

ERC Day out - Cutty Sark and a Thames Trip – Sept. 4th 2012 - a personal story

It was with some pleasure that our small group welcomed Andy to the Eastbourne Station Concourse – we now felt we were in fact going to London, because he had the tickets, but also because he had designed the wonderful day that would open before us and knew the way.

Andy was all full of smiles and together with Bob and his grandson, William, full of Weatherstone’s ‘Full English Breakfast’ – they were well set up for the long day ahead.

Our group grew with Simon and Pat joining us at Polegate and Chris and Yvette at Berwick. The train became crowded at Lewes with people standing from Haywards Heath – an indication of the crowds going to London for the Paralympics.



Some one said they were ‘following me’ as I stood tall amongst the crowds at the packed Victoria station but I was so glad of a tall Andy striding out in front leading the way to the Underground - which was also ‘pretty full’, as was Westminster Pier - where we joined by Neil and Anne and Brian and Pam.

We were very fortunate to be among the last to board our boat the ‘London Rose’ and was forced to occupy the upper Cabin rather than the ‘Upper Open Deck’ with its excellent views – but which, later, became almost untenable as the Sun blazed down – its occupants seeking shelter on the lower deck.



Our Thames trip become one long laugh as our ‘Captain’ entertained us with a long series of stories and comments about the places and buildings we passed.

He opened with “They can now carry out marriages on the London Eye – you exchange your vows on the way up - sign the register at the top- and its all downhill after that” and “You see behind the ‘Eye’ the old London GLC building. When Margaret Thatcher dissolved the GLC it was sold to a Japanese consortium. The deal was - they would pay half of the purchase price up-front and the rest out of profits over the next five years. It didn’t make a profit until the sixth year”. And so on down the River pointing out all the major buildings with entertaining tales attached.



He delighted in pointing out ‘Helen Mirram’s ,former, very nice detached property – he said she discovered that everyone knew her address so she moved and her new address is

A little later he pointed out the Monument to the Great Fire of London (1666) – and then across the river towards Greenwich – the “Free Trade Wharf”. He explained that all goods unloaded at the port attracted a payment but during the Great Plague of 1665-

1666 Londoners were starving, because no one would bring food into the City for fear of infection, Dutch Ships brought food which was unloaded at this wharf, and in gratitude, all Dutch Ships were given the concession that they can unload goods here without charge.

Our Captain thought the greatest irony of the trip was HMS Ocean – the Guard Ship for the Olympic Games – the largest ship in the Royal Navy - carrying loads of helicopters armed with all the latest missiles – and bristling with all manner of machine guns and cannons – but relying on a miniscule, lightly armed Thames Police Launch, circling the Ship 24/7, for its protection.



(Note the Ocean's Crew forming the Olympic Logo on the flight deck – as She is towed into position by her Tugs)

A sharpshooting helicopter and A Thames Police Launch – showing Off for the Olympic Photographers.



And so on to Greenwich where many passengers disembarked. We remained on board to continue the voyage to the Thames Barrier and return.

The photos show the Cable Cars and the O² and how close they are to the Barrier. The centre section of the barrier is raised for inspection. But if there were a danger of flooding, by an influx of water from the North Sea, the other sections would be raised. There has been three occasions when London has been at risk and the barrier has been raised.



The Captain's final joke – he said "You see that pile of steel just beyond the barrier (it looked like a pile of steel from milling machines) they export it - the shiny pieces go to make Mercedes and the rusty bits to make Fiats"

We had a wonderful trip down the Thames – in perfect conditions and with an entertaining commentary along the way.

And so on to the **Cutty Sark** under almost a cloudless sky and with **NO WIND**

Conditions she would have hated and which would have driven her Master to drink - he would have preferred to have been able to have driven her to her limits with all her canvas set and her gunnels awash in an Easterly Gale – then you would have seen Cutty Sark in her element – truly doing the job she was designed to do – bringing the cargo home faster than anyone else.



And the cargo was Tea from China. The first ship home with the New Crop could expect to sell the cargo at a large premium – that was why speed was so important and why the Cutty Sark looks more like a racing yacht than a cargo ship.



Here we can see how narrow she is - and what a fine 'entry' she has. She was built for all-out-speed- at the cost of cargo carrying capacity.

That meant to make her Economic her cargos had to Be 'high-profit' 'high ticket' Items.



Her greatest recorded distance in 24 hours was 363 nautical miles (NM) (averaging 15 knots – 17 ¼ mph), although she recorded 2163 miles in six days, which given the weather over the whole period implied she had achieved over 370 NM some days. By comparison, Thermopylae's best recorded 24 hour distance was 358 NM. Cutty Sark was considered to have the edge in a heavier wind, and Thermopylae in a lighter one.

Thermopylae was her great rival and won the 1872 race home from China. Cutty Sark was 400 miles ahead as they got into the Indian Ocean – but Cutty Sark’s rudder gave way and delaying her - She arrived back at London around 7 days after her rival.

But Cutty Sark was doomed from birth – she was launched on the 22 November 1869 and the Suez Cannel was opened Five days previously, on the 17th. The cannal cut the journey to the Far East by more than half – for steamers.

Square riggers were unable to use the Cannel as it is situated in an area of light fickle winds – death to a sailing ship designed to navigate the gale force winds of the Roaring Fourties – and so her useful life was quite short. She shipped wool from Australia for a time and then general tramping, with a different sail layout – but the end was inevitable.



The ‘London Rose’ Captain’s jibe was “It cost £9 million (actually £5 million) to refurbish the Cutty Sark for which they could have built three ships”.

But in fact the Cutty Sark has been wonderfully restored and is truly beautiful – the craftsmanship is excellent – and the materials used - the very best - even a Russian Oligarch would be proud to own her.

Incidentally - Isn’t exciting to be able to walk – inside her, on her decks and underneath her in this wonderful space created by supporting her with struts from the dock walls. A scheme to replicate the pressures on her frames she would experience as if she was being supported by the sea.

Greenwich Foot Tunnel

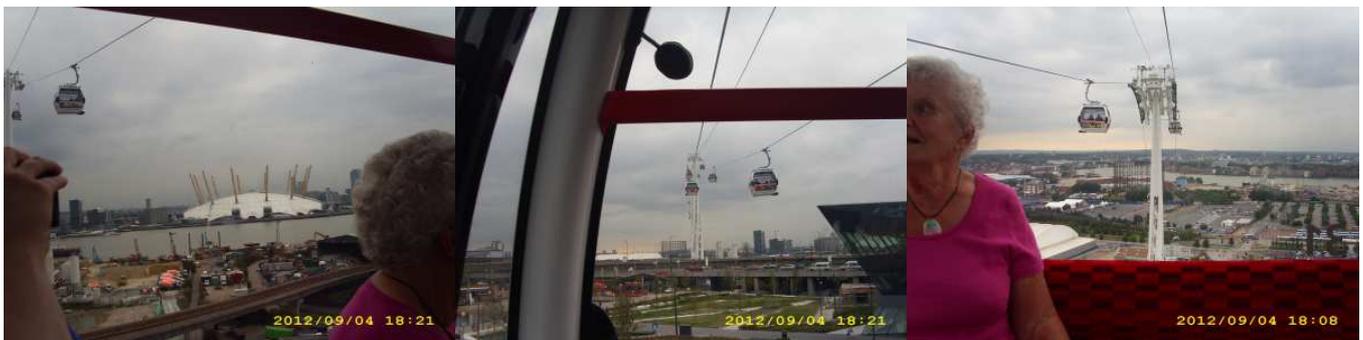


Andy’s great delight was to introduce us to this amazing tunnel under the Thames, beginning at the Bow of the Cutty Sark and ending in Docklands.

It was opened in 1902, is about ¼ miles long – with lifts at both ends – which make things a little easier - but it did seem like it was uphill all the way.

At the end our walk through the tunnel we rubbed shoulders with Bankers leaving their offices – but no one offered us a lift in a Porsche – which we would have accepted with delight as our feet were killing us – but there was further to go to reach our destination – The Emirates Air Line (The Thames Cable Cars) – as the names suggest - now run by Emirates.

At just five minutes each way – it is a wonderful way to rise above the roof-tops and see a different London.



As we were waiting for our party to assemble after the Air Ride we bought some wonderful Real Cornish Cream – Ice-creams – a delicious end to a marvellous day.

Thank you Andy for an exhilarating day out. - Bill