

A large container ship with a white hull and yellow bottom, carrying many colorful shipping containers, is sailing on the water. In the foreground, a small black sailing barge with a large, vibrant red sail is also on the water. The barge has 'IRON SIDES' and 'LONDON' written on its side. The background shows a clear blue sky with some clouds and industrial structures along the distant shore.

THAMES SAILING BARGE MATCH

Saturday, 19th July 2025

MATCH PROGRAMME

93rd Thames Sailing Barge Match
DONATIONS WELCOME

THE SAILING BARGE: A USEFUL CRAFT

From a correspondent: The Times 1932

The sailing barge is often looked upon as a steadily decreasing factor in the trade of the Port of London, but the number of entries for this year's barge races on the Thames and Medway justifies the minority who believe that the end of the barge's usefulness is not yet; and when certain facts are taken into consideration, it is easy to agree with them. There are, however, many captains of ships who would not deplore their total disappearance from the reaches of the river.

The manner in which barges are kept under control by their small crews (for each of the river barges there is usually a captain and a mate, who is also cook, while the coasters carry about four hands all told) is a mystery to seamen who have been used to craft of a different build and rig. To watch these shallow vessels so heavily laden that every swell threatens to overwhelm them, is to be fascinated by the ease with which they ride out a rough sea.

Easy it looks, but after how many years of practice!

Like poets, bargemasters are born, not made. From their childhood they have been taught to think of nothing but the barge. In an older generation the barge was not only the livelihood of many, it was their only habitation, and wives undertook the dual duties of mothers and mates. Happily these conditions belong to the past.

THAMES SAILING BARGE MATCH 2025

Entries

BARGE	BUILT	YEAR	REG TONS	START	MARK	FINISH
COASTING CLASS - Start 09.30 hrs						
Gladys	Harwich	1901	68			
Pudge	Rochester	1922	70			
CHAMPION STAYSAIL CLASS – Start 09.45 hrs						
Niagara	Wivenhoe	1898	79			
CHAMPION BOWSPRIT CLASS – Start 10.00 hrs						
Blue Mermaid	Polruan	2019	83			
Marjorie	Ipswich	1902	56			

Please note that most of the photographs in this programme are from previous Matches.

The photographs in the Commodore's Report are from 2024, when the Match could not be raced due to severe weather conditions.

THAMES SAILING BARGE MATCH 2025 PROGRAMME

This year's Match will be held on Saturday, 19th July 2025 and will be sailed from the Lower Hope to the North Oaze Buoy, returning to finish at Gravesend.

Friday, 18th July

Briefing for Masters and Mainsheetmen at 19.30 at the Port of London Authority, London River House, Gravesend. As the Match was not sailed last year there are no cups to return.

Saturday, 19th July

The three classes will start at the following times, with a ten minute and five minute horn and flag before each start:

COASTING CLASS

START 09.30

CHAMPION STAYSAIL CLASS

START 09.45

CHAMPION BOWSPRIT CLASS

START 10.00

COURSE (Weather permitting)

The race starts in Lower Hope Reach (off Stanford-le-Hope in Essex, about four miles down river from Gravesend) and runs down river past Southend-on-Sea to the North Oaze Buoy before returning to finish at Gravesend – a total distance of 43 nautical miles.

The finish line is from St Andrews Gardens, next to the Three Daws public house in Gravesend.

PRIZE GIVING AND SUPPER

The supper will be held in the Three Daws. Food will be served from 19.00. The Prize Giving will commence at 20.00.

Thames Match Report 2024

The 92nd Thames Sailing Barge Match was due to take place on Saturday 15th June. An increased entry of twelve barges was encouraging after a few rather lean years but during the week three withdrew for various reasons and of the nine that had made it to Gravesend by Friday evening too many crew members had dropped out for the *Adieu* to be able to race effectively so only eight barges remained, the same number as last year. The weather forecast was not good with fresh south westerlies and thundery showers for Saturday but looked possible with a shortened course.



Saturday morning dawned clear and bright with a lovely sailing breeze, but the 0600 inshore waters forecast had deteriorated to “south or southwest 4-6 increasing 7 or gale 8 for a time, thundery showers, good visibility except in rain”. A hastily convened meeting on the Town Pier of the skippers and Match Committee agreed that the prudent thing to do was to cancel the Match. This turned out to be the right decision: by mid-morning it

was blowing hard with torrential rain blotting out any visibility. We later found out that the Round-the-Island yacht race had cancelled all except the Ocean Racing classes and many of them had turned back before getting out of the Solent.



It was disappointing to participants and spectators to have to cancel and indeed I'm not aware that the Thames Match has ever been cancelled for weather in its 160-year history. The 1903 and 1928 matches are recorded as having been sailed in a near-gale with some damage to the barges' gear but in those days the barges were relatively new and had a tight professional crew who all knew exactly what they were doing and what risks they were taking. Today with most vessels over a hundred years old, many with families and friends on board and with a very different safety culture, we have to be more cautious.



A few of the would-be participants departed early while others found different ways of passing the day before repairing to the Three Daws for the traditional match supper.

In the absence of a prize giving we were treated to a well-crafted and entertaining speech by former owner of the *Lady Daphne* Michael Mainelli, weaving together themes of the Thames, commerce, history, shipping and the traditions associated with his current role as Lord Mayor of London. Michael has retained his interest in sailing barges and indeed has chosen our *Blue Mermaid's* Sea Change Sailing Trust as one of the Lord Mayor's charities for his year of office. We hope that next year, being less busy, he will be able to spend the day afloat with the Match on Saturday 19th July.





Although there are no prizes this year for racing, the Committee would like to award two of its trophies. The Gold Belt Cup for achievement is given to David Pollock of *Repertor* for having supported almost every match (and not only the Thames Match) for the last thirty years. Appropriately, this is *Repertor's* centenary year. The Roy Stanbrook Salver for services to the Match is awarded to John Hargreaves who has been our reliable timekeeper for the last twenty-five years.

Julian Cass, Officer of the Day 2024





THAMES SAILING BARGES AT DUNKIRK

Thames Sailing Barges had been in cross-Channel trade for many years. During the First World War they were engaged trading to the Northern French and Belgian ports, taking coal, coke and tar, as well as general supplies to support the troops and their animals. Trade continued in the between the war years, but May 1940 brought them into a new use.

The sudden advance of the German forces through the Lowlands of Europe meant that the British Expeditionary Force (BEF), together with their French allies, were surrounded with their backs pushed against the waters of the English Channel. A rapidly planned scheme to rescue about 30,000 of those troops was formed by Vice Admiral Bertram Ramsay, called Operation Dynamo. Who knew that the audacious plan would in fact save ten times that number?

The Royal Navy would provide escort cover for the merchant and civilian craft and maintain the mine swept routes between Dover and Dunkirk.

Over 1,300 vessels took part in Operation Dynamo. They ranged from commercial passenger carrying pleasure steamers to privately owned small craft, all requisitioned by the Admiralty. Originally it was planned to use naval personnel to crew them, but many civilian owners and crew volunteered to man their craft. No accurate list exists of all the vessels that took part in the evacuation. Over 50 of the Little Ships were Thames tugs. For speed, the tugs were used to tow craft such as sailing barges across the Channel; however tugs, having a deep draught, could not go close inshore. Supplies of water, food and ammunition were also to be taken across to the troops.



As the Thames Sailing Barge had the advantage of requiring little water, the intention was that they could be beached to unload supplies of water, food and ammunition. They were then used to board the troops, before transferring the men to vessels moored offshore, either direct or via the requisitioned small pleasure craft. The Barges were classed as being expendable, there being no plan to tow them back home, avoiding slowing the tugs' return. Those that came back generally did so under their own power. The Beatrice Maud, originally having been abandoned, was in fact sailed back by French soldiers who fortunately had an officer with sailing experience.



The two barges Pudge and Centaur, currently owned and maintained by the Thames Sailing Barge Trust, had different experiences. Both were requisitioned and sent to Dover Western Dock. William Watson was the Master of Pudge and his cargo book makes no mention of his trip to Dunkirk. It just stops on 27th May having sailed light from Ipswich to London. It then resumes on 12th June. What he saw and experienced between those dates is not recorded. Pudge, together with the Lady Rosebery and Doris, was being towed across in a line by the tug St Fagan when the tug was dive bombed with a direct hit down her funnel into the engine room. The tug sank whilst Pudge was blown out of the water. Her Master's comment was that "she came down the right way up"! The third hand of the Lady Rosebery was 15 year-old John Atkins. He had been transferred from the barge to the St Fagan for safety. Sadly he didn't survive the explosion. Both the Doris and the Lady Rosebery were also lost.



Centaur had a very different experience. Having been requisitioned she was also sent to Dover Western Dock to load supplies for the troops on the beaches. On arrival at Dover she was squeezed against the dock wall by a tug coming into the Dock too quickly.

While being loaded, one of the soldiers engaged in the loading called up to the Master to tell him “you’ve got water down here”. His reply was “yes I know, you are loading it” only to get the reply “it’s coming in from outside”. Centaur had sprung several planks when she was squeezed by the tug. She was then unloaded and returned to her owners for repair.

All craft requisitioned and taken across to Dunkirk were uninsured. The barge owners were therefore left to carry the cost of any loss, as insurance was not an option. Out of the 31 barges that went across only 18 returned, the remaining 13 being sunk or abandoned on the beaches. The photograph of Ethel Everard stranded and abandoned on the beach is one of the iconic pictures used by the Germans for propaganda. The beached Ethel Everard is an emotional image in the Dunkirk scenes in the film ‘Atonement’.



While Operation Dynamo was regarded as a great success, rescuing so many, it took place in the face of a major defeat.



TROPHIES AWARDED

GOLD BELT CUP – FOR ACHIEVEMENT – DAVID POLLOCK, REPERTOR

ROY STANBROOK SALVER – FOR SERVICES TO THE MATCH – JOHN HARGREAVES

Race Committee

Honorary Chair: F M Everard CBE
 Honorary Match Secretary: Brian Pain
 Capt J Cass
 M Mainelli
 R Newlyn
 S Akhurst

Bridge Committee

Commodore: Capt J Cass

Thames Sailing Barge Match Patrons

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 Mr Michael Everard
 Mr John Hargreaves
 Ms Christine Lawrence
 Mr & Mrs Michael & Elisabeth Mainelli
 Mr Roger Newlyn
 Mr Brian Pain
 Ms Heather Rooke
 Mr David Rye
 Mr & Mrs Richard & Mary Walsh
 Mrs Anne Wignall

Thanks also to

X-Pilot – Committee Boat
 The Three Daws Public House
 The Port of London Authority

Contact

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Date of Next Year's Match
Saturday, 18th July 2026

19TH July 2025

High Water Tilbury 08.03

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