

The Thames: The Past and The Present



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William Wordsworth
On Westminster Bridge

*Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!
The river glideth at his own sweet will.
Dear God! The very houses seem asleep;
And all that mighty heart is lying still!*

The Thames is a major river flowing through southern England. While best known because its lower reaches flow through central London, the river flows through several other towns and cities, including Oxford, Reading and Windsor.



The Thames, from Middle English "Temese", is derived from the Celtic name for the river, "Tamesas". The river gives its name to the Thames Valley, a region of England centred around the river between Oxford and West London, the Thames Gateway, the area centred around the tidal Thames, and the Thames Estuary to the east of London.



**The Thames has a length of 215 miles
(346 km).**



The river Thames contains over 80 islands ranging from the large estuarial marshlands of the Isle of Sheppey, Isle of Grain and Canvey Island to small tree-covered islets like Rose Isle in Oxfordshire and Headpile Eyot in Berkshire.



The River Thames can first be identified as a discrete drainage line as early as 58 million years ago, in the late Palaeocene Period Thanetian Stage.



The River Thames has served several roles in human history, being an economic resource, a water highway, a boundary, a fresh water source, also a source of food and more recently a leisure facility.



There are several watersports prevalent on the Thames, with many clubs encouraging participation and organising racing and inter-club competitions.



The Thames is mentioned in many works of literature including novels, diaries and poetry. It is the central theme in three in particular:

"Three Men in a Boat" by Jerome K. Jerome, first published in 1889, is a humorous account of a boating holiday on the Thames between Kingston and Oxford.



Charles Dickens "Our Mutual Friend" (written in the years 1864–65) describes the river in a grimmer light.

"In these times of ours, though concerning the exact year there is no need to be precise, a boat of dirty and disreputable appearance, with two figures in it, floated on the Thames, between Southwark Bridge which is of iron, and London Bridge which is of stone, as an autumn evening was closing in." The figures in this boat were those of a strong man with ragged grizzled hair and a sun-browned face, and a girl of nineteen or twenty. The girl rowed, pulling a pair of sculls very easily; the man with the rudder-lines slack in his hands, and his hands loose in his waistband, kept an eager look-out."



Kenneth Grahame's "The Wind in the Willows", written in 1908, is set in the middle to upper reaches of the river.



The Thames on Canvas

The River Thames has been a subject for artists, great and minor, over the centuries. Four major artists with works based on the Thames are Canaletto, J. M. W. Turner, Claude Monet, and James McNeil Whistler. The 20th century British artist Stanley Spencer produced many works at Cookham.

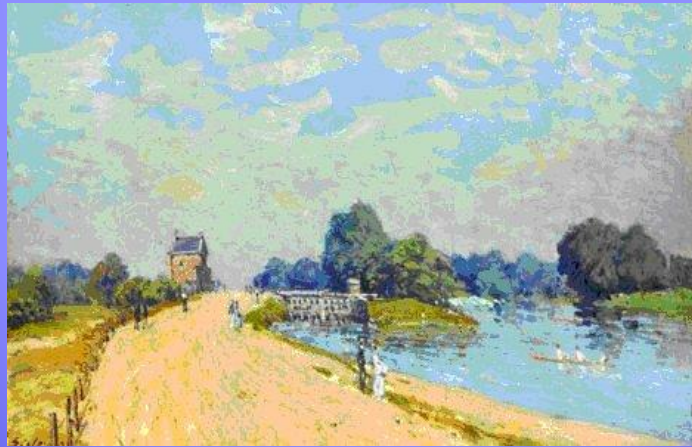
Landscape painters have long been enthralled by London's river - this 19th century view of the Thames at Hampton Court is the work of one of the great unknowns among the French Impressionists, the 'Englishman' Alfred Sisley.



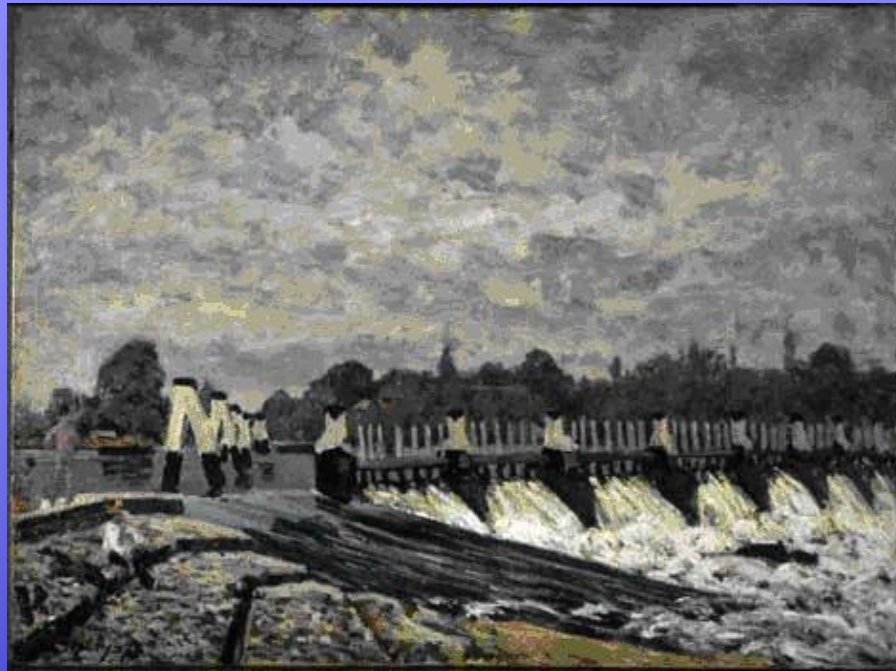
Born in Paris of English parents, Sisley came to the UK only twice during his lifetime to paint, capturing the Thames on the first occasion, in 1874, as a working river and as a pleasure ground.



He chose to ignore London in the main, apart from a solitary canvas depicting Charing Cross Bridge, preferring Hampton Court and the area to the west of the Thames by the nearby riverside village of East Molesey.



Here he could indulge his love of colour
and the interplay of light on water -
sometimes with dramatic results.



The Thames in Ice. 1860. James Abbott McNeill Whistler (1834-1903)



James Jacques Joseph Tissot. The Thames



Claude Monet.
The Thames at Westminster
(Westminster Bridge) 1871



The Thames - Summer Morning near Maidenhead

Alfred de Breanski, Jr. (1877 - 1957)



SEA GULLS. THE THAMES IN LONDON.
THE HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT. 1904

