

THIS ENGLAND



△ The launch of the Royal Thamesis, a replica of an historic river craft, marked the 20th anniversary of a traditional rally on the Thames.

RALLYING ROUND ON THE RIVER

It is seen along with Wimbledon and Ascot as one of the high points of the English social calendar, and thousands flood into Oxfordshire every summer for the Henley-on-Thames Regatta. The spotlight is therefore deflected from what dedicated river folk regard as Henley's real event of the year — the Thames Traditional Boat Rally, which this time round celebrated its 20th anniversary.

To commemorate the occasion in proper style, *Royal Thamesis*, a specially-commissioned replica of the Queen's Shallop (a light, open boat) was launched. The last time such a craft graced the river at Henley was in 1912 when the original, now in the National Maritime Museum, bore King George V and Queen Mary to the regatta.

Resembling the royal shallop as closely as possible, the replica has a brilliant white hull burnished with gold and scarlet trim, and a red and gold canopy. At the stern is a gold-faced carving of Thamesis (Old Father

Thames) based on the sculpted, downstream-facing keystone on Henley bridge.

When the craft slipped smoothly into the water she did so to a welcome of hooters and horns, whistles and whoops from the boats bobbing around her.

In 1912 the original shallop was crewed by eight. The latest version, shorter to facilitate transport by road, was crewed by six of the Queen's Swan Markers under the helmsmanship of the Queen's Swan Master. As she cleared the jetty, her scarlet oars were lowered into the Thames for the first time.

To qualify for the Thames Traditional Boat Rally, which draws hundreds of skiffs, gigs, punts and launches from all around the country and abroad, vessels must be built of timber, or canvas, or riveted steel — welding is definitely out. Plywood boats are also permissible, so long as the hulls are planked clinker (for the uninitiated, overlapping planks).

Unlike many of those who flock to the colourful whirl that is the Henley Regatta, those taking part in the rally are generally content to remain in or near their boats, quietly contemplating their surroundings and raising glasses to their lips, or assiduously burnishing brass and copper; but however they spend their time, they depart the river feeling the world a better place.

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