

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR LADIES ROWING TEAM IN THE PORT OF LONDON CHALLENGE ROWING RACE 2011!

Congratulations to our ladies rowing team from the Poplar Blackwell Rowing Club who represented the Water Conservators in the Port of London (PLA) Challenge Rowing Race on Monday, 11 July 2011 and WON!

There were 12 teams in the race from Temple Pier to Chelsea Harbour (about 40 minutes rowing time) and some of the teams had all men crews. Our ladies beat the lot!

The PLA Challenge on the River Thames is a race for the cutters of various Livery Companies. The Company Cutter, the 'Water Forget-me-not', has impressively won this race on seven previous occasions, but this is only the second time we have had an all-female crew. (The first being last year when our team still managed to beat decisively all but the burly male team from the Port of London Authority itself.) Once again our crew was trained and entered into the Challenge by the very able Bargemaster, Johnny Dwan, who clearly exacted the same high standards from this team as he has used in the past to train the Oxford University Boat Race crew.

The newly engraved solid silver winner's cup, donated by the Port of London Authority, will be on display for all to see at the Michaelmas lunch in September.

The Port of London Challenge and the Thames Waterman Cutter

The first Port of London Challenge Race was held on 18 July 1996 and was started by Betty Boothroyd, the then Speaker of the House of Commons. It was arranged as a curtain-raiser for the famous Doggett's Coat and Badge Race later the same day. It also showcased the growing sport of Waterman's Cutter racing and is now an established event in its own right.

The Thames Waterman Cutter is 34 feet long with a beam of 4 feet, 6 inches and is a design based on drawings of boats used by the Watermen of London in the 1700's. In keeping with the concept of traditional rowing it has fixed seats for up to six rowers and room for a cox and passenger. It is also simply adapted to the role of Ceremonial Livery barge with extra seating for passengers under a stern canopy. In this form the Cutter closely resembles the decorated craft commonly depicted in historical prints and pictures of the River Thames in the 17th and 18th Centuries.

Only five Cutters contested the inaugural race in 1996 but such has been the growth in popularity of Cutter racing in the intervening years (there are now nearly 30 of them on the Thames), that modern races now have 'staggered starts'. The Cutters are set off in waves, so their crews are not only racing against those in their own starting rank, but also against the clock as the crew that records the fastest time over the course wins.



Our six ladies rowers (sporting their smart new Water Conservator T-shirts, designed specifically for this event), along with their male cox, are pictured here with Barry Dennis, Master, and the winner's cup.



Cutters are crewed by six rowers and a cox and, in keeping with tradition, a passenger must be carried. Our 'mystery' passenger on this occasion was, apparently, the boyfriend of one of the crew!