

Discovering The History of The Thames

Did you know that the River Thames is over 30 million years old? The Thames has run through Great Britain since before it became an island! The Thames was once 10 times bigger than it is today and was a tributary of the river Rhine in Germany.

People have been living near the Thames for over 400,000 years. Relics from past civilizations, such as jewelry, pottery, and glassware can still be found in the muddy riverbanks during low tide. Tracing the history of the river is a great way to learn about the people of Great Britain.

A Brief Timeline of Life Along The Thames

30 million years ago	The Thames was a tributary of the river Rhine before Great Britain became an island.
10 million years ago	The Thames changed course and was 10 times as wide as it is today.
400,000 – 700,000 years ago	Humans arrived in England.
10,000 years ago	Picts, considered the first Britons, settled in England.
8 th Century BC	Celts arrived in England and pushed the Picts into Scotland.
43 AD	Romans arrived in England and ruled for the following 400 years. The Romans created an international trading port in what is now London. They built wharves, mills and London Bridge – the first man made structure crossing the river.
6 th Century	Tribes from Germany, called Angles, Jutes, and Saxons invaded Great Britain.
870	Vikings invaded settlements along the banks of the river as far up as Reading.
900 – 1000	Viking and Danish invaders controlled settlements along the Thames.
1016	Danish King Canute brought peace to the settlements along the Thames. By that time, most of the towns along the river had been given the names they still have today.
1066	William the Conqueror, a Norman, gained control of the Thames Valley and later all of England. He built the Tower of London and a number of castles including Windsor Castle – now the oldest continuously inhabited castle in the world.
1485	Henry Tudor, from Wales, became Henry II, the first Tudor monarch.
1485 – 1703	The Tudor and Stuart monarchs built a number of palaces along the Thames including Hampton Court, Kew, Richmond, Whitehall and Greenwich.
17 th and 18 th Century	Pound locks were created along the river facilitating travel. Shipbuilders constructed vessels of war (France, Spanish, American) that set sail from the Thames and went out to sea. International shipping increased.
18 th Century	London was one of the busiest ports in the world. The London Docks were constructed to accommodate the trade boom. Great Britain was becoming a large empire through the process of colonization in other lands.
19 th Century, Victorian Era	The Great Stink occurred and as a result the sewer system, still in use today, was constructed in an effort to clean up the Thames. The Victoria Embankments were built on the sides of the river to guard against flooding, which forced the river into a more narrow space making it deeper and flow faster.
1864	Architect Sir Joseph Bazalgette created the plan for the London sewer system.
20 th Century	Trade in the port of London greatly decreased due to the process of containerization in shipping and improved road transportation. The London Docks closed. Tourism and pedestrian commuting increased on the Thames. The water quality increased dramatically in the river and the river became repopulated by hundreds of plant and animal species.
21 st Century	Sections of the river above London are utilized for recreation, rowing, swimming and boating. High-end residential property has increased along river in London. The Olympic Games will be held in London in 2012 and will utilize the Thames.

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