

U3A Bikers The Boat Race Route Friday 14th March 2025

A chilly start and a cold NE wind but we were well wrapped up as we assembled at Brockwell Park Lido for Mary's ride.

Out of the park and up Brixton Water Lane, we set out in two groups, across Clapham and Wandsworth Commons and along Garrett Lane and Ram Street, with just light traffic here today.

We joined the Thames Path at the estuary of the River Wandle, then across Wandsworth Park to St Mary's Church, and the Putney Pantry for coffee, always busy.



The difficult crossing at Putney Bridge negotiated, the path continued along Putney Reach and the club boat houses, around the long sweep of the Thames to Bazalgette's Grade II* Hammersmith Bridge (1887) still awaiting resolution of who pays for the repairs.

The Thames Path towards Mortlake, past the Brewery, was in fair condition. A line of flotsam on the path showed the high water mark in places. I spotted for the first time a notice about seals in the river, and a heron was seen on a mudbank.

The final stretch, along Thames Bank, provided a good surface as we approached Chiswick Bridge. We noted the two marker posts, one each side of the river, for the finish line for the Boat Race.

The groups paused on Chiswick Bridge for a view down the river.



Once across the river, the groups set off downstream, past Dukes Meadow, a very pleasant stretch of the river path, complete with the Bandstand (opened in 1926).

There have been plans to build on Dukes Meadow over the years and we are fortunate that these have come to nothing. In 1914 the Brentford Gas Company planned to cover 80 acres of the Meadow with a huge gasworks. The people of Chiswick and surrounding areas raised strong objections and the plan was abandoned.

And there was a plan in 1926 to build a power station the size of Battersea on the meadows; the plan was dropped and in 1928 Fulham Power Station was built instead; the “Regent on the River” development which claims to reflect the appearance of the power station, now occupies the site of the demolished building.

We passed Chiswick Eyot and just beyond Hammersmith Bridge we found a statue of Lancelot 'Capability' Brown. Apparently his nickname came from his fondness for describing country estates as having great 'capabilities' for improvement!

We paused to read the information board on Hammersmith Mall Riverside Walk.

Local features included a Quaker Burial Ground, two pubs, Hammersmith Pier, Kelmscott House (which was the home of William Morris for 18 years), and a pumping station. Other details were about indigenous trees (black poplar and alder) and the wildlife (cormorant, grey heron, black-headed gulls, mallard and tufted ducks) and now Egyptian geese.

Bishop's Park was the lunch stop. The café was busy and so small groups of us had to find space to sit. There was a brief shower of hailstones while we were inside.

The return route was past Fulham Palace, inland around Hurlingham Park, beneath Wandsworth Bridge, and on past Lots Road Power Station.

The shared path of Chelsea Embankment is quite narrow but brought us to the Albert Bridge, then Battersea Park and via the Patmore Estate back to Brockwell Park.



Thank you Mary and Andrew for leading this ride.

Distance: 23 miles cycled.

Riders: *Andrew Burke, Caroline Strallen, Chris Booth, Daniela Walther, Jan Ray, Jane Andrew, Joe Antos, John Clements, Mark Stones, Martin Dale, Mary Burke, Patrick Mulhern.*

Ride leaders: Mary and Andrew

Report by John, 17th March 2025

The Oxford and Cambridge Boat Races 2025

The 79th Women's Boat Race and the 170th Men's Boat Race are on Sunday 13th April and will be from Putney to Mortlake.

The Boat Race is raced over the Championship Course, the stretch of the River Thames between Mortlake and Putney. The river is tidal here and is commonly referred to as the Tideway.

The first race was held in 1829 on a course near Henley and it was not until 1845 that the race was held on the course used today. The course was later marked by two stones on the southern bank of the river, inscribed "U.B.R." (University Boat Race). The Mortlake end was marked by a stone a few yards downstream from Chiswick Bridge, near The Ship Inn, and the other one is just upstream of Putney Bridge, a distance of 4 miles and 374 yards.

Races are always rowed with the tidal current; Putney to Mortlake on a flood tide and Mortlake to Putney on an ebb tide. In the Men's race Cambridge (the light blues) lead Oxford (the dark blues) by 87 to 81. In the Women's race Cambridge lead Oxford 47 to 30.

In 1859 the Cambridge boat sank; in 1912 both boats sank and a re-row was held. In 1877 the result was declared as a dead heat.

The boats ("shells") used in the races are coxed eights, 62 feet long; each rower has a single oar.

The first women's boat race was held in 1927. It has been held each year since 1964. From 2015, the women's race has been held on the same day and course. "The Boat Race" refers to the combined event of the two races.

Acknowledgement: *source material from Wikipedia*