## TRACING THE RIVER THAMES

### "ALONG HIS SILVER-WINDING WAY"

### AIDEEN E. BRODY

テムズ川、水源から河口まで

# A. E. ブローディ

テムズ川の源流グロスタシャからロンドンを越えて北海に流入するテムズ川の流れについて述べる。英国の南部を西から東へと横切るテムズ川は、有史以前より交通路として使われてきたが、上流では静かな田園地方を流れる川であるが、下流ではこの国特有のさまざまな歴史を反映している。この河川をめぐる有名な行事、人びと、場所、この河川を利用して行われるスポーツ、河畔の娯楽のあれこれについて述べ、今日のテムズが抱える環境問題にも触れた。

The poet Edmund Spenser wrote of walking "Along the shoare of silver streaming Themmes." Milton called it "royal-towered Thame." Wordsworth surveyed the scene from one of its bridges and penned his famous line "Earth has not anything to show more fair." What is it about England's River Thames that has inspired so many of her poets to rhapsodize on its charms? All rivers are mesmeric with their everchanging reflections in rippling water. The Thames adds to this with the constant movement of all varieties of river craft; it glides past elegant buildings and under curved bridges; it responds dramatically to changes of tide and weather, and, above all, it is connected with so much of England's history. No wonder, then, that such a source of inspiration is beloved by the poets. In this report, we will follow the river from its beginnings in Gloucestershire to its end beyond London, taking a look at places located on the river, at events connected with the river and, less seriously, at attractive riverside relaxations.



Fig. 1 The River Thames — Source to Estuary

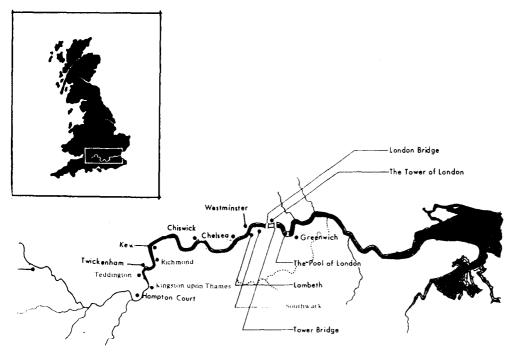
### The River - Source to Estuary

Gloucestershire is one of the West Midlands counties and is perhaps better known for its River Severn, Britain's longest river, than for the Thames. Yet it is here that the source of the River Thames is located. In an open grassy field off the A433 road, three miles to the southwest of the old Roman administrative center of Cirencester, there is a small, muddy patch of ground. This is Thames Head, the humble beginning of London's mighty River Thames. Were it not for the stone marker announcing the fact, no-one would make any connection between the two. The marker reads

THE CONSERVATORS OF THE RIVER THAMES

1857 - 1974

THIS STONE WAS PLACED HERE TO MARK THE SOURCE OF THE RIVER THAMES



and the footpath leading to it is signposted

Source of Thames Coates

(Coates is a small village a little to the north of Thames Head).

Although it looks so unlikely a spot for the start of a great river, this area is, in fact, in the foothills of the Cotswolds. It commands a fine view over the surrounding countryside. From this point, the Thames flows underground for a short distance, appearing lower down as a very shallow stream. It runs beside the main street of the village of Ashton Keynes, where small bridges, not much more than a meter in length, link each house to the street. The first small town on the still infant river is Cricklade. This town was occupied by the Romans, is recorded as having a mint in Saxon times, and still has a building which dates back to the 13th century. Its fine parish church, St. Sampson's, has an interesting tower, built in 1553 by John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland, giving it a cathedral-like appearance.

Both Ashton Keynes and Cricklade are in the county of Wiltshire, close to its boundary with Gloucestershire. This part of the country comprises the water meadows (or flood plain) of the upper reaches of the Thames, and there are several streams, such as the Churn, joining the river here. The Thames is additionally swelled by the Coln and Leach tributaries, which join the main river above and below Lechlade, respectively, and later by the Windrush and the Evenlode, flowing down from Gloucestershire to join the Thames in Oxfordshire.

The Cotswolds are limestone hills and the landscape in this area is marked by green fields and grey limestone buildings. From the fifteenth century, this was sheep country, and many of the lovely 15th to 17th century churches and manor houses to be seen in the Cotswolds were built by rich wool merchants. There is still plenty of sheep-grazing to be seen today, though most of Britain's raw wool now comes from Australia.

By the time the Thames reaches Lechlade, it has become a river deep enough to be navigable by large boats, though still quite narrow. As such, it has become a very popular place for boating, and many and varied are the boats which use St. John's Lock just below the town. A historical note for Lechlade is that Cotswold stone for building St. Paul's Cathedral was loaded onto barges here for its long journey downriver to the City of London.

The stretch of the Thames below Lechlade runs through quiet countryside and small villages as it flows into Oxfordshire. The village of Buscot, together with Buscot Park, its manor house, Buscot Old Parsonage, and extensive farmland and woodland, all belong to the National Trust. Kelmscot is famous for its association with William Morris, the artist, writer, and designer of furniture, wallpaper, tapestries and fabrics for the home. He lived in the Elizabethan Kelmscott Manor near the river from 1871 to 1896. This house is now a museum showing some of Morris's designs. It belongs to the Society of Antiquaries of London, and is open only on Wednesdays. Among other writers who have lived in this area are the poets Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Alexander Pope and Matthew Arnold, and the author of *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, Thomas Hughes.

Radcot is another attractive little village on the river. It has a fine 14th century triple-arched bridge which is especially beautiful when reflected in the quiet water.

The Thames, as highway, has been much travelled upon from prehistoric times. For getting across the country, it was safer, and quicker, than other forms of transport, even down to the mid-nineteenth century. Not until the coming of the railways did rivers and canals yield to a swifter form of transportation. Once they did, commercial

traffic on the upper reaches of the Thames ended, and the era of river-as-playground began. From commercial Thames to leisure Thames, it comes as no surprise to find a large number of restaurants, inns, pubs, and fine houses on its banks, some of them of considerable antiquity.

At Newbridge, in Oxfordshire, shortly before the river takes a turn northwards, there is the pleasant inn The Rose Revived, where a convivial meal can be enjoyed from a terrace overlooking the river.

Bablockhythe, once a ferry crossing point on the river below Oxford, has been given fame by Matthew Arnold in the eighth stanza of his poem *The Scholar Gypsy* with the lines

Thee, at the ferry, Oxford riders blithe,
Returning home on summer nights, have met
Crossing the stripling Thames at Bablock-hithe,
Trailing in the cool stream thy fingers wet,
As the slow punt swings round:

A favorite haunt of Oxford's residents is the Trout Inn at Godstow, two miles north of the city. Some people like to travel there slowly, poling upstream in the shallow, flat-bottomed boats known as punts. Others prefer the vigorous three-mile walk along the footpaths through Port Meadow. This latter is a flood plain for the Thames, fortunately not built over as so many others have been. Consequently, when it is flooded, as happens regularly every winter when the river is swollen by rain or melting snow, Port Meadow becomes a haven for a wide variety of birds: duck, geese, plover, lapwing, and redshank. However, the prudent drive to the Trout at this time of year anyway. It is in summer that the Trout Inn is busiest, when darkness arrives late, between 9 and 10 pm, and when one can sit out in the garden enjoying a meal, and listening to the soothing sound of water rushing over the weir.

This is a very old inn, which once was a hospice for visitors to the convent across the river. Visit the ruins of the nunnery where the beautiful Rosamond, a rival for the affections of King Henry II, died in 1176 — possibly poisoned by Queen Eleanor of Aquitaine, the King's wife. The flimsy wooden bridge in the garden of the Trout cannot be used. Go out and across the narrow stone bridge just outside the inn.

One famous punter to Godstow was Lewis Carroll, real name Charles Dodgson, who was a lecturer in mathematics at Christ Church College, Oxford. While on the

long journey upstream in the company of Alice Liddell, young daughter of the Dean of Christ Church, he invented stories to amuse her which were later published as *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*.

Another favorite Oxford pub, the Perch, is located at Binsey, a small village downstream from Godstow. It also can be reached by walking across Port Meadow, or from the tow-path, or, of course, by car. In fine summer weather, the stretch of river between the Perch and the Trout can be as crowded as the motorway on a Bank Holiday! Binsey is featured in a poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins mourning the felling of a row of poplar trees there, 'Binsey Poplars felled 1879'. In the local churchyard can be seen St. Frideswide's well, whose water was known for its healing properties. Called "Binsey treacle mine", (the word "treacle" having both the meaning of "a medicinal compound" as well as "syrup"), the name appealed to Lewis Carroll's quirky sense of humor, hence his invention of the "treacle well" in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.

And so we arrive at Oxford, the first major town on the banks of the River Thames. The original Latin name for the river was "Tamesis", possibly from tam, meaning "wide", and isis, meaning "water". In and around Oxford the river is more often called the "Isis" than the "Thames". Another river, the Cherwell, also joins the mainstream in Oxford. Since Oxford is also a university city, with some 10,000 students, it is natural that the rivers play a major role in its life, both for sport and for recreation. The high calibre students who attend the university often go on to become writers of one kind or another, so references to the Thames, not just at Oxford, but throughout its length, are frequent in literature. The poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins, wrote of Oxford, "Cuckoo-echoing, bell-swarmed, lark-charmed, rook-racked, river-rounded", which is a nicely succinct description.

The two main activities on the river at Oxford from spring to autumn are the leisurely punting, and the frenzied boat racing. Almost everyone, from young to old, indulges in the former, but only dedicated youth do the latter. Practice for the boat races is hard and unremitting. One goal is to win the "head of the river" title by beating all the teams from other colleges. The crews train for this competition on the narrow stretch of river from Folly Bridge, near Christ Church College, downstream to the lock at Iffley. There is also the annual Boat Race, between teams from Oxford and Cambridge Universities, but this race, which has been held just before Easter since 1856, is rowed over the four and a half miles from Putney Bridge to Chiswick Bridge

in London.

From Oxford, the Thames continues its southward course down through the Goring Gap to Reading, its route dictated by the lie of the land, with the Chiltern Hills to the east and the Berkshire Downs to the south-south-west. It is a charming stretch of river, much of it in open countryside. In the small towns or villages, many interesting old buildings can be seen, for example, picturesque thatched or half-timbered dwellings. It is a busy section for those on boats: there are eight locks between Abingdon and Pangbourne alone. It is historic, too. At Abingdon, there are the ruins of a tenth century Benedictine Abbey. Across the river from Dorchester, there is a Celtic hill fort dating back to about 1500 BC, atop the Sinodun Hills, while Dorchester itself was an important Roman settlement, and has a magnificent late Norman abbey. Both Wallingford and Goring were crossing points for the Thames in ancient times. The Bronze Age trading route Ridge Way and the pre-Roman Icknield Way join each other at Goring.

On a lighter note, Jerome K. Jerome's *Three Men in a Boat* stayed at the Barley Mow Inn near the bridge in Clifton Hampden and at the Swan Hotel in Pangbourne. Kenneth Grahame, author of *The Wind in the Willows* lived and died at Pangbourne, where the river settings in the book have hardly changed since the story was written. Lastly, John Galsworthy, in *The Forsyte Saga*, placed Soames Forsyte's country home at Mapledurham.

Reading, an industrial town by the river, is well-known for its university. King Henry I (1068-1135) lies buried in what remains of a Norman Abbey dating from 1121. The Abbey Gate still exists. From 1785 to 1787, Jane Austen and her sister Cassandra attended a two-room school above this gate.

Sonning is the next village on the river. The Thames from Sonning onwards is increasingly busy with colorful rivercraft of many varieties. The river is flowing in and out of Oxfordshire, Berkshire, and Buckinghamshire before dipping briefly down into Surrey and then entering the Greater London suburbs. There are numerous riverside inns and attractive private houses with, as often as not, smooth green lawns running down to the river and trees overhanging the water.

During the summer months, the river from Henley-on-Thames to Bray is alive with the sights and sounds of river regattas. The most prestigious of these, Henley Royal Regatta, is held in July every year, and is as much of a social occasion as a sporting event. Henley town is pleasant with many elegant and historic buildings. One

coaching inn, the Old White Hart, was built in 1340. Two riverside hotels with good restaurants which overlook the regatta area are Angel on the Bridge and Little White Hart Hotel.

Slightly further to the north is Medmenham, now a quietly respectable village, but formerly, in the 18th century, the headquarters of the notorious Hell Fire Club, whose members held wild parties in the rebuilt Norman Abbey. The Dog and Badger Inn, a short walk from the river, is popular with boaters. Built in 1390, it became an inn in the 16th century.

The Compleat Angler Hotel, famed for its good food and fine riverside location, is situated at Marlow. The hotel was named after a book, *The Compleat Angler*, written on the pleasures of fishing by Izaak Walton. The book came out in 1653, and took Walton forty years to finish — presumably because he spent so much time fishing in the river near Marlow! It was, at any rate, said to be his favorite stretch of river. The poet Shelley and his wife, Mary, lived in the town, both of them busy writing: Shelley, 'The Revolt of Islam', and Mary, *Frankenstein*.

A little further on is Cookham, home of the painter Stanley Spencer (1891-1959). One of his most famous paintings is of "swan-upping". The office of the Keeper of the Royal Swans is in Cookham and the old ceremony of "swan-upping", the picking up and marking (with small cuts on the beak) of swans on the Thames, takes place near the town. The right to own swans on the River Thames between London Bridge and Henley is limited to the monarch and two Livery Companies (the Vintners' and the Dyers'). The ceremony takes place when the cygnets are two months old and ownership is established by marking them. The Royal Swans are marked with five cuts, while the others are marked with only two cuts.

Below Cookham Lock, a beautiful stretch of river, thick with beechwood trees and particularly glorious in autumn, runs past Cliveden, famous as the home of the Astor family and meeting-place for the 'Cliveden Set' — composed of politicians and international celebrities —prior to the Second World War. The house now belongs to the National Trust, but is also a hotel, albeit a prohibitively expensive one.

As the river runs down to Maidenhead, it passes Boulter's Lock, which is still pretty much as described in Jerome's *Three Men in a Boat* — except for an up-dating of boat and boaters' fashions, 20th century instead of 19th century. Boulter's Lock Inn, built in 1726, has good food in its restaurant overlooking the river.

In Maidenhead, there is a fine railway bridge with a single wide span over the

river — remarkable considering its material: brick. It was designed by Isambard Kingdom Brunel, who was a very versatile engineer, responsible for many fine designs around England, including the Clifton Suspension Bridge near Bristol. In nearby Bray, just below Maidenhead, the Waterside Inn enjoys an enviable reputation for fine food. The river then flows into Windsor.

The most notable thing about Windsor has to be its castle — the largest in England and dominating both town and river. The obvious advantages of a site high on a hill and guarding any approach by river was realized from the time of the ancient Britons onwards. Today's castle covers thirteen acres and was founded by William the Conqueror, but did not become a royal residence until the time of King Henry I (early 12th century). From then until the 19th century, buildings of one kind or another have been added to it. Unfortunately, the northeast wing was badly damaged by fire towards the end of 1992 and is still under repair. In order to help with the repair bill, entry to the castle, previously free, now costs £8 (\$12). Rooms open to visitors include the State Apartments, the Gallery, and St. George's Chapel. From the battlements, there is a magnificent view over the surrounding countryside, including the small town of Eton, across a bridge from Windsor, where the world-famous public school, Eton College, is located. No less than 20 British prime ministers were Old Etonians. Some of Eton's buildings date back to 1440, the year it was founded by King Henry VI. Let us end this description of Windsor and Eton by quoting from Thomas Gray's "Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College":

Ye distant spires, ye antique towers

That crown the watery glade,

Where grateful Science still adores

Her Henry's holy shade;

And ye, that from the stately brow

Of Windsor's heights th'expanse below

Of grove, of lawn, of mead survey,

Whose turf, whose shade, whose flowers among

Wanders the hoary Thames along

His silver-winding way.

The next significantly historic site on the Thames is Runnymede, near Egham

on the south bank of the river, where in 1215 King John was obliged by his barons to sign the Magna Carta, the political charter which put some limits on royal power and gave greater protection to the people.

Continuing downriver, one reaches Hampton Court, Cardinal Wolsey's pride and passion, his futile forfeit to Henry VIII, whose favorite palace it became, and the rival to Versailles of later monarchs.

The river at this point curves in a semi-circle. Hampton Court Palace was built on the north bank within the curve, a huge red-brick building with more than a thousand rooms, and nearly as many chimneys! Construction was begun in 1514, when Cardinal Wolsey was at his most powerful, but by 1529 his wealth and power were winning him only enemies, notably the King, who accepted Hampton Court as a gift, but nevertheless imprisoned Wolsey for treason the following year. It was used as a royal residence by subsequent monarchs, but since the reign of George II (1727–60), it has been used to provide "grace and favor" residences for high-ranking former servants of the sovereign. Part of it is open to the public, notably the State Apartments, and of course the magnificent gardens and the maze.

Like Windsor, Hampton Court also suffered major damage when a fire broke out in one of the grace-and-favor apartments six years ago. Restoration work was completed by July, 1993, at which time the Queen re-opened the King's Apartments to the public.

From Hampton Court, the river winds through Kingston upon Thames, Richmond, and Kew, a beautiful stretch which is home to many fine mansions, parks, and gardens, built in the days when the Thames was still an important thoroughfare, and the King, his court, and the aristocracy favored this district for their out-of-town houses.

In the 9th century, Kingston upon Thames was where the Saxon kings were crowned. It was well-known as a safe crossing point on the river, and it possessed a bridge as early as the 12th century. In fact, for centuries there was no other bridge until London Bridge (connecting The City on the north side to Southwark on the south). Kingston today is a busy place, with excellent shopping facilities, but it still preserves the atmosphere of a long-established market town. Particularly attractive is the riverfront, where there are several good restaurants.

Mute testimony to the extravagant lifestyles of the rich and powerful of earlier ages are the splendid mansions on both banks of the river between Kingston and

Richmond. Halfway between the two towns is Twickenham. Here, at Strawberry Hill in 1747, Horace Walpole, son of the prime minister, bought a house on the north bank of the river. He had it rebuilt in the Gothic style, to the surprise, if not always the admiration, of his contemporaries. It now functions as a teachers' training college, and can only be viewed from outside.

A little further downriver on the south side is the very beautiful Ham House, built in 1610 by Sir James Vavasour, of the court of King James I. The National Trust acquired this building in 1948 and it is now a branch of the Victoria and Albert Museum.

Back on the north bank, almost directly opposite Ham House, is York House, built in the 17th century. It has had various aristocratic tenants, notably James, Duke of York (who reigned as King James II from 1685-1688). It is now used for offices by the Richmond Town Council.

Not far from York House is Marble Hill House and Park, which King George II had built for his mistress, Henrietta Howard. It was used later by Mrs Fitzherbert, the mistress and secret wife of George IV, when he was still Prince Regent.

Marble Hill is on the outskirts of Richmond, one of the most charming towns on the Thames. There was a royal palace at Richmond in the 12th century. It went through various vicissitudes as the centuries passed, and there is nothing left now but a Tudor-era gateway. However, there are many beautiful 17th and 18th century buildings in the town, and the view from Richmond Hill, home to the rich and famous of today, is superb, a landscape artist's dream. Richmond is especially favored by its location between vast areas of parkland: Marble Hill Park and Petersham Meadows upstream, and Syon Park and Richmond Park downstream. Richmond Park runs into the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, where Kew Palace, built in 1631 for a London merchant, is located. George III used it temporarily, but it was left empty after 1818. It is now looked after by the Department of the Environment.

Continuing downriver, we reach Chiswick Bridge, where the Oxford-Cambridge Boat Race finishes, and Chiswick, which has another large park area, Duke's Meadow, where the 18th century Chiswick House can be seen. It is open to the public all year.

Below Chiswick, the river runs into a more industrial section, with warehouses, water works, an oil depot, and a power station. But here and there are fine buildings dating from a pre-industrial age, and stretches of parkland. Fulham Palace, home of the Bishops of London, is set in Bishop's Park, just above Putney Bridge where the

Boat Race starts. Curving round again, the river then passes Chelsea, a popular residential area from the 18th century, where the charming Victorian-era Albert Bridge crosses the river to Battersea Park.

A little further down on the south bank is Lambeth Palace, home to the archbishops of Canterbury for about 700 years. Diagonally opposite is Westminster, with the Houses of Parliament and Westminster Abbey. The Abbey was consecrated in 1065 and since that time every English monarch has been crowned there. By 1269, the Abbey had been rebuilt, modelled after the cathedrals of Reims and Amiens in France. Inside there are over 1,000 monuments, commemorating some of the greatest names in English history. The old Palace of Westminster was the main London residence of the monarch until the reign of Henry VIII. After he moved to Whitehall Palace in 1529, Westminster Palace was turned over to the State. Sadly, most of it burned down in a fire in 1834, so the present Parliament buildings date only from that time.

There is much to do and see in London, but here we are concerned only with what is on the riverside. Downstream diagonally across from Westminster is the South Bank complex, comprising concert halls, theatres and galleries. Many old ships are moored along this stretch of the river, at least one of which is an excellent restaurant. At Southwark, on the south side, Shakespeare's Globe Theatre stood. An identical new Globe is still under construction there now. At this point, the river flows under London Bridge, once practically a town in itself with houses, shops, even a chapel. The buildings were pulled down in 1760. The bridge was replaced in 1832, and again in 1973, this latter version being taken down stone by stone and shipped to the USA, where it was re-erected in Arizona. The next bridge downriver is Tower Bridge, next to the Tower of London. Tower Bridge is the only drawbridge on the Thames, and although it looks older, in fact dates from 1894. With its two towers and walkway, it is certainly very distinctive and photogenic.

Together with Westminster, the Tower of London ranks high on the sightseeing schedule. Boats ply from Westminster to the Tower all day long, which is quite the most pleasurable way of travelling between the two. Look for Traitors' Gate, now bricked up but visible from the river, through which even Queen Elizabeth I travelled when she was imprisoned in the tower in 1554. Though designed as fortress and then palace, the Tower's most notorious use has been as prison and execution ground.

St. Katherine's Dock is near the Tower. It was once used for storage ware-

houses but is now a marina and boat museum, and the buildings have been converted into apartments and shops. The very modern Tower Hotel stands between the Tower of London and St. Katherine's Dock. Its restaurant, The Carvery, overlooking the Dock, serves a very good hot buffet-style lunch.

Below Tower Bridge, the Thames is crossed by tunnels under the river. The banks are lined with wharves down to Greenwich which, like Hampton Court, is also closely associated with British sovereigns. Henry VIII was born in the palace that once stood there, as were his daughters Mary and Elizabeth I. James I and his wife spent much time there, and the consort of Charles I had the English architect and designer Inigo Jones (1573–1652) build the Queen's House. In the reign of Charles II, Greenwich Palace was pulled down, and the Queen's House was enlarged. All the buildings at Greenwich were given to the Navy by William and Mary. A naval hospital was built to a design of Christopher Wren, and the Queen's House is now the National Maritime Museum. The whole complex is designed to look particularly effective from the river.

The character of the river turns industrial again below Greenwich, with gasworks and dockland. At Woolwich, the Thames Barrier was built in 1982 to protect London from flooding. In good weather, boats ferry sightseers downriver to see it!

Beyond this the Thames becomes an estuary and flows into the North Sea, thus ending its 215-mile journey from Gloucestershire.

### **Postscript**

Upstream, beyond Teddington, where the tidal Thames ends, the river has always been relatively clean, with good fishing. Downstream, it is a different story. As London grew during the industrial age and the population expanded, the Thames became appallingly polluted. The situation improved slightly towards the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries. But then came the two world wars, with the bomb damage to sewage pipes in the Second World War being particularly disastrous. By the 1950s London's river had become no better than a stinking pond. Through the 1960s and 70s, clean-up work got underway and gradually fish returned to the river. By 1988 salmon were once again running upriver. Today the Thames is clean once again and nearly a hundred fish species have been recorded. However, a new worry has arisen about the use of agricultural chemicals on farming land up-

stream leaching into the river and causing further pollution. Obviously, complacency is impossible in the ecosystem of a river.

There is one pleasure that is increasingly available to those who enjoy walking by rivers. The footpaths and towpaths along the Thames now stretch westward from London for a hundred miles.

Boats of all kinds, from skiffs and canoes to narrow boats and cruisers are available for hire in most towns or villages beside the river for those who prefer to be on the water.

Drinking Thames water, or swimming in the river, is not advised. But by all means walk, run, row or cruise on or along the river, and enjoy the infinite variety of scenery and wildlife: water meadows, quiet willow-shaded backwaters, ancient woodlands, or landscaped parklands, historic buildings, or friendly pubs. What pleasanter way could there be of passing time?

### **Background Reading**

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