

We now pass under one of the newest bridges on this part of the Thames. Built in 1996 and opened in September of that year this footbridge, Summerleaze Bridge, had a dual purpose since it was also an earth conveyor, carrying the excavation spoil from the new Flood Relief Channel constructed north of the main river from Taplow to Eton. Between the river and the flood relief channel lies the Eton Rowing Lake, to which a number of rowing clubs have transferred their regattas each year. This is the venue for the rowing events for the 2012 Olympics, having already successfully established the rowing world championships.

Just before it on the left can be seen the tail of the cut into which the old flood relief channel was joined to help Maidenhead after the floods of 1947 when the river rose well above its normal winter levels and inundated much of the eastern side of that town.

It is somewhere about these parts that the Three Men in a Boat of Jerome K Jerome fame had their sad lunch of beef with no mustard and an unopenable tin of pineapple which was consigned to a watery grave. The tin was rather dented if you're still thinking of looking for it.

Next, to the left of the main stream, is Monkey Island, the name of which has been variously attributed to the paintings of monkeys on the ceiling of a pavilion on the island, erected by the third Duke of Marlborough; or a fanciful corruption of "Monks' Ait", since there was believed to have been a monks' cell there. Besides the pavilion there is a first-class hotel which has been extended, refurbished and generally elevated into exclusiveness. On your right lies the village and manor at Dorney.

The first plans for the New Thames Bridge which dominates this reach were considered in 1935, not for the M4 motorway, but to carry the Maidenhead Bypass over the main channel, Pigeon Hill Ait on our left, and the millstream outfall beyond. Work started in 1937 but was stopped in 1940. The design was updated after the war and the 270 ft span and headroom of 25½ ft was opened as the Maidenhead Bypass Bridge in March 1961. In fact this was designated as the M4 bridge although the 'motorway' originally only ran from Langley to the Maidenhead Thicket on the A4.

Bray Lock is to the right of the pool below the weir which is away to our left. Above the weir is the Bray millstream which runs behind Pigeon Hill Ait and does not return to the river channel until just under the New Thames Bridge behind us. Bray Lock is the shortest lock below Caversham at 134 ft, first constructed in 1845 and rebuilt quite shortly afterwards, as many were, in the present, slightly different, location. It was rebuilt again in 1888 and the lock house in 1911 on what used to be called Parting, or Parton, Island. At this point we wind ship to return to Windsor descending the river and so retracing our journey slightly faster as the current will help us along.

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## Boveney to Bray

### The 2 Hour Trip

FOR THE FIRST and last part of your cruise, between Windsor and Boveney, you should study the leaflet '*Windsor to Boveney*' that covers the 40 minute trip which will have been handed to you with this supplement.

The 2 Hour Trip covers almost 5 miles of picturesque Thames scenery with a number of sights of historic interest which are described in these leaflets.

Due to circumstances outside our control, it may not be possible to proceed as far as Bray Weir and Lock as we may be delayed by excessive boat traffic at Boveney Lock which we will be using in both directions on this trip.

**B**OVENEY WEIR on the Berkshire side, to your left coming upstream, is where French Brothers' 40 minute Trips turn back for Windsor. Today we will be ascending Boveney Lock which allows us to bypass the weir into the next 3 mile 'pound' or 'reach'.

The first 'pound lock' at Boveney was opened in November 1838, after plans for a lower station in the Cuckoo Weir Stream and a rounding off of Clewer Point had been rescinded two years earlier. Earlier flash weirs here probably go back to the 13th century. The first lock-chamber was constructed where the boat-rollers are now sited, the present chamber being installed in 1898 with the present boat slide shortly afterwards.

Above the lock on the right comes Boveney Church, dedicated to St Mary Magdalene, and dating from the 12th century, now cared for by the lock-keeper at Boveney. Services are not often held here although a number of film and TV companies visit the location for a medieval religious setting. To mind comes the 1990 Robin Hood film with Kevin Costner and ITV's Inspector Morse. It is suggested that it was originally built as a place of worship for bargemen, since there was a timber wharf here, and this may explain why there was need for a church where little or no village exists.

On the right is the Eton College boathouse with its unique construction supported on curved wooden trusses. The building is conveniently situated for the new rowing trench which has been built for the college, south of Dorney Common,

Opposite lies Bush Ait which divides the river from the start of the Clewer Mill Stream. The stream no longer turns the mill which has disappeared but carries the modern yacht or motor cruiser to her berth in the Racecourse Yacht Basin behind us.

Now stands Sutherland Grange on our left with its attendant cottages facing the Maidenhead Road at its closest point to the river, which further along come a number of buildings such as "The Willows" and modern bungalows looking out onto Ruddles Pool. On our right we come to Surly Hall Point, a name which has survived to remind us that a hundred years ago Eton boys used to row up to the Surly Hall Inn on the opposite shore for refreshment. The inn, which could be approached by a chain ferry from the towing path was closed by its owner, the Duchess of Sutherland in 1899 and the building entirely removed by the autumn of 1901.

Above Ruddles Pool is the Willows Caravan Park against which are moored a line of residential houseboats. This colony seems to have existed since World War II, a time capsule perhaps, illustrating the austerity of the prolonged housing shortage which ran for a good many years after.

Next on the left comes Windsor Marina. There has been a boatyard here for many years, well before the marina was excavated in the 1970's. Originally known as The Willows Boatyard, it is now owned by MDL, who operate Penton Hook Marina further downstream and Bray Marina further up this reach. Eton Excelsior Rowing Club follows on south bank – originally established in 1826.

Above Windsor Marina is Water Oakley, site of a wharf, originally known as Queen's Wharf since Bray which lies ahead had royal

connections in that the lands hereabout were always vested in the Queen consort. Earliest records show the wharf was here in 1305. However, the Victorian Neo-Gothic edifice at the top of the bank was erected in 1859 in imitation of a Rhineland castle for Richard Hall-Saye, a JP who lived there until 1874. From him it passed to Lord Otho Fitzgerald who had a waterwheel erected on the bank. During World War II General de Gaulle was a frequent visitor which gave rise to the belief that the house was the HQ in Britain of the French Resistance. The exterior was often used by Hammer Films for their horror epics. In 1979 the house was sold by the last owner's trustees to the present owners who converted it into a hotel.

Still on your left, just above Oakley Court comes a bungalow behind which stand the Bray Film Studios. These buildings form an extension of an older house known as Down Place which was taken over by Hammer Films in 1950. The original house was certainly here before 1518 when the first record of its purchase survives. However, the present building to which the studios were added dates from 1750. The most famous occupant was probably Jacob Tonson, a London bookseller and founder of the Kit-Kat Club, at first sight a gathering of men of influence, letters and the arts but in fact a society formed for the defence of the House of Hanover at a time when it was feared there might be another Jacobite claim to the throne.

Our boat now passes up the right-hand side of Queen's Eyot, at one time considered for the site of the lock which was eventually built at Bray. The right-hand channel is the usual one for navigation and has been so since about 1775 when it was first dredged and widened. In 1898 the island came into the ownership of Eton College as a visiting point for their "wet-bobs", the pupils who take up rowing. A pavilion on the island was destroyed by fire in the 1980's and a new building has been erected by the present Queen's Eyot Club.

Bray Marina, on the site of Pardoe's boathouse, is a flooded gravel working, connected to the river in 1965/6. Like Queen's Eyot, the land is still owned here by Eton College, on both sides of the river.

