

# Lock houses saved

In December we were delighted to hear that the Environment Agency had decided to abandon the planned disposal of lock-keepers' houses.

We first heard rumours of this plan early last year and immediately expressed our concern to the EA, who confirmed that it had been decided to sell 10 of the 57 houses for lock-keepers, with a further 12 to be rented out, as part of "an efficiency review".

This news led to an unprecedented campaign involving a wide-range of organisations, lock-keepers and their families, trade unions, Thames Valley and other MPs and individual members of the public.

The EA's decision to remove resident lock-keepers was challenged on many grounds – reduced flood control, the safety of boaters and others, the need for immediate action on water levels and to ensure navigation, the fact that keepers and their families are part of local communities with their houses very much part of the riverside scene and heritage.

The River Thames Society is proud to have played a part in the campaign, starting from a unanimous decision of the 2008 AGM, followed by a letter-writing exercise with members expressing concern to MPs, media interviews, petitions, special leaflets and display material much in evidence at river events.

We also voiced opposition to the disposal plans directly to the Waterways Minister, the EA's Chairman and Chief Executive, also at meetings of various EA liaison bodies – River Thames Alliance, River User Groups, Waterways Working Group etc. on which RTS is represented.

The EA was clearly taken aback by the huge amount of criticism and eventually undertook to put matters "on hold" pending a wider review of terms and conditions of employment. But this seemed to be only a delaying tactic, allowing the sales and rentals to proceed when opposition had, hopefully, died down and the pressure continued.

Finally, early in December the Thames

Regional Director, Howard Davidson announced that:

*"The EA has listened carefully to those who raised objections to our original proposals announced earlier this year. We have carried out a full review into this, and issues such as flood risk and our response to incidents outside normal working hours have been key to our considerations.*

*As a result, we have reached the conclusion that keeping a resident lock and weir keeper at the 45 lock sites along the Thames is the sensible way forward to enhance how we manage the river as safely and efficiently as possible."*

Mr Davidson also said that five houses that are either completely off river or not on or adjacent to a lock site would be disposed of, when staff could move from them into ones that became vacant at lock sites. He repeated a commitment that no lock and weir keeper will be made redundant or homeless as a result of this proposal.

**The RTS Council pays tribute to everyone who took part in the campaign and who kept up the pressure that led to this "victory for common sense".**



TONY ELLIS

Day's lock



COLIN REYNOLDS

Shifford



COLIN REYNOLDS

Sandford



COLIN REYNOLDS

Godstow



COLIN REYNOLDS

Culham



JOHN SKUSE

Cookham

# Two saved

The PLA's magazine *Tidal Thames* reported that Richmond lock-keeper, Bert Wolff saved a disabled man from drowning after his wheelchair toppled into the river.

Alerted by a member of the public, who had seen an abandoned wheelchair below Twickenham Bridge, the Lock's work-boat was launched and the man was found under the water on the Middlesex side. He was then taken ashore, given oxygen and carried to a waiting ambulance.

At Gravesend PLA Planning Officer Lucy Owen glanced up from her desk in her riverside office to see a casualty being swept away by the current.

Lucy sounded the alarm and the PLA's patrol boat *Gunfleet* was sent to the scene, with the crew, Paul Dixon and Paul Lingham able to catch hold of the woman and bring her ashore.



Bert Wolff and Lucy Owen



## London Bridge 800th anniversary fair

This year is the 800th anniversary of the completion in 1209 of the first stone bridge across the Thames under the direction of the priest-architect Peter de Colechurch.

To celebrate this important milestone the Lord Mayor's Appeal 2009 is planning to re-create a medieval fair on London Bridge on July 11. A sheep drive will be included amongst a variety of fun events planned for the day. The City of London Corporation and Transport for London have agreed that the whole bridge will be closed all day to traffic.

The Livery Companies and Guilds are expected to be in costume and will be encouraged to use their cutters and barges, there will be craft stalls, medieval cookshops, archery and other competitions.

For further information contact The Lord Mayor's Appeal 2009 office on 020 7728 2680 or the website [www.thelordmayorsappeal.org](http://www.thelordmayorsappeal.org).

## Blessing of the river

The annual ceremony of Blessing the River took place on January 11, the Feast of the Baptism of Jesus.

The congregations of St. Magnus the Martyr, which is on the City of London side and Southwark Cathedral on the South Bank met at the centre of London Bridge for the service, which concluded with a wooden cross being dropped into the river.

The parish boundaries meet in the middle of the river and the middle of the Bridge, as do the Dioceses of London and Southwark.

This event was the first held by the Cathedral to mark the 800th anniversary of the opening of the great medieval London Bridge.



JILL MEAD

## Port of London authority centenary

This year the PLA celebrates its centenary and events include an exhibition at the Museum of London Docklands and a concert Celebrating London and the Sea.

The exhibition covers the history of the PLA from 1909-2009 and runs from March 30 to April 19 at the Museum, No.1 Warehouse, West India Quay, Hertsmere Road, London E14. Daily 10-6, nearest stations DLR West India Quay, Tube Canary Wharf, Ferry to Canary Wharf Pier. Tel: 020 7001 9844, [info@museumoflondon.org.uk](mailto:info@museumoflondon.org.uk).

The Concert is on 18th April, 7.30 pm at Cadogan Hall, London SW1, Sloane Square Station. City of London Choir, London Mozart Players and soloists in a programme which includes Haydn's Nelson Mass, excerpts from HMS Pinafore, London Pride, Old Father Thames, Rule Britannia. Plus the Fanfare Trumpeters of the British Legion and Watermen of the Port of London in ceremonial dress.

Proceeds to the RNLI, tickets from PLA offices and Cadogan Hall; contact 01474 562400, [enquiry@pla.co.uk](mailto:enquiry@pla.co.uk)

The new visitors' centre at King's Lock



ENVIRONMENT AGENCY

## King's lock wins prize

The Environment Agency's magazine *Thames Riverviews* reports that the extension to the King's lock office has won the award for Environmental Project of the Year from the Institution of Civil Engineers.

This will act as a visitors' centre and it was the brainchild of lock-keeper Leigh Fenton and Relief Lock-Keeper Sarah Markham. The building has been used to trial green products and techniques for use in future projects on the Thames and other EA waters.

Funded by the EA's Carbon Reduction Fund among the green features are foundations made from used car tyres, walls of straw bales faced with lime render, timber that's either re-used, unwanted or from sustainable forests and photovoltaic cells on the roof to generate electricity.



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HMS *Illustrious* sails up the Thames

# Illustrious visits London

As a centrepiece for the Royal Navy's Remembrance Weekend celebrations in November HMS *Illustrious* sailed up the Thames to moor at Greenwich.

The ship had a busy year on deployment in the North Sea and Indian Ocean, where she was shadowed by a TV crew making the *Warship* documentary series for Channel Five.

*Illustrious* was built by Swann Hunter on the Tyne and was commissioned in 1982 whilst at sea on the way to the Falklands. With a complement of over 750, increasing to over 1,000 when Air Group personnel are embarked and a top speed of 28 knots she carries Harriers, Sea King and Merlin helicopters.

# Towpath news

River Warden Co-ordinator (non-tidal), Dick Mayon-White reports that major improvements have been made to the towpath through Oxford, removing all the dangerous places where the bank had eroded.

Unfortunately, the spur for this repair was the drowning of a boy two years ago, but the Council has really made a good job of the repairs. This contrasts with pot-holes in other reaches, most notably at Goring.

# Medals saved

The RNLI's London and South East newspaper *Compass* reported that Dunkirk veteran Charles Brown had been reunited with his medals thanks to volunteers from Teddington lifeboat station.

Mr Brown was boarding a boat when his medals fell into the river and he feared they were lost forever. However, experienced divers from Teddington RNLI volunteered to search for them and, despite poor visibility, found them and returned them to a delighted Mr Brown.



The RNLI's Jean-Philippe Trenque and Charles Brown

JANE MORGAN

# Launches and rescues rise

In the first half of 2008 the busiest lifeboat station in London and the South East was Tower, with 180 launches resulting in 40 people being rescued.

The figure for all the Thames stations – Gravesend, Tower, Chiswick and Teddington was 317, with 96 rescues.

# Boat fire safety

A new leaflet Fire Safety on Boats has been issued by the Department of Communities & Local Government with the Boat Safety Scheme.

This gives practical advice on how boaters can be safer on board and includes tips on smoke and carbon monoxide alarms, safe cooking and heating, fuel and power safety, having an emergency plan and what to do in the event of fire.

To download a copy of the leaflet visit: [www.campaigns.direct.gov.uk/firekills/leaflets.html](http://www.campaigns.direct.gov.uk/firekills/leaflets.html)

# Support for new moorings

The Central Tideway & Estuary Branch has welcomed a proposal to establish moorings and a sailing club on Erith Rands near Rainham.

If planning permission is obtained from the London Borough of Havering this will include a slipway and the laying of buoys for moorings, which could be a valuable stopover point for boats coming up the Thames or going down to the Estuary.

## WESTMINSTER VISITS

Another warship seen in London was the Type 23 frigate HMS *Westminster*, which berthed alongside HMS *Belfast* in November. The Freedom of the City of Westminster was conferred in 2005 and on this occasion the crew exercised its right to march through the city.



ROYAL NAVY

# London International Boat Show



DICK MAYTON-WHITE

In mid-winter, when the economic situation is as harsh as the weather, a visit to a boat show is something of an escape from reality. What was there at the London International Boat Show to fuel dreams of summer?

Thames-side companies (Bossoms, Bushnells, Salters and Val Wyatt) were well represented in the North Hall of the Excel Exhibition Centre with a range of day-boats and motor cruisers. Bossoms were showing the *Windrush 25* (see picture) for the first time that this new design has been seen outside their boatyard in Oxford. The *Windrush Weekender* version on show is electric powered and has accommodation for two. I had seen glimpses

of it in the shed when it was being built, and I was impressed by the high quality of finish. More familiar British-built boats were close by – *Shetlands* and *Vikings* – and those imported from the Netherlands – *Antaris* and *Interboat*.

Next to the array of new boats designed for the Thames was the classic boat section. This always gets attention, because it is active in contrast to the many static displays. This year, people were making parts to restore the *Cutty Sark* (see picture). Nearby, there was an elegant launch displayed by *Hambleton Sales & Charter*. However, in my opinion, the most beautiful boat in the show was elsewhere, in the South Hall where Patterson Boatworks from Cumbria had a 25ft cedar strip open launch that could be fitted with a diesel, electric or hybrid engine, and would be perfect for the Thames. Also in the South Hall were the larger motor boats, including the Haines Cruisers from Brays Marine Sales.

I was lucky to be visiting on a sunny day, so enjoyed going outside to see the boats afloat. Here narrow- and broad-beam canal boats, including the *Sea Otter*, were on show, although somewhat overshadowed by a Royal Navy Frigate and the billionaires' yachts that were too big to fit in the exhibition halls. Back in the warmth of the halls, having spent an imaginary fortune on dream purchases, it was time to look for somewhere to moor, someone who could teach boat handling, and some fittings to use up any spare cash. MDL Marinas have some helpful schemes for people who would like to use more than one of their marinas (Penton Hook, Windsor and Chatham). Bisham Abbey Sailing and Navigation School is friendly and very convenient for people who live in Thames Valley. Nauticalia (based at Shepperton) have plenty of extras to adorn any boat and its crew.

What was missing? In contrast to the stands promoting boating in Scotland, Ireland, the Mediterranean and the English Canals, there was no invitation to visit the Thames.

*Perhaps next year, the Environment Agency and Port of London and/or some of the clubs and societies could combine to tell people about the delights and accessibility of the river that flows past the exhibition site.*

**DICK MAYTON-WHITE**

## Talking tugs

A few new working vessels appeared on the tidal Thames during 2008, among which were a trio of tugs. The first of these to make itself visible was *Green London*. This is the ex-*Jim Higgs*, which previously worked for Cleanaways carrying waste containers to Rainham, Essex. It is now operated by the Green Barge Company which is transporting aggregates from Tilbury to the Olympic construction site on the River Lea. It made its public debut at the TOW Barge Drive event back in June. The 77ft, 109grt vessel was built for the PLA in 1959 as *Lord Ritchie*, renamed *Jim Higgs* in 1985, and *Green London* in 2008.

Spotted in central London for a few weeks in August and September was the Medway tug *Elsa*. This is a fairly new-built vessel, of 7.6 tonne bollard pull, hired in to escort the restaurant boat *Symphony*, which had temporary problems with its propulsion. *Elsa* followed behind the vessel on its twice daily runs from Charing Cross Embankment pier up to Battersea Reach, where it was ready to assist as the boat swung round to return downstream from Chelsea Harbour.

The third newly-introduced tug was the GPS vessel *Ionia*. This is a recently purchased Dutch vessel (1956/ex-*Jenny*, ex-*Noordster*), used by GPS to

tow barges of aggregates upriver as far as Wandsworth. The new name is a traditional Thames tug title, which continues the GPS policy of renaming vessels after the famous London Tugs fleets of the post-war years.



*Green London*, Lambeth Reach



*Elsa*, King's Reach

GUY REWIS