

Diamond Jubilee Queen's Rowbarge Project

As a celebration of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, and to highlight and pay tribute to the role of the River Thames in the history and pageantry of London through the ages, Lord Sterling, with the support of a small syndicate consisting of The Gosling Foundation, Eyal Ofer, Lloyd's Register, and the Weston Foundation, has commissioned a Royal Rowbarge for Her Majesty the Queen. It will echo those used on royal occasions in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. Most importantly, the vessel will form a great benefit and long term legacy of the Jubilee in the years to come.

The design and build of the barge utilises structures and techniques that have changed little since the clinker built long boats of Anglo-saxons who first arrived on our shores in the 4th century AD and carries on a centuries-old tradition of royal rowbarges on the Thames. Its similarity to the vessels in the famous Canaletto painting *The River Thames with St. Paul's Cathedral on Lord Mayor's Day* will be immediately apparent. Commenting on the Project, David Starkey said *"As an historian, I'm delighted to see the revival of the great tradition of royal rowbarges and pageantry on the River Thames. But this beautiful wooden vessel doesn't only look to the past. It will provide a focal point for the celebration of the Jubilee and also promises to be a lasting asset to the charities and educational organisations using the river in their work"*.

The Queen's Rowbarge is being constructed by Mark Edwards of Richmond, one of the few remaining traditional boatbuilders in the UK, who is leading a team of young and enthusiastic craftsmen from around Britain. The vessel will be furnished using traditional British woods. When completed it will be close to 90 feet long and will be rowed by 18 oarsmen. It will fly Royal and City Standards at the appropriate times, and will carry 16 crests representing the Realms of the Commonwealth.

The Queen's Rowbarge will take part in a number of high profile events this year, such as leading the Jubilee Pageant on the Thames on 3rd June 2012. Her Majesty the Queen will be aboard the Spirit of Chartwell, a motor vessel which will be beautifully decorated for the occasion. In addition to the pageant, the rowbarge will also be a key part of numerous other functions to celebrate this Jubilee and Olympic year.

Thames Alive, the organisation dedicated to promoting the well-being of the river, including its sporting activities, notably rowing, is expected to undertake the running and maintenance of the vessel on behalf of The Maritime Heritage Trust on an ongoing basis, and to make it available for the training and education of young people, such as the Sea Cadet Corps and those with disabilities, and for other charitable purposes.

The Queen's Rowbarge will form a tangible link between Britain's status as a seafaring nation and maritime London. The River Thames, the rowbarge's home water, played a defining role in world trade which remains the essence of a city which is still the hub for the world's leading maritime organisations. The City of London led by the Lord Mayor, an oarsman himself, plans to make considerable use of the row barge to promote the City. Typical opportunities include The Lord Mayor's Show Flotilla, resurrected in 2011 after 146 years; as the 'flagship' for the Livery Company

occasions that involves their shallops and cutters; at The Mayor's Thames Festival; at Henley Royal Regatta and at other established rowing events

Although the keel was laid just 8 weeks ago, since when rapid progress has been made, the project team have been working closely with the Maritime and Coastguard Agency and Lloyds' Register for nearly 6 months to finalise the design. Their expert advice and support regarding the safety and seaworthiness of the finished vessel has been invaluable. A great amount of research has been carried out by Simon Stephens, a curator at the National Maritime Museum, into the design, operational and social use of these great barges during their history. Much of this will be covered in an exhibition to be held at The National Maritime Museum in Greenwich this year, which will be called "The Royal River, Power, Pageantry and the Thames" and will be curated by David Starkey.

The team working with Lord Sterling on the project consists of naval architects Stuart Roy and Ed Burnett, project manager Damian Byrne, and master boatbuilder Mark Edwards. Additional support for the project has been widespread, but special thanks are due to Cushman and Wakefield, who in the space of 48 hours identified an ideal industrial unit owned by Segro, in which the vessel is being built. Segro most generously provided the space at no cost, and British Telecom very kindly set up communications for the site in under 24 hours. Young people from the Princes Trust are working on the project for experience and training.

Commenting on the project, five-time Olympic rowing champion Sir Steve Redgrave said *"I visited the yard where the rowbarge is being constructed, and was captivated not just by the beautiful lines of this magnificent vessel, but by the infectious energy and enthusiasm of the young team working to build it. Speaking for myself, I can't wait to have a go at rowing it!"*

Echoing these sentiments, Christopher Rodrigues CBE, Chairman of VisitBritain and past-Chairman of the Leander Club said *"Britain is famous across the world as a country rich in heritage and pageantry, and our strong naval traditions are carried on by a history of sporting success in rowing. This vessel unites these two strengths very neatly in this Jubilee and Olympic year, and I very much look forward to seeing the finished article on the river and joining Steve in the boat"*

The Mayor of London, Boris Johnson said: *"The whole world is looking forward to London hosting an outstanding summer of awe-inspiring events, starting with the wonderful Thames Diamond Jubilee Pageant in June that I am proud to support. The Queen's Rowbarge with its design reflecting vessels from the Thames' eighteenth century water pageants is set to be a truly striking addition to the Jubilee celebrations."*

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Notes to Editors

Lord Sterling has a long connection and great experience in the maritime history of Britain, and London in particular. He is Chairman of the National Maritime Museum and of the Cutty Sark Trust, and was formerly Executive Chairman of P&O Steam Navigation Company for many years. He holds the rank of Rear Admiral in the Royal Naval Reserve, ran the London celebrations for the Silver Jubilee, and was Chairman of the Steering Committee for the Queen's Golden Jubilee.