

Key message

RNLI lifeboat crew on the Thames are ordinary people doing an extraordinary job on a unique stretch of water. Their commitment to saving lives never falters and to ensure that they can continue doing so they need our support.



Key

6 - E class lifeboat

7 - Atlantic 85 lifeboat

8 - D class lifeboat

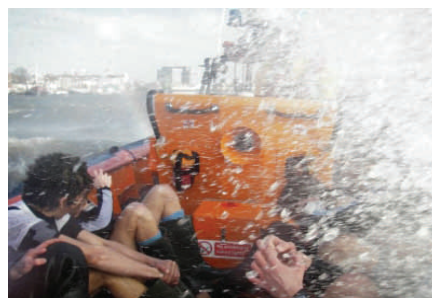
The History

Until 2002, the RNLI had long provided a welcome ring of safety on the waters all around the UK and Republic of Ireland and even on some inland bodies of water - but never before upriver to London. Then, in 1989, a tragic loss made everything change.

The Marchioness Disaster occurred on the River Thames in the early hours of 20 August 1989, when the pleasure boat *Marchioness* sank after being run down by the dredger *Bowbelle*, near Cannon Street Railway Bridge. There were 131 people onboard attending and crewing a private birthday party. 51 of those people drowned.

The disaster triggered a fundamental change in the nation's thinking on the issue of water rescue, sparking widespread debate and, eventually, a full-scale enquiry. The recommendations of this enquiry led to the UK Government calling on the RNLI to use their lifesaving expertise to provide search and rescue cover on the River Thames.

From January 2002, RNLI lifeboat stations have operated from Gravesend in Kent, Tower in central London and Chiswick to the west, right up to Teddington in Middlesex, stretching the full length of the Thames' tidal waters. 2010 proved to be the busiest year for Thames stations since they opened in 2002 - demonstrating what a necessary addition to our rescue fleet these lifeboats have proved to be.



Facts

- To provide the cover needed on this unique stretch of river, with its powerful currents and heavy traffic, RNLI lifeboat stations are strategically placed at Gravesend, Tower, Chiswick and Teddington to cover the Thames tidal waters. Today these stations and their crews are trained to respond to any call, from helping individuals in difficulty on the water to full-scale public emergencies.
- Our lifeboat crews on the Thames are some of the busiest within the whole of the RNLI. The equipment and training they need is vital to ensure we save as many lives as possible.
- Time is of the essence on any shout, but especially on the River Thames where many rescues involve people already in the water. Therefore, a mix of full timers and volunteers are needed at the four lifeboat stations along the river to ensure a fast enough response. The lifeboats can launch within **90 seconds** and aim to reach **95%** of casualties on the river between Canvey Island in Essex and Teddington within **15 minutes**.
- The Thames lifeboat stations have a total of **125 volunteer crew** and **30 employees**.
- The full time Tower, Gravesend and Chiswick crew operate **12 hour shifts on 4 day rotations**. Teddington crew are volunteers.
- RNLI lifeboats can be divided into two categories: all-weather and inshore. The Thames stations all operate inshore lifeboats (ILBs). Found only at Chiswick and Tower stations, the E class is the fastest lifeboat in the fleet and is specially designed to meet the demands of the River. With its fast-running tide, powerful undercurrents, hidden debris and heavy traffic, the River Thames is surprisingly hostile for those on and by the water. Teddington operates a smaller D class inshore lifeboat, while Gravesend operates an Atlantic 85 inshore lifeboat.



Left: Tower E class; Top right: Teddington D class; Bottom right: Gravesend Atlantic 85

Stats

Launches

Station Name	2002	2003	2003	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010*	Totals
Chiswick	243	235	190	181	169	142	149	187	219	1715
Gravesend	113	77	99	81	95	84	93	125	105	872
Teddington	65	65	49	36	63	50	64	61	56	509
Tower	396	354	322	339	343	265	405	379	442	3245
Totals	817	731	660	637	670	541	711	752	822	6341

People Rescued

Station Name	2002	2003	2003	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010*	Totals
Chiswick	119	138	119	105	79	73	42	78	105	858
Gravesend	55	25	84	48	58	53	67	46	62	498
Teddington	10	18	8	7	6	8	16	6	5	84
Tower	81	92	134	76	99	92	99	147	108	928
Totals	265	273	345	236	242	226	224	277	280	2368

Lives Saved

Station Name	2002	2003	2003	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010*	Totals
Chiswick	13	9	61	27	5	6	2	7	3	133
Gravesend	0	3	9	5	4	10	5	9	6	51
Teddington	5	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	10
Tower	17	37	24	16	22	14	18	13	18	179
Totals	35	50	95	49	31	31	26	29	27	373

* Correct as at 6 December 2010. 2010 figures are provisional and subject to immediate change.
But, even at the time this goes to print, 2010 is already the busiest year for launches on the Thames.

Types of rescues on The Thames 2002 - 2010*

Launches by year

Category	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010*	Overall
Aircraft	1	0	0	0	5	0	1	0	0	7
Commercial vessels	63	55	50	49	40	54	62	41	62	476
Distress signals	14	7	6	1	2	4	3	9	6	52
Fishing vessels	1	2	2	0	2	1	4	1	1	14
Manual craft	58	67	35	42	53	34	42	61	56	448
Miscellaneous **	102	79	65	66	54	33	45	51	53	548
People ashore	81	227	219	240	263	185	249	258	307	2029
Person in the river/ sea	352	177	158	141	161	138	199	202	185	1713
Powered vessels	111	91	95	71	67	70	81	99	109	794
Sailing vessels	34	26	30	27	23	22	25	30	43	260
Grand Total	817	731	660	637	670	541	711	752	822	6341

People rescued by year

Category	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010*	Overall
Aircraft	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Commercial vessels	8	17	69	21	39	50	17	3	26	250
Distress signals	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Fishing vessels	3	0	2	0	1	1	4	0	0	11
Manual craft	44	43	58	26	46	32	21	70	43	383
Miscellaneous **	8	9	13	6	3	2	2	6	0	49
People ashore	34	23	29	40	18	14	15	20	15	208
Person in the river/ sea	29	43	33	31	40	34	42	29	34	315
Powered vessels	114	119	119	96	81	59	105	134	118	945
Sailing vessels	25	19	22	16	14	34	18	15	44	207
Grand Total	265	273	345	236	242	226	224	277	280	2368

* Correct as of 6 December 2010. 2010 Figures are provisional and subject to immediate change.

**Miscellaneous includes the following casualties:

- Animals
- Dead human bodies
- Motor vehicles
- Objects in the river/sea
- Other vessels

Tower lifeboat station - the busiest station in the RNLI

Since the inception of the Lifeboat service in central London in 2002, Tower lifeboat station has consistently been the busiest lifeboat station in Britain and Ireland, regularly responding to over 250 requests for assistance each year. Even on Christmas Day 2009, the crew were called out on two separate emergencies.

The station was relocated from less suitable premises in 2006 and is now based at Victoria Embankment in the heart of the city. The RNLI was sold the new station for just £1 by the Metropolitan Police - who later donated that £1 back to the RNLI! The Metropolitan Police still hold a small office in the station and work closely with the RNLI on the River.

Based on such a busy stretch of river, inevitably Tower lifeboat crew receive a large variety of 'shouts'. These range from assisting capsized rowers, sinking yachts, people ill or injured on board passenger vessels, people who jump into the river, boat fires, and people who have fallen into the water. The crew also provide a first aid response for anyone on or near the river, as they are frequently able to reach casualties quicker than the ambulance service as they do not encounter the same traffic difficulties. This speed of response can enable Tower lifeboat crew to provide life saving first aid until the ambulance service arrives to take over.



The opening of Tower lifeboat pier in 2006
Credit: Tower/RNLI

From minor to major

The RNLI is always ready to respond to whatever request is made of it, from helping individuals in difficulty on or in the water, to full-scale public emergencies.

London never called on the RNLI's services more dramatically than during the terrorist bombings in the summer of 2005. All public transport was suspended and civilians were being evacuated en masse - with the river one of the few reliable ways out.

Thames stations' lifeboats and the Trent class from Sheerness, just along the coast, all joined in the efforts to remove the public from the danger that still threatened the city.

More recently, the sodden summer of 2007 saw upriver Thamesiders endangered, when flooding engulfed wide swathes of the country. Reading was badly hit and downstream, many roads around London were submerged. The RNLI's specialist Flood Rescue Team, formed for just such a crisis, was deployed with the emergency services. Specially trained in floodwater rescue, they provided much-appreciated help at Kingston-upon-Thames.

Looking ahead at some of the upcoming national events, London will inevitably be packed with tourists and visitors. During the Royal Wedding in 2011, the Queen's Diamond Jubilee soon after and the 2012 London Olympics, all four of the Thames lifeboat stations will be on hand to provide much needed safety cover along the River.



Credit: RNLI/Nigel Millard

Chiswick RNLI Rescue

When a father saw his 2-year-old son fall into the river off their family houseboat in early January 2009, he did what any parent would do: jumped straight in after him. But in the cold water and strong current he soon started to struggle to keep them both afloat. In the meantime, his wife rang 999 before attempting to get into their rowing boat to go and help.

In her panic, she capsized the boat and all three found themselves in the water. Thankfully the Chiswick E class was there within minutes. Station Manager Wayne Bellamy explained: 'It was so close to being a massive tragedy. The potential existed for an entire family to have died.'

Following the incident the father kindly wrote to the station: 'Just a brief note to thank the crew who warmed up myself, my wife and my son after he fell in the river. Your speedy response and help, not to mention somebody's woolly hat, were very much appreciated. I work onboard the [house]boat and see you patrolling day in, day out in all weathers. I've always been reassured by your presence. Thank you for being there.'

Tower RNLI Rescues

London's RNLI Tower Lifeboat Crew saves two lives during the 2010 New Year's Eve celebrations in central London. With an estimated 107,000 people in controlled areas watching the fireworks and partying the night away, and a further 44 party boats with 7,000 passengers on-board, it was no wonder that the RNLI lifeboat crew had a busy night of calls during which they saved two lives.

Eight volunteers and full-time paid staff, working on two lifeboats, responded to a variety of incidents together with their neighbours on the River Thames, the Marine section of the Metropolitan Police, Port of London Authority and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency. Incidents included a person unconscious on a pleasure boat, people in the water, and a car partially submerged on a slipway.

The two lives saved were people recovered from the river, one who slipped and fell and the other who fell from a bridge. Both were brought back to Tower Lifeboat Station and later were taken to hospital by paramedics from the London Ambulance Service.

Costs

People, boats, equipment and premises costs per year:

Tower - £520,000

Gravesend - £525,000

Teddington - £85,000

Chiswick - £495,000