' (bow side) is to the right - in the direction in which the boat and the stream are moving.

The River Thames, also called the Isis in the Oxford area, is important for several reasons. For centuries it was a great trading route, connecting the Thames Valley and, through the canal system, the west and midlands of England with the great port of London. It is a great source of drinking water for London, and as railways shut down transport by water, they opened the Thames Valley to Londoners for enjoyment and recreation. The modern sport of rowing was born on the Thames, and it remains a world centre.

The guide was updated in 2013. Please contribute comments and corrections [HERE](#).

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### **Seven days from Oxford to London**

**DAY 1 – Godstow to Clifton Hampden (27 km, 6 locks)**

**DAY 2 - Clifton Hampden to Pangbourne (29 km, 4 locks)**

**DAY 3 - Pangbourne to Henley (24 km, 6 locks)**

**DAY 4 - Henley to Maidenhead (25 km, 6 locks)**

**DAY 5 - Maidenhead to Staines (24 km, 5 locks)**

**DAY 6 - Staines to Teddington (28 km, 6 locks)**

**DAY 7 - Teddington to Putney (15 km)**

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*Rowers' guide to the Thames*

### **DAY 1 – Godstow to Clifton Hampden, 27 km, 6 locks**

The tour starts at St Edward's school boathouse, close to Godstow lock beside the remains of Godstow Abbey. St Edward's is a prominent rowing school.

Port Meadow on your port side gives wonderful views of Oxford - 'Oxford, more beautiful than dreams,' wrote Arthur Quiller Couch, nineteenth century author known as 'Q', who was a professor of literature and a rower. It was here, on a picnic by boat from Oxford that the author Lewis Carroll dreamed up the plot of *Alice in Wonderland*, his classic children's fantasy written for Alice Liddell, daughter of Dean Liddell of Christ Church.

#### **Lock 1 – Osney**

Osney lock is the gateway to a cruise through Oxford to Folly bridge, home of Salters who operate hire boats and steamers and used to build racing boats. Below the bridge on the port side is Christ Church Meadow, where college barges used to line the bank where boathouses now stand. 'Bumping' races are held twice a year on this water, originated by boats racing each other home from Iffley lock. Boats are attached to the bank and started simultaneously by a gun. If a boat bumps the one in front, it moves up a place in the starting order in next day's race. The leading boat at the end of the week is Head of the River.

Oxford University Boat Club was founded in 1839, ten years after the first Boat Race against Cambridge. The burnt-out remains of its Victorian boathouse could still be seen in 2003 on the starboard side. At the end of the boathouses to port, the river Cherwell joins the Isis, a tributary popular for punts. Before reaching Iffley lock you will pass City of Oxford Rowing Club (port) and Falcon Rowing Club. George Harris the boatbuilders used to be here (starboard).

#### **Lock 2 – Iffley**

Iffley lock was built in 1632 and rebuilt in 1923. The village tucked away on the port side has one of the best Norman churches in England. Rose Isle marks the half way point to the next lock.

#### **Lock 3 - Sandford**

1.5 km below Sandford lock you pass Radley boathouses on the starboard side. Radley College opened in 1847 and is a prominent rowing school. The next landmark on the port side is Nuneham House, a Palladian mansion set in a park by Viscount Harcourt, Lord High Chancellor in 1710. Here Queen Victoria spent her honeymoon. Close by is Carfax Tower, a folly moved here from Oxford in the 1780s, where it had served as a water tower. Radley's old boathouse is on the starboard side. It is hereabouts that the author Lewis Carroll, whose real name was the Rev Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, fashioned another of his children's tales, *Alice Through the Looking Glass*.

Passing Lockwood Island and woods on the port side, you pass under a footbridge, followed by Nuneham railway bridge before reaching the next lock.

#### **Lock 4 - Abingdon**

Abingdon is the site of an ancient abbey which was 5 km in circumference and flourished until the dissolution of the monasteries by Henry VIII in 1538. The county hall is now a museum. Abingdon bridge crosses Nag's Head Island as well as the Thames. Abingdon School is another independent school prominent in rowing. On the port side is Aldersey Island, bounded by the Swift Ditch Backwater, which bypasses the Abingdon bend.

Once past the town, the river turns towards port and set back from it is Culham Manor, a cluster of manor house and cottages, church and pub. You will row past Sutton Pools to Culham lock and Sutton bridge.

#### **Lock 5 - Culham**

Sutton Courtenay, away from the river to starboard, is an idyllic medieval village on the Sutton Pools backwater. It has a Norman church tower with a one-handed clock. The row continues through a railway bridge and along a reach to Clifton lock, with Long Wittenham to starboard.

#### **Lock 6 – Clifton**

Passing through the lock, you arrive at Clifton Hampden, a 'chocolate box' village dating from the 1500s-1600s. George Gilbert Scott, architect of the Houses of Parliament, designed the bridge. Just before the bridge to starboard is the Barley Mow Inn, where the day ends. It was made famous in Jerome K Jerome's account of a camping trip on the river, *Three Men in a Boat*. It was restored after a fire in 1975.

## **DAY 2 - Clifton Hampden to Pangbourne (29 km, 4 locks)**

Leaving Clifton Hampden, you pass Burcot House and the village of Burcot on the port side. After 4 km is the first lock of the day.

### **Lock 1 – Day's**

Robert Gibbings, author of *Sweet Thames Run Softly*, lived at Little Wittenham. 'Every mile of water has its own character, every bridge too, every village, and every farm whose meadows are enriched by the silt of winter floods,' he wrote. To starboard, the distinctive hills known as the Wittenham clumps can be seen. On the port side, the village of Dorchester which is along a hidden backwater off the main river, was the capital of Wessex until 1092. It has a superb abbey church which reflects its former importance.

The river continues through Shillingford bridge with a hotel nestling beneath a steep wooded hillside

### **Lock 2 – Benson**

Benson lock marks the start of the longest stretch of the upper Thames between locks. Soon the spire of St Peter's church will tell you that are approaching Wallingford. About a mile before the town, you will pass the house where Agatha Christie wrote the adventures of the fictional detective Hercule Poirot.

The village of Benson, away from the river on the port side, has an RAF station which was a bomber and air reconnaissance base during the second world war. After the war RAF Benson became famous in rowing. Many prominent oarsmen were directed to the station for their military service, and crews from the base won two trophies at Henley Royal Regatta in 1953. They returned 50 years later, with every man present to row over the course. The RAF rowed from Wallingford and in the early 1950s set up joint premises with the new local club, which is now Wallingford RC, just below the bridge to starboard.

Wallingford bridge has 17 arches and dates from the 1200s. The town hall is Jacobean, and Wallingford was the last royalist stronghold to surrender to the Parliamentarians in the English Civil War during the 1600s, after a 16-week siege.

Below Wallingford you will pass the present boathouses of Oxford University Boat Club and its local rival Oxford Brookes University, both prominent in supplying recruits to GB's under-23 and senior national teams.

After a road bridge is an office development on the port side that used to be Carmel College, another school with a rowing background.

You come next to the hamlets of North Stoke (to port) and Moulsoford (starboard), the latter marked by the Beetle and Wedge, an excellent pub and restaurant. To port a little further is the Leatherne Bottle, also a well-known restaurant. After that you will reach

### **Lock 3 - Cleeve**

After Cleeve lock you will come to Goring and Streatley, facing each other across the river, joined by a bridge immediately before the lock. Goring (to port) is Edwardian and has a mill and a lock. Sir Arthur 'Bomber' Harris, head of the RAF during the 1939-45 war and known for his controversial blanket bombing policy that flattened the Ruhr, Dresden and Berlin, lived here. Streatley (to starboard) has an old college barge moored outside the hotel by the bridge.

### **Lock 4 - Goring**

You now pass through the Goring Gap, an Ice Age channel carved through chalk hills by the Thames, with its beeches, maples and chestnuts. You will pass the Grott, a house embellished with shells, to starboard before passing under one of Isambard Kingdom Brunel's railway bridges. Brunel was the engineer of the Great Western Railway between London and Bristol. Brunel was once voted second to Winston Churchill as the greatest ever Briton.

On the starboard bank is the Child Beale wildlife park where the National Schools Regatta was held until its popularity caused it to move to the National Water Sports Centre in Nottingham.

The destination for the day is Pangbourne, home of another school which rows, Pangbourne College. The college was founded to supply officers to the Royal and merchant navies, and the pupils wear naval uniform. There is a chapel here that is a memorial to servicemen and women killed in the Falklands war of the 1980s.

Approaching the town on the starboard side is a row of seven houses built by D H Evans, the founder of a London department store, known as the 'seven deadly sins' because he is supposed to have kept a mistress in each. A private toll bridge joins Pangbourne to Whitchurch. Kenneth Grahame, author of the classic children's story *Wind in the Willows*, lived here until 1932. The writer D H Lawrence (*Lady Chatterley's Lover*) lived at a house called Kylemore.

### **DAY 3 - Pangbourne to Henley (24 km, 6 locks)**

The writer Robert Gibbings said that the Thames downstream of Pangbourne is so crowded with views that they ‘might have dropped from the gold frames of the Royal Academy’.

#### **Lock 1 - Whitchurch**

At Whitchurch lock the River Pang joins the Thames. Hardwick House, which you will pass on the port side, is a roseate mansion with gables and chimneys dating from Richard II’s reign. It was the model for Toad Hall in the Kenneth Grahame’s *Wind in the Willows*, and the next lock, Mapledurham, inspired the illustrator E H Shepard’s drawings for the book.

#### **Lock 2 - Mapledurham**

The hamlet of Mapledurham on the port side has a mill and a manor. The house was built by the Blount family at the time of the Spanish Armada in 1588 in the shape of an E (after Queen Elizabeth?). It has gables, high chimneys, and was used in the filming of *The Eagle Has Landed*.

After Mapledurham, urban Tilehurst is on the starboard side along Kentwood Deep, opposite open country on the other bank. The stretch where the Reading Head of River Race and Reading Regatta are held passes Poplar Island, Apple Tree Eyot, and St Mary’s Island to Caversham bridge, just before which is a sports centre and Reading Rowing Club to starboard. There are some fine villas on the port bank leading to Caversham, a place which ‘sprawls like an amorphous vertebrae’ according to the writer Henry James.

Between Caversham bridge and Reading bridge is Reading University’s boathouse on the port side, and Fry’s Island. Reading is a dismal city with a gaol renowned because the writer and wit Oscar Wilde was a prisoner there. It was the home of Huntley and Palmers, biscuit suppliers to the British Empire. It is now the centre of southern England’s Silicon Valley, and its waterside has been regenerated. It is extremely well connected by rail, so if you have had enough and want the bright lights of London, jump ship here.

#### **Lock 3 - Caversham**

The River Kennet joins the Thames to starboard below Caversham lock, marked by the horseshoe bridge that carries the towpath across the Kennet. Behind this, another of Brunel’s railway bridges crosses the Kennet, and close to the mouth of the tributary is Blake’s lock where the Kennet and Avon canal begins. This canal runs west for 87 miles to the Bristol Channel via Bath and Bristol. At the canal entrance is Brunel’s 1839 railway bridge.

On the port side of the next reach is a marina and the Redgrave-Pinsent rowing lake at Caversham, a 6-lane 2000-metre all-weather training course for Britain’s national rowing team.

#### **Lock 4 - Sonning**

Sonning lock has a reputation for its gardens, but so have many of the locks that the tour passes through. Approaching Sonning on the starboard side is a house designed to look like the White House in Washington DC, home of the spoon-bender supreme, Uri Geller. Passing through Sonning's 1700s humpbacked bridge, the roadway leads to a very pretty village with the Bull Inn next to St Andrew's Church.

Between Sonning and Shiplake, you will pass St Patrick's bridge on the starboard side which crosses St Patrick's stream that leaves the Thames here. You pass Buck Ait, Hallsmead Ait and The Lynch before coming to Shiplake College boathouse on the port side, with the school on the hillside above in the trees. Shiplake is hardly visible from the river, but has literary connections, having been the home of Alfred, Lord Tennyson and Algernon Charles Swinburne. The writer George Orwell (*1984; Animal Farm*), whose real name was Eric Blair, lived here as a child.

Phillimore's Island is passed before the next lock, after which St Patrick's stream rejoins the Thames.

#### **Lock 5 - Shiplake**

Passing out of the lock, the river runs under the bridge of the branch railway line to Henley-on-Thames, and sweeps round a large bend passing several more islands to Marsh lock. On the starboard shore is a curious ornamental bridge made from large rocks crossing an inlet on the Park Place estate.

#### **Lock 6 – Marsh**

Marsh lock is on an island with a long wooden bridge over the top of a long weir. A mill can still be seen tucked on to the port side bank when you are below the lock. Like other locks, Marsh has rollers for manhandling traditional Thames skiffs and punts between levels, and also has a salmon leap to assist the fish to get to their upstream spawning grounds. The lock was designed by the Rev Humphrey Gainsborough, a designer and inventor of note and brother of the landscape artist Thomas Gainsborough.

A 1.5 km row past several islands brings you to Henley-on-Thames, with Henley Rowing Club to starboard on the Berkshire bank, and the River & Rowing Museum on the Oxfordshire side.

You can't escape from rowing at Henley. The first Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race took place here in 1829, Henley Regatta started in 1839 and is held in the first week of July each year, and Henley is home to Henley Women's Regatta, Henley Town and Visitors' and several other regattas and time trials. The regatta's headquarters are in a building designed by Terry Farrell, just upstream of the bridge which has five arches and balustrades and dates from 1787. The bridge has keystone heads of Thames and Isis on either side of it. An arch of the previous bridge is visible under the Regatta HQ where the booms that mark the course are stored.

Leander Club, downstream of the bridge, is the oldest rowing club in Britain (1818). Henley is also the base of Upper Thames RC and Henley RC, and, since 1998, the River & Rowing Museum, winner of awards for its architecture by David Chipperfield and Museum of the Year in its first year. One of the founders was Chris Dodd, writer and veteran of several FISA pleasure tours. A visit to the museum and its boat collection and its superb cafe is essential for anyone connected with rowing.

If you collect books, be sure to visit Richard Way's antiquarian bookshop close to the river in Friday Street which specialises in rowing, Thames and English literature.

Henley also has an annual Traditional Boat Rally in August, a music festival in the regatta enclosures in July, and a literary festival in September. The community is in mourning for its famous brewery, Brakspears, which unceremoniously closed in 2002. The company continues to own pubs and beer is brewed elsewhere under the Brakspeare name. Henley still has a big choice of excellent pubs to visit.



#### **DAY 4 - Henley to Maidenhead (25 km, 6 locks)**

The day begins by rowing from the finish to the start of the Henley Royal Regatta course. In July the regatta's tents stretch for a long way along the starboard (Berkshire) bank, starting with boat tents, with the enclosures beginning as you round the first bend. The regatta course is 1 mile 550 yards long in two straight lanes, the start being at the downstream end of distant Temple Island.

Along the course you will pass Remenham club, a social rowing club formed by seven active London rowing clubs, and then Upper Thames Rowing Club. On the port side are Phyllis Court, a country club with a grandstand facing the river, followed by meadows and Fawley Court, a Wren house once occupied by a Polish religious order. Passing Temple Island, the river bends to starboard, and on the port bank is Reading University's business school (formerly Henley Management College). It is an Italianate mansion originally called Greenlands and built by W H Smith, a newsagent whose outlets you will still see on railway stations, airport terminals and high streets.

#### **Lock 1 – Hambleden**

Hambleden lock is beside a fine example of a water mill that was functioning until 1955. It is now converted into apartments. The weir is a white water maelstrom popular with canoeists. The village of Hambleden is up the valley away from the river, so picturesque and perfect that it is seldom without a film crew at work on period dramas.

Below Hambleden the red brick eighteenth century Culham Court occupies a superb position on the starboard side. Later, to port, you will pass Medmenham Abbey followed by castellated Danesfield House, now a hotel, standing back on the hillside. Medmenham is famous for being the headquarters of the Hell Fire Club set up by Sir Francis Dashwood and his friends in 1745. Dashwood filled the abbey with pornographic artworks and staged secret orgies.

#### **Lock 2 – Hurley**

The lock has a timber weir winch, used to pull boats upstream through the old 'flash' lock before the modern 'pound' lock was built. The hamlet of Hurley used to have a Benedictine monastery and still has two medieval tithe barns and a very old inn, the Olde Bell. Below the lock to starboard is Freebody's boatyard, a warren of wood and varnish, and to port is Harleyford Manor, built in 1755 and now the clubhouse of a marina. It is a short distance to the 150-ft span of a wooden footbridge that replaced a ferry linking the banks before Temple lock.

#### **Lock 3 – Temple**

Passing Temple you come to the start of the traditional Marlow regatta course, and to starboard you will pass Bisham Abbey, a Tudor house built from the stones of the former abbey which is now a national sports centre. Queen Elizabeth I was imprisoned here, and Henry VIII gave it to his divorced wife Anne of Cleves, the 'Flanders Mare'. Soon coxes will be able to see the spire of Marlow church which is situated close to the wonderful suspension bridge by William Tierney Clark and opened in 1832. Its ironwork was replaced by steel in the 1920s.

Marlow is a marvellous riverside town with a handsome main street and beautiful church, and it has been associated with many writers. These include the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley who wrote *The Revolt of Islam* and his wife Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley who created Frankenstein here. The poets Edward Thomas and T S Eliot were also Marlow dwellers.

On the starboard bank adjacent to the bridge is Marlow Rowing Club, the club where Sir Steve Redgrave's old school does its rowing. This is Redgrave's hometown and where his English teacher Francis Smith discovered him as a sixteen-year-old. It is also the home of Mike Spracklen, the coach who coached him to his first Olympic medal and has since been chief men's coach in Canada (1992, 2004, 2008) and the US (1996 Olympics), and chief women's coach for GB for the Sydney Olympics (2000).

Marlow RC is rebuilding after a fire in 2012. The club has a nineteenth century tubular sculling boat made in Sydney. The thriving club has turned out many internationals, both men and women, as well as being the home of some wild experiments, such as Grogono's hydrofoil sculling boat in the 1960s. Below the bridge is the Compleat Angler Hotel beside the impressive weir.

#### **Lock 4 – Marlow**

Exiting Marlow lock affords magnificent views of the town's waterside. Soon you will pass under a road bridge and Longridge Scout camp on the starboard side. Part of Britain's women's team used to be based at Marlow. Boats from the camp find good rowing conditions whatever the weather on the stretch which runs all the way to Cookham with no other rowing activity on it. Recently, however, this squad has done most of its training at the dedicated lake at Caversham, which you passed between Reading and Sonning.

There follows a bend several kilometres long to starboard through beautiful scenery and away from roads and 21<sup>st</sup> century impediments. Passing Gibraltar Islands, Quarry Wood lies on the starboard bank, its foliage and beech trees becoming the dreaded Wild Wood in Kenneth Grahame's *Wind in the Willows*.

Eventually Bourne End with its twee Edwardian villas is passed to port, and its branch line crosses the Thames. Bourne End is home to Upper Thames Sailing Club and Bourne End Cruiser and Yacht Club, and was once home to the children's writer Enid Blyton. The river eventually runs under a road bridge to Cookham, a pretty village on the starboard side that is famous for the eccentric artist Stanley Spencer. One of most evocative pictures is *Christ Preaching at Cookham Regatta*. There is a gallery showing his works.

#### **Lock 5 – Cookham**

Cookham lock is on Formosa Island, enclosed by two channels, and is the largest lock on the river. From Cookham you will row along the Cliveden Deep, a wonderful stretch of water with plentiful foliage and a steep bank with hanging woods on the port side.

Glimpsed through the trees at the top is Cliveden. The house was designed in 1881 by Sir Charles Barry and bought by William Waldorf Astor in 1893, and at various times has been associated with political scandal and intrigue, notably during the 1930s and again in the 1960s in the Profumo affair, a scandal involving a government minister, a Soviet diplomat and call girls.

The wildness of the terrain is tamed as the next lock is approached.

### **Lock 6 – Boulter's**

Boulter's lock, named after a 'bolter' or miller because the first lock keeper was also in charge of the flour mill that used to be here, is a fine structure made famous by Edward John Gregory's painting *Boulter's Lock, Sunday Afternoon 1895*, depicting steamers, punts, skiffs and canoes and the sartorial elegance of their occupants as they jostled at the downstream entrance to the lock.

Below Boulter's and set back on the port side is Taplow Court, once the home of Lord Desborough who was a famous oarsman, sportsman and chairman of the then Thames Conservancy, governing body of the non-tidal river. Before Maidenhead road bridge is the boarded up Skindles Hotel, once notorious for trysts between guards officers and debutants ('the hymen of London' according to the novelist Michael Arlen). Then comes the new Maidenhead Rowing Club followed by the most famous of Brunel's Thames railway bridges. Built in 1839, it has the widest arches in Britain, measuring 38.8 metres wide but with only 7.3 metres headroom at the centre. The bridge confounded critics who said it would fall down. J W Turner's powerful painting *Rain, Steam and Speed* is of a Great Western Train crossing this bridge.

### **DAY 5 - Maidenhead to Staines (24 km, 5 locks)**

Soon after leaving Maidenhead, where the annual punting championships are held, you pass Bray on the starboard side. This is the home of some famous television types such as the interviewer Michael Parkinson and the endearing Aussie didgeridoo player Rolf Harris, and some top class restaurants in the area, including Heston Blumenthal's Fat Duck (reserve 12 months ahead). A twist in the river past an island brings you to Bray lock.

#### **Lock 1 – Bray**

After this lock you row under the M4 motorway and pass Monkey Island with its hotel. Here the writers H G Wells and Rebecca West conducted their affair. The river skirts Dorney Lake, an 8-lane rowing course on the port side developed by Eton College. It was the venue for the rowing (and canoeing) regattas of the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Away on the port side is Dorney Court, a 16<sup>th</sup> century manor house where Charles II's mistress Barbara Villers (Mrs Palmer) lived. On the starboard side is Oakley Court, a Victorian gothic pile which has been likened to Dracula's castle. Rounding a sharp bend to port, you are soon close to the Dorney rowing centre and a boathouse on the river used by Eton College and the Army Rowing Club. Close by the bank is a tiny chapel dating from the 1100s, St Mary Magdelene, with a clapboard belfry. Houses in the hamlet hidden behind it are timber framed and Tudor.

#### **Lock 2 – Boveney**

From Boveney lock the houses of Eton Wick can be seen on the port side and Windsor racecourse on starboard. Clewer is on the starboard bank, a house where the Victorian prime minister, William Gladstone, an oarsman in his time, sent prostitutes whom he had 'rescued' for rehabilitation. Sir Daniel Gooch, the first locomotive engineer of the Great Western Railway and the inaugurator of telegraphic communications between Britain and America, is buried here.

After the road bridge there is a bathing place called Athens marked by a platform with a bench, traditional swimming place for the boys of Eton College, who are supposed not to show themselves naked when boats containing ladies are passing. After further twists and turns you pass under a road and a railway bridge, to the Brocas meadow on the port side. From here Windsor castle, royal residence, imposes itself on the skyline, towering over the town to starboard. Eton with its school and chapel is to port, and the Eton boathouses precede the pedestrian bridge linking Windsor and Eton.

Besides Eton College, prime mover in the establishment of rowing as an amateur sport and where rowing remains a major sport, there are also other clubs here – Eton Excelsior, Eton Vikings and Windsor Boys' School, the latter, like its big brother, prominent in junior rowing.

**Lock 3 - Romney**

Passing under the bridge, you get good views of the backside of the college and receding Windsor when you come to Romney lock. This is followed by Black Potts railway bridge and a long pull with Windsor Great Park to starboard and a golf course followed by a road bridge and the village of Datchet to port. The next bridge, Albert bridge, brings you to the approach to Ham Island and Old Windsor lock.

**Lock 4 – Old Windsor**

Friday Island beside Old Windsor lock was the home of Dr Julius Grant, a criminologist who invented Marmite. Below Old Windsor the Thames flows past the Wraysbury on the port side and the meadows of Runnymede on starboard.

Runnymede is where King John sealed the Magna Carta in 1215 which guaranteed Parliamentary sovereignty over the monarchy in the government of England. He was rowed there by Thames watermen. Nobody knows for certain exactly where this key constitutional document was agreed – possibly on Magna Carta Island to your port side. At Runnymede memorials also commemorate the late US president John F Kennedy, and the Commonwealth Air Forces. The river continues past the remains of Ankerwycke Priory to port.

**Lock 5 - Bell Weir**

Bell Weir lock leads to the M25 motorway bridge followed by Holm Island and Staines bridge.

## **DAY 6 - Staines to Teddington (28 km, 6 locks)**

### **Lock 1 – Penton Hook**

The railway bridge at Staines is painted with yellow stripes to stop swans flying into it. The long stretch through Staines is built up on both banks and bends around to the wilderness of Penton Hook Island, round which the river makes a spectacular loop. The lock, however, is across the neck of the loop. Penton Hook was a mass burial place during the great plague of 1664.

From here you progress past the village of Laleham to port, another rowing centre where a former GB national coach and FISA commissioner, Penny Chuter, was brought up, rowing herself to school daily. Penny became the English punting, skiffing and sculling champion in the same year when she was 17. She won a silver medal at the European championships before turning to a successful coaching career.

Coming out of Laleham is Laleham House and park, once home of Lord Lucan who sent the Light Brigade into the Valley of Death during the Crimea War. The house is on the port side, with open country again to starboard. You pass under the M3 motorway before arriving at the next lock that precedes Chertsey bridge.

### **Lock 2 – Chertsey**

The river now turns its back on Chertsey to starboard and sweeps round an S-bend at Dumsey Eyot. It continues through low-lying meads, site of a Benedictine abbey sacked by the Vikings, to another twist by Pharaoh's Island, given to Admiral Lord Nelson to commemorate victory against the French in the Battle of the Nile in 1805. There follows a loop in the river past D'Oyly Carte Island, named for Gilbert and Sullivan who composed and penned the comic operas performed by the D'Oyly Carte Company, to Shepperton lock. Hereabouts is a confusion of waterways where the Wey navigation, a canal linking the Thames to River Wey via Guildford and Godalming, enters the river.

### **Lock 3 – Shepperton**

Shepperton is known for its film studios where *The Guns of Navarone*, *The Dam Busters* and *Cleopatra* were made. Thus Shepperton's pubs have entertained streams of box office stars such as Liz Taylor and Richard Burton, Gregory Peck, David Niven, and are still frequented by their successors. Through Shepperton lock you pass a passenger ferry that still operates, and the main river twists and turns its way past a sailing lagoon to port and Desborough Island and a water works to starboard, while the Desborough Cut to starboard takes a straight course to Walton-on-Thames.

The commuter town of Weybridge lies beyond the tree line of the Desborough Cut, home of Weybridge Rowing Club, Weybridge Ladies (one of the earliest women's rowing clubs in Britain) and Weyfarers, the recreational rowing club set up by Caroline and John Turnbull, organisers of the FISA tour of the Thames in 2003. Hereabouts is also the home of Carl Douglas Racing Boats, and the now defunct boat builders Aylings (who began life as oar makers in Putney) were also situated in Weybridge. British Aerospace made

the first carbon fibre racing boat in Weybridge in 1976, named Carbon Tiger and exhibited at the River & Rowing Museum at Henley.

Where the cut and river meet again with Walton bridges in sight is the pretty village of Lower Halliford to port and Walton-on-Thames to starboard. There are two bridges at Walton, one opened in 1783 and depicted on canvas by Joseph Mallord William Turner RA, the second - the ugliest bridge on the Thames - erected by Royal Engineers in 1953 and painted only by them.

There follows a long straight stretch of 4.5 k past Walton-on-Thames to starboard and Walton Rowing Club to Sunbury's two side-by-side locks, Sunbury has some fine waterside houses on the riverside, including one called Hawke which was the home of Admiral Hawke who destroyed Napoleon's fleet at Quiberon Bay in 1759.

#### **Lock 4 – Sunbury**

Below Sunbury lock are reservoirs for much of the way to Hampton. You pass Sunbury Lock Ait, Phoenix Island, Sunbury Court Island, Purvis Eyot and Platts Eyot (where Thornycroft built gunboats) before reaching Hampton on the port side.

The actor and playwright David Garrick (1717-79) lived in Hampton. His house is now a public garden. On Garrick's Eyot he erected a small temple to commemorate Shakespeare. The statue of Shakespeare which was here is now in the British Museum.

A bend to starboard sends the river past Garrick's Eyot and two more islands, Tagg's Island and Ash Island to Molesey lock. Tagg's Island has houseboats, and in the 1870s had a hotel frequented by royalty, notably the Prince of Wales (Edward the Caresser) and his girlfriends. Before the 1914-18 war it was run by Fred Karno who turned it into the Katsino pleasure dome with a dance hall, menagerie, casino and theatre. Among artists who trod the boards here were Charlie Chaplin, Stan Laurel, Bud Flanagan and George Robey. On the port bank is a Swiss chalet, imported piece by piece in 1900.

Before the lock to starboard is Molesey Boat Club and the boathouses of Hampton School and Lady Elizabeth Holles. Molesey BC is in the top league of clubs, supplying many internationals to the British team including the Olympic gold medallists Martin Cross (1984), Jonny and Greg Searle (1992) and Andy Triggs Hodge (2008 and 2012). Hampton and LEH are among the strongest boys and girls schools respectively in the country.

#### **Lock 5 - Molesey**

Immediately after the lock, one of the busiest and most celebrated locks on the Thames, is Hampton Court Bridge by Sir Edwin Lutyens (1931), and beside it the 300-year-old Mitre Inn which contains paintings by Walter Sisley. Through the bridge is Hampton Court Palace, a sumptuous pile built by Cardinal Wolsey in 1514. Fearing for his future, the cardinal gave his 280-room cottage to King Henry VIII in 1526. The king rewarded him by sending him to the Tower of London and execution. Many royals lived here, including all but one of Henry's seven wives.

The parklands of the palace now flank the river to port, behind a perimeter wall which rounds an enormous bend, past Thames Ditton Island and Raven's Ait where it straightens out to reveal Kingston bridge ahead. This stretch is known as Queen's Reach and its towpath is grandly called Barge Walk. Before the bridge to starboard, opposite the Swan pub is Wolsey's cottage where the cardinal kept his mistress.

Through the bridge and the nearby railway bridge are riverside gardens on the starboard side in which Kingston Rowing Club has its boathouse. Roy Plomley rowed for this club, the late founder of a very successful BBC radio programme called *Desert Island Discs* in which interviewees choose which eight records they would take with them if stranded on a desert island. The playwright Robert Cedric Sherriff (anti-WW1 play *Journey's End*) rowed at Kingston, too. Kingston has its name from being the coronation place of England's Saxon kings. The writer John Galsworthy and the historian Edward Gibbon were born here.

Hampton Wick is on the port side, and the river continues with Teddington to port and Kingston to starboard to Teddington lock. It was at Teddington that Barnes Wallis developed the 'bouncing bomb' during the 1939-45 war, responsible for bursting dams in the Ruhr.

### **Lock 6 – Teddington**

This is the last lock downstream or the first lock upstream, depending on which way you look at it. Below the lock is the top of the tideway, where the North Sea advances and recedes through London twice a day – 'seven hours up and five hours down' according to Rudyard Kipling, or is it the other way round?



### **DAY 7 - Teddington to Putney (15 km)**

From Teddington lock the river passes the spot where the poet Alexander Pope built his villa and then the extraordinary Gothic structure of Horace Walpole's Strawberry Hill, to port. Ham Lands are to starboard, and then you pass before Eel Pie Island at Twickenham, until recently home of George Sims Racing Boats. Among the residents of the island is Trevor Baylis, inventor of the clock radio. The novelist Charles Dickens picnicked here, and Eel Pie Island was famed for the Eel Pie Hotel in the 1950s and 1960s, where the Rolling Stones played, plus jazz bands with the singer George Melly.

After Eel Pie Island, Ham House is to starboard and Marble Hill Park to port. Marble Hill House is an elegant mansion funded by King George II for his mistress Henrietta Howard, and later occupied by Mrs Fitzherbert, a widow who secretly married the future King George IV.

The river sweeps round to Richmond-on-Thames with marvellous views of the town rising on its hillside to starboard. Right under Richmond Bridge (the oldest surviving bridge on the Thames, 1774-75) is Mark Edwards's boathouse, builder of traditional wooden boats, including the six-seat Thames waterman's cutters, and the replica of the Cornelius Drebbel's 16<sup>th</sup> century submarine. Edwards also built the magnificent royal barge *Gloriana* that led Elizabeth II's jubilee pageant in 2012. Richmond is Regency and has many attractive riverside features.

Through a railway bridge and another road bridge you pass Richmond lock, a 'half tide' lock which controls the tide between here and Teddington. Old Deer Park is now to starboard and Isleworth to port, the river passing the large Isleworth Island before turning to starboard to come between Syon Park to port and Kew Botanical Gardens hidden to starboard. Syon, once a convent, passed through various royal and noble hands, and the landscaping was done by 'Capability' Lancelot Brown (1716-83). The world-renowned botanic gardens at Kew began as a plaything for Princess Augustus, wife of Prince Frederick, parents of the mad King George III. A Dutch merchant built Kew Palace in 1631.

On the port side the Grand Union Canal (from Birmingham and the Midlands) joins the Thames, and passing the islands Lot's Ait, Hog Hole and Brentford Ait, Kew bridge comes into view. You now pass Strand-on-the-Green on the port side, a pretty village dating from the 1700s, among whose residents was the eccentric Hanoverian court painter, Frankfurt-born Johann Zoffany (1734-1810). There are great pubs like the City Barge that you will not be able to stop at. The railway to Richmond crosses here, before Oliver's Ait, an island named for the seventeenth century republican leader Oliver Cromwell.

After the village you will pass London University's boathouse on the port side, and approaching Chiswick Bridge (Sir Herbert Baker, 1933) you will pass Putney Town rowing club to starboard and Mortlake Anglian & Alpha and Quintin boathouses to port. Mortlake Anglian & Alpha is used by Cambridge at the end of the University Boat Race, and Quintin by Oxford. Passing under Chiswick Bridge, the finishing post for the Boat

Race (and starting post for the Head of River Race) is outside Tideway Scullers School, with the notional line stretching across the river to an orange-coloured stone outside the Ship public house.

This marks the beginning of the last four miles of this tour as you follow the great S bend of the Boat Race course to its start at Putney. For this stretch, the banks are known as the 'Middlesex station' on your port side and the 'Surrey station' on starboard, named after the counties that once governed the territory.

You will pass the Whyte Hart to starboard before passing under the trellised Barnes Railway Bridge (the boathouses of Thames Tradesmen RC, Civil Service and Emanuel School are either side of it to port) and the riverside frontage of Barnes to starboard (where there is a famous jazz pub called the Bull). Duke's Meadows with its bandstand are to port, and then an embankment rounds a huge bend at Chiswick past the island known as Chiswick Eyot to Hammersmith Bridge.

Chiswick has been home to all manner of royalty, politicians, writers and artists. It has a beautiful church opposite Chiswick Steps, a marker point on the Boat Race course, while its best-known building is the Palladian mansion, Chiswick House. Hogarth House was the home of the painter William Hogarth, and the Redgrave family – not Sir Steve the oarsman but the actors Sir Michael and Rachael and their children Vanessa, Lynne and Corin – once lived on the Mall.

On the port side you pass the Royal Corinthian Yacht Club which shares premises with Sons of the Thames RC. The Dove, a pub beside the river on the port side before you pass Hammersmith pier, began as a coffee house in the 1700s. King Charles II and his mistress Nell Gwyn were supposed to have canoodled here, but where didn't they? The poet James Thomson (1700-1748) wrote the words to patriotic song *Rule Britannia* in an upstairs room of the Dove.

Sir Joseph Bazalgette designed Hammersmith Suspension Bridge in 1887, replacing an earlier suspension bridge by Tierney Clark which was the model for the Chain Bridge linking Buda and Pest in Hungary. William Morris, the champion of the arts and craft movement during the 1800s, lived at Kelmscott House, facing the river, a few doors away from the bow window of British Rowing's HQ (formerly the Amateur Rowing Association) with its blue-painted boathouse (BR is the governing body of rowing in England and Great Britain – but not Scotland, Wales or any part of Ireland). Rowing clubs at Hammersmith include Latymer Upper School, Furnivall (founded as a sculling club for women), and Auriol Kensington (founded to cater for employees of big stores). St Paul's School and boathouse is set in its playing fields on the opposite side to Hammersmith Mall.

Passing under Hammersmith bridge, you will see the arts centre known as Hammersmith Studios to port and Harrods Depository on the starboard side, built as a warehouse for the famous department store but now converted into apartments. Opposite Harrods are the offices of the architect Richard Rogers with its arch roof that follows the sun, next door

to the River Café. On the starboard bank is a recently developed nature reserve, and on the towpath you may spot a bust of Steve Fairbairn, the Australian coach who founded an 'ism' in rowing and started the Head of River Race in 1926. The Head now attracts 420 men's eights each spring to the time trial from Mortlake to Putney. Fairbairn's bust is the mile post, an important marker on the Boat Race course.

On the port side there are dwellings until you reach the Fulham football stadium. Barn Elms rowing centre appears to starboard, and now Putney Bridge can be seen ahead. On the port side, Bishops Park stretches as far as the bridge. On starboard is Putney Embankment with its rowing clubs and pubs.

Putney is the centre of rowing in the London, where some of the biggest and most famous clubs line the embankment – London, Vesta, Thames and Imperial College among them. Putney became a rowing centre soon after the railway reached the village from central London in the 1850s. Rowers looked for quiet water away from the heavy river traffic and pollution of central London.

The Putney-to-Mortlake course was used for the world professional sculling races of the 1800s. Known as the Championship Course, it is now the course for the Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race, the Wingfield Sculls (upstream to Mortlake on the incoming tide), and for the Head of the River Race, the Women's Head of River, the Schools Head and smaller boat time trials downstream from Mortlake with the outgoing tide. Schools with boathouses at Putney are Dulwich College, King's School Wimbledon, and Westminster.

Putney is connected by rail, tube and bus to central London. From here to Gravesend in the Thames estuary, professional watermen in their thousands worked the river and raced each other for money until bridges, steam boats and public transport curtailed their world. But it is these professionals and their counterparts from other rivers and ports who gave us the sport and recreation that we love.

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