

## The River Thames

The Thames is a river flowing through narrow country, which connects London with the North Sea. After the Severn the Thames measuring 346 km is the second-longest river in Great Britain.

In spite of its fame and its substantial length the Thames is not counted as one of the big European rivers. In the province Ontario in Canada there is also a Thames with a town called London.

### Course:

The spring of the Thames lies near the village Kemble in the Cotswolds, 110 metres above the sea level. Afterwards the Thames flows by Oxford, Wallingford, Reading, Maidenhead, Eton and Windsor. The headwaters of the Thames lie in Gloucestershire, from where it forms the traditional borders between the counties. The borders are between Gloucestershire and Wiltshire, between Berkshire on the southern shore and Oxfordshire in the north, then between Berkshire and Buckinghamshire, Buckinghamshire and Surrey, Surrey and Middlesex and between Essex and Kent. Even today the Thames is an administrative border, even if it is one, which is no longer so important.



*Map of the River Thames*

The first arms of a river of the Thames passed Greater London with Syon House, Hampton Court Palace, Richmond and Kew, before it flows through the London city centre, afterwards Greenwich and Dartford, before it reaches the North Sea with Southend in an estuary at the mouth. An estuary is the wide water body at the mouth of a river or stream on a lower coast. The area to the west of London is also called Thames Valley, nevertheless, politicians rather speak of the Thames gateway.

The river sign starts to show about 90 kilometres before the mouth for tide activity, because the North Sea influences it. London was made according to tradition the capital of Roman Britain because there in the year 43 B.C. the first tide activity appeared, but by a combination of different factors this point has moved upstream during the last 2000 years. In London the water contains light shares of sea salt or also so-called brackish water.

Between Maidenhead and Windsor the Thames supplies an artificial lateral canal created for flood control, the Jubilee River. Besides, the Thames contains countless islands.

A towpath developed, which today as the Thames Path runs along the river far almost its whole length.



*The Thames passes by some of the sights of London, including the Houses of Parliament and the London Eye.*

### **History:**

England and Continental Europe formed at the time of the last ice age a big coherent landmass, which is also called "Doggerland". At that time the Thames was still a tributary of the Rhine.

During the small ice age in the 17th and 18th century the Thames was often frozen over in winter. In 1607 a "frost fair" was held for the first time in the form of a tent town on the river, which offered a row of pleasure. After the temperatures rose from 1814 onwards, the river did not freeze over any more completely. Another factor could have been in 1825 the construction of the new London bridge : The new bridge had fewer pillars and permitted a higher assembly-line speed to the river, so that it was not slow enough to complete freezing over any more.

In the 18th century the Thames developed into one of the most-used waterways of the world, because London became the centre of the big British Empire. Upstream the Oxford canal from 1790 created a connection between the Thames near Oxford about to the Coventry canal in the Midlands, which made the coal deliveries to London easier.

At this one of the worst accidents on the river happened. On 3rd September 1878 the congested pleasure boat Princess Alice and the coal freighter Bywell Castle collided on the same latitude as Gallions Reach. Through the most terrible shipping accident in British waters about 640 people died.

The soiling during the big stench in summer, 1858 and the stench resulting from it became so bad that meetings of the House of Commons had to be interrupted in Westminster for some time. Therefore, big sewage canals were built on both shores under the management of the engineer Joseph Bazalgette.



*Joseph Bazalgette*



*The Thames at Hampton*

Not until 1914, did the commercial relevance of the Thames decrease, which came about primarily because of the railway, the increase of the traffic and the decline of the empire. Slowly life returned again to the dirty river, which earlier had been dead and today the Thames is one of the cleanest rivers flowing through a metropolis of the world.

In Woolwich Reach, London, there has been a barrage against the tide influence since 1980. In 2006 a whale got lost in the Thames. It died, although one tried to pilot him again back towards the sea.



Sources:

- Museum of London
- Museum of London Docklands
- Travel guide (publisher: Baedeker)
- Exercises from school

## **Interview:**

**Question:** “Have ever seen the Thames Barrier Gates closed?”

**Answer:** “Yes, they were closed twice on 9<sup>th</sup> November 2007. It was after a storm surge in the North Sea, which was comparable to the one in 1953.”

**Question:** “What was the main danger?”

**Answer:** “The main danger of flooding from the surge was on the coast above the Thames Barrier, where evacuations took place.”

**Question:** “Did the Thames Flood Barriers prevent the biggest damage?”

**Answer:** “The winds abated a little and, at the Thames Barrier, the 9<sup>th</sup> November 2007 storm surge did not completely coincide with high tide.”

**Question:** “Do you think that the Thames Flood Barriers will save you still in the future from floods?”

**Answer:** “I hope so but I can’t say so much about it. I just can imagine that we will need in the future a better and another one. Today we have problems like global warming and the sea is going to be more dangerous than in past times. Maybe we should really think about a stronger flood barrier.”

On the one hand many other people are of the same opinion. Because of things like global warming and other nature catastrophes they are scared and don’t know if the Thames Flood Barriers will save them in the case of a real flood. Some of the people we interviewed also think that the Flood Barriers should be renovated because today they are 27 years old and they don’t trust the technology used 27 years ago.

On the other hand most of the people just know that there is a Flood Barrier but they aren’t really interested in it. Above all the young persons who have never witnessed a flood are disinterested in it and don’t care about it.