

## Thames Skiff Rowing 31 July – 2 August 2023

On 31 July, 4 Aquanauts met at the delightful Trout Inn, Lechlade to commence a 3 day adventure, rowing down the Thames to Oxford. A quick photo with Old Father Thames in St John's lock was followed by the first of approximately 40 000 oar/scull/paddle/blade strokes (depending on the level of pedantry in the conversation) before reaching Oxford.



**Charlie J (cox), Graham (high gearing bow), Guy (boilerhouse) paying homage to OFT**

The first mile and a half was uneventful until reaching Buscot lock. A boater coming upstream thought the lock was taking a long time to fill up. He insisted he had followed all the relevant instructions. We were joined by a Canadian canoe crew of 2, dressed in dungarees, who looked a little like the super Mario brothers and, as it turned out, were brothers. Our combined advice on lock gate operation had no effect until we all repaired to the 'instructions' which turned out to confirm what we had been telling him i.e. if you leave the sluice gates open in both the top and bottom lock gates, the lock will not fill up. It's a bit like trying to fill a bathtub with the plug out. Eventually we were all agreed and proceeded.



### **Consultation over lock gate operation**

We continued under Eaton Bridge and through Grafton Lock until reaching our lunch stop at Ye Olde Swan at Radcot Bridge where we bumped into a skiff full of lawyers. We enjoyed a relaxed lunch waving to the Supermarios as they paddled past. Thereafter, during an untroubled row/scull through Radcot and Rushey locks, we saw numerous moorhens, ducks, geese, herons, cormorants, pillboxes and a kingfisher, but very few people.



### **Team Penguin and The Lawyers in Radcot Lock**

We arrived at the superb Trout Inn at Tadpole Bridge to enjoy a glass of La Mumba and a sumptuous dinner of roast belly pork before retiring for the night. Next morning we set off again after an excellent breakfast of Eggs Benedict, and enjoyed more of the almost deserted Upper Thames. We passed under Tenfoot bridge, which perhaps bizarrely, unlike

most M40 motorway bridges does not have '10 foot' scrawled on it in graffiti, before reaching Shifford lock. The lockkeepers house, according to a local woman, used to be a regular haunt of Hollywood stars and played host to some outstanding parties in the 1950s. It was pretty quiet when we visited.



### **Discussing wildfowl and other important matters downstream of Shifford Lock**

We reached the Rose Revived at Newbridge (apparently the oldest structure spanning the Thames) for lunch, where we were joined by the Lawyers. We enjoyed a relaxed lunch, again, waving to the Supermarios as they paddled past, again. The afternoon saw another very peaceful transit, with a host of wildlife and very few people. The solitude was very welcome until it extended to our lodgings for the evening at Bablock Hythe. After several attempts, we eventually made contact with our hosts before departing for a fantastic supper, hosted by the Lawyers, at the Harcourt Arms at Stanton Harcourt.



**Newbridge – 13<sup>th</sup> Century built of Taynton stone by monks on the orders of King John to improve communications between the wool towns and Cotswold farms. It originally had 51 arches but is now reduced to 12. The Civil War Battle of Newbridge was fought here in 1644 when Parliamentarian William Waller, attempting to cross the Thames to capture King Charles I, was defeated.**

The weather promised to be dreadful the following day. Torrential rain was predicted from 11 o'clock onwards. We resolved on an early start and after a utilitarian breakfast on a tray, rowed steadily, sustained, as ever, by the inexhaustible onboard supply of pork scratchings. We gained a number of miles, whilst transiting through 5 locks, and reached the shelter of the Head of the River Inn 5 minutes before the deluge started. A very welcome lunch of Tapas plus a cleansing pint of Butcombe bitter (from Bristol) saw us ride out the worst of the rain. We then completed a 20 minute dash to Donnington Bridge, to handover the skiff, in mild drizzle.

A highly enjoyable 3 days with a unified and balanced crew. Much high quality food and drink, fantastic wildlife, good weather (on the whole) and some peace and quiet. Next year will see a week long row from Lechlade to London with accompanying narrow boat. Details to follow on the PAC website.