

Thames Riverside

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counterbalance

River Thames

The River Thames, also known in parts as the River Isis, is a river that flows through southern England, including London. It is the longest river in England at 215 miles (346 km) in total length. The River starts at Thames Head in Gloucestershire and flows into the North Sea near Tilbury, Essex and Gravesend, Kent through the Thames Estuary.

The River flows through Oxford, Reading, Henley-on-Thames and Windsor before entering London. Tideway section of the river reaches up to Teddington Lock in London Borough of Richmond upon Thames with a water level rise and fall of 23ft

(7 meters). There are 45 navigation locks along the river with accompanying weirs.

It's catchment area covers much of the south-east and small parts of the west of England. Fed by more than 50 named tributaries, the River Thames plays an important role in our geography and culture of the area. There are over 80 islands created by the river with a mixture of freshwater and seawater supporting a variety of wildlife along its banks.



History of the River

The River Thames has been used as an economic resource, maritime route, physical boundary, freshwater source, a food source and leisure/tourism attraction. There has been human habitation living off the river dating back to the Neolithic times (3300-2700 BC).

River barges travelled daily from Oxford to London carrying timber, wool, food, livestock and even stone from Cotswolds used to rebuild St Paul's Cathedral after the Great Fire of London 1666.

During the 16th and 17th centuries the guild of waterman were established and the Thames became a safe route for Londoner's to move through the city. By the 18th century, the river was one of the busiest waterways in the world as the British Empire expanded and London became the centre of the world.

As the city's population grew, it's industries discarded their rubbish into the river including waste from slaughterhouses, fish markets and tanneries as well as cesspools from houses when it rained. It deteriorated further in the 19th Century when raw sewage and gaswork by-products were discharged into the Thames harbouring many harmful bacteria and chemicals. This led to the Great Stink of 1858 where pollution

in the river reached such extremes that the House of Commons at Westminster had to be abandoned.

Under the supervision of Engineer Joseph Bazalgette an effort was made to improve the condition of the river by constructing massive sewer systems on the north and south river embankments along with building reservoirs and pumping stations on the river to help improve the quality of water supply.

During the Victorian era many railway and road bridges were constructed across the river which in turn reduced the commercial activity. This led to sporting and leisure use increasing with the establishment of boat races and clubs. The decline of the Empire in the years following WW1 reduced the economic prominence of the river.

Following the post-war era, the Port of London remained one of the UK's three main ports, however most trade moved downstream from central London. With the decline of heavy industry within the city and improved sewage treatment, the water quality improved and aquatic life returned. In 1982 the Thames Barrier opened to protect the city from seasonal high tides.



The River Thames with St. Paul's Cathedral on Lord Mayor's Day, - 1748 Canaletto



River Thames study with Tower Bridge and Tugs, watercolour on paper - Barry T. Pearce

Research & Route

The River Thames has played an important role in the financial, cultural and physical fabric of London.

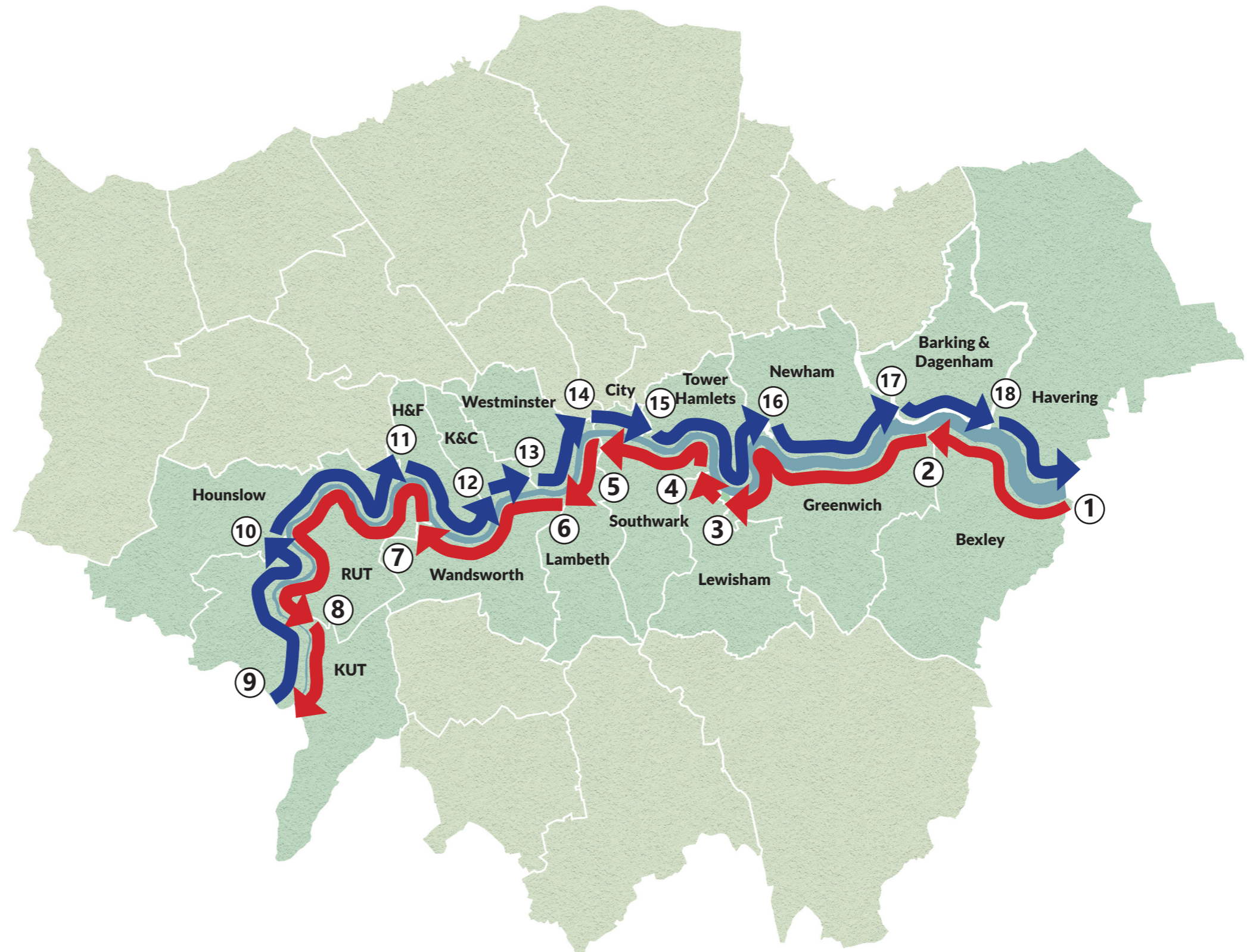
I have long been inspired by the work of Richard Rogers (Lord Rogers of Riverside) and his projects alongside the River Thames including his late office and housing estates. My biggest delight were his ideas related to "London as it could be" and the Arno Masterplan on civic improvements to the banks of the river to encourage riverside living, working and enjoyment. Rivers are an asset to the communities that live next to them, creating vibrant new public realm for pedestrians.

Alongside reading the public life studies of Jan Gehl and following in his footsteps we at Counterbalance have decided to 'Look and Learn' by getting out on the river, seeing how it works, using all our senses and asking ourselves what river and city do we want, whilst exploring the interaction between public life and public space.

Having grown up near London and lived there for the last 10 years I have always connected with the River as a reminder of my youth and education during my time in Portsmouth although I have not been able to explore the river to its full extend and its relationship with city.

We therefore took this as an opportunity to walk the full extend of the GLA element of the River Thames on both sides of the river. Starting on the south bank in Bexley up to Kingston upon Thames and crossing the river ending our journey in Havering.

We will be observing and recording a visual diary along with mapping our findings and publishing them as we complete each element of the route. The findings can be found on our website and Instagram account [thames_riverside](#).



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