

Richmond Venturer at Hampton Court



River Thames boat project

DRAWN BY THE RIVER - SUE BAILEY'S RIVERSIDE WALK

To mark the River Thames Boat Project's 21st Anniversary, Hampton artist Sue Bailey is planning to walk the length of the Thames path from the source to the Thames Barrier, a distance of 184 miles, stopping to sketch and paint along the way to record her journey. Her plan is to start at the end of April, so if you are on the tow path keep a look out for her. She anticipates it will take a month complete the walk, after which there will be an exhibition of selected art work.

If you would like to contribute to Sue Bailey's Riverside Walk please send a cheque made payable to River Thames Boat Project, 66 Hill Street, Richmond, Surrey TW9 1TW, or you can donate online by going to: www.justgiving.com/richmondventurer

JOHN FRYE

2009 marks the 21st anniversary of the River Thames Boat Project and this is a brief history of our boat *Richmond Venturer* and the charity, writes **Miranda Jagers**

In August 1908 a 26m barge was launched in Lekerkerk, near Utrecht, she was named De Tyd Zal l'Lereren or Time Will Tell – now owned by the River Thames Boat Project. A hundred years later she is living up to her original name.

In 1908 a 26m barge De Tyd Zal l'Lereren or Time Will Tell was launched in Lekerkerk, near Utrecht. Other than several changes of name little is known of her first 80 years but a careful look at hull and decks gives some clues – there are no signs of rigging, so she was not a sailing barge. She might have been horse-drawn, but more likely was powered by an enormous two cylinder semi-diesel Duetz engine.

Along with many other barges we think she was turned into a landing-craft to take part in Operation Sea Lion, Germany's proposed invasion of the UK. Many of these barges had their bows cut-off completely, but in De Tyd's case the starboard side was cut away to form a ramp.

Thankfully, England was not invaded but forty years later she did cross the Channel, bought by Sir Richard Branson for use on the Thames, but he subsequently decided to build a new boat.

1988 was European Year for the Environment and the then Mayor of

Richmond –upon–Thames, Martin Emerson launched the idea of an “environmental boat” for all to visit and learn about the river. Alan Burough, a businessman, Thames philanthropist, oarsman and amputee heard about the Mayor's plans, acquired De Tyd or Gerja as she was called and sold her to the Boat Project for the princely sum of £1. The barge was officially handed over to the Mayor in May 1988 at a riverside ceremony in Twickenham.

The first task was to start planning the conversion work and raise the money to buy a new engine and the Trustees appointed a Project Manager, Miranda Jagers, who had been involved as a volunteer. Within a fortnight of starting the job Miranda heard that the BBC's “Challenge Anneka” wanted to feature the fitting out of the barge, but first the conversion had to be designed, with cargo hatches replaced by a steel deck, fresh water and sewage tanks fabricated and a companion way built to provide access down below.

In October 1990, the “Challenge” was set by the science class of Collis School, Teddington and volunteer boat builders, engineers, joiners, electricians and painters fitted out the saloon, galley and lift and painted the boat. A large amount of equipment was donated and Anneka

Rice chose the name Richmond Venturer, because Venturer Scouts had worked aboard and the boat would “venture” out on the river from Richmond.

Anneka and her team had met their challenge but there was still much to do before the Venturer could fulfil the Mayor's aim and over the next five years money was raised and materials donated to complete the conversion from cargo to community boat.

She is now very well equipped, environmental education materials, reference books and binoculars are available for clients to use and all public areas are accessible to people with disabilities.

From Martin Emerson's initial idea 21 years ago the River Thames Boat Project has developed into a thriving local charity, with two full-time and two part-time staff, assisted by 65 volunteers. They run our programmes providing environmental education activities for schools, respite trips for young carers, day and residential trips for people with disabilities and older people. Every year thousands of people of all ages from support organisations, day centres, care homes and schools discover the joys of the river and life afloat aboard the Richmond Venturer.

To find out more about the River Thames Boat Project go to: www.thamesboatproject.org or phone 020 8940 3509 