

A Review of the Day Cruise on the Paddle Steamer Waverley

organized by Colin Bird for IWA Chiltern Branch

A full day on the Thames from 9.am – 9pm, so the party from Chiltern arrived at Tower Pier to start our day. What a welcome, the bar was open for teas and coffee, desperately needed after such an early start from home. While the boat filled, everyone spent their time watching the Uber clippers come and go, filled with commuters.

The horn sounded and we watched Tower Bridge slowly raise – all for us, what an honour. We glid passed Belfast and under the bridge on our way. The commentator was very knowledgeable and kept our interest throughout the journey. As we cruised along so many detailed points were drawn to our attention. Everything - historical, scenery, industry and even waste plants, all were explained.

Before we knew it, we were passing the barrier, and were travelling at speed towards our first stop at Gravesend. The day was sunny, but outside on the deck you could feel the breeze. The ticket office was busy selling train tickets for Southend Pier our next stop. Many options for travel on Waverley were available, cruise one way, train or coach return from any of the destinations. At Southend more passengers boarded, the boat took 600 but you always seemed to find a seat, inside or out.



The restaurant was serving freshly cooked fish and chips, this was completed in a very efficient manner with only a short queuing time involved. Meanwhile the bar continued to serve drinks to groups of friends.



John standing on an enormous heap of Oyster shells.

Whitstable was our destination, so many tried the oysters in the pubs for lunch. This proved to be an interesting resort, with many signposts explaining various methods for keeping the sea at bay. After a one and a quarter hour stop, we were back on board for our return trip.



Tourists enjoying Waverley's visit to the town.

The weather had clouded over so the trip across the large estuary was blowy and after picking up the passengers from Southend many found their way to the bar and restaurant room below.

Stopping at Gravesend, it was now getting dark, but still the commentor found interesting items along the route to talk about.

As we entered the outskirts of London, many returned to the decks. London, brightly lit in every direction still had many attractive buildings on show. The O2, the Cable Car, Greenwich and Canary Wharf we passed all on this fascinating tour. It really emphasised the fact how meandering the river is.



Tower Bridge opening ready for our passage.

We were now in sight of the high light of the trip – Tower Bridge, lit up in all its splendour. As we approached it slowly opened and all-around cameras were clicking away to capture the image. We expertly moored at Tower Pier and the boat was quickly and efficiently off loaded. An enjoyable day, for all, as we made our way home.

Waverley, although based in Scotland, always come South for a few months and completes various cruises. It was whispered that it may be cruising from Portsmouth next year. The best way to check this out, is to look on their web site for this year's itinerary.

Thanks go to Colin for organising this full day's excursion for the Branch.

Now Christmas Festivities are over, why not insert the following dates in your diary.

Chiltern Branch social meetings with talks 2024

Wednesday 24-01-24 8pm - Expanding Horizons - Jeremy Batch

His talk takes us on to blue waters as opposed to still.

Wednesday 28-02-24 8pm - The Marine Policing Unit - Paul Jacobs

The Metropolitan Police Marine Policing Unit is responsible for policing 47 miles of the River Thames from Dartford to Hampton Court.

Wednesday 20-03-24 8pm - Chiltern Branch Annual General Meeting

Wednesday 24-04-24 8pm - The Rise and Fall of Pleasure Boating on the Thames - Simon Wenham Another visit to the Royal River.

Unless shown otherwise, meetings are the 4th Wednesday of the month at 8.00pm at Rickmansworth Waterways Trust Education Centre Batchworth Locks, Rickmansworth WD3 1JJ

Non-members are welcome. Tea and coffee available