

## Floating in the Flotilla at the Jubilee Pageant

What an honour to be chosen to board the **Water-Forget-Me-Not** for this amazing historic event – the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Pageant – an event comprising one of the largest number of vessels



from the UK and the Commonwealth ever assembled on the Thames. Over 1,000 vessels gathered comprising man-powered boats, historic boats, pleasure boats, working boats, boats which survived the Dunkirk evacuation, bedecked in their finest rigs and sporting crews and passengers dressed in their finest traditions and livery, each boat with its own incredible story to tell.

Our crew of five race-winning ladies and their able Cox in the Worshipful Company Cutter struck out from Mortlake Boat Club by Chiswick Bridge at 10.45 a.m. on a grey, damp morning heading towards Hammersmith Bridge. We were joined down the river by a steady stream of boats of all shapes and sizes, all seeking their assembly points ready for the magnificent Royal Barge, Gloriana, to take up her regal position at the head of the flotilla.

Crowds had already assembled on the bridges, on the towpaths and on every balcony bordering the river, all equipped with bunting, flags, glasses of bubbly, red white and blue hats, scarves



and clothing of every kind imaginable, undaunted by the cold and damp conditions – a wonderful sight and sound – true British spirit at its very best.

At 2pm with Gloriana in position, the signal was given and to the tune of the royal bells and cheering crowds, with flashing blades we set off. Juggling and nautically negotiating to keep our allocated positions, the expertise of our Cox and rowers was paramount. The sound of the patriotic cheers of the spectators, sometimes 20 deep, was very emotional and a wave of pride spurred us on towards Tower Bridge.



Her Majesty the Queen took the salute of “tossing oars” from the Royal Barge, The Spirit of Chartwell, a salute which dates back to Norman times. This was a particularly moving moment for the crews and passengers, if not somewhat precarious!

As the flotilla wound its way down the Thames, we viewed our magnificent city from a new angle, river views of the Palace of Westminster, St. Paul’s,

the wonderful warhorse display at the National Theatre and the extraordinary avenue of sail encompassing St. Katherine’s dock with its gathering of tall ships, warships, sailing barges, cocklers, oyster smackers, herring drifters and fishing trawlers, all too tall to pass under the bridges.

This majestic day was brought to an end by the London Philharmonic Orchestra playing and the Royal College of Music Chamber Choir singing the National Anthem, accompanied by spectacular pyrotechnics.

Once we passed Tower Bridge, our crew had had enough of pottering about and decided to race back to their Boat Yard at Poplar Rowing Club and with the wind in our faces and the rain down our necks, sleeves, boots etc., we finally arrived at the south-eastern corner of the Isle of Dogs, seven hours after we set off in the morning. Soaking wet, gibbering with cold and not being in the mood for further sight-seeing, we headed off for the warmth of the Boat yard and the loos!!



The magnificent scene of the man-powered boats positioned behind Gloriana is to be the subject of a painting which will hang in the Savoy. **Water-Forget-Me-Not** will never be forgotten.

Bobbing about on the river, one day in June 2012, the Mistress and I were privileged to be part of our own Canaletto canvas.