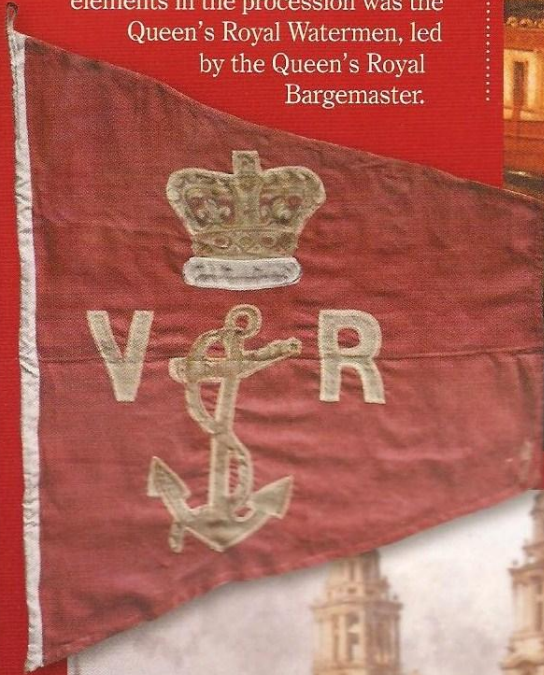


The Queen's Waterboatmen

by James H. Hilletad, Member No. 6

In 2002 the William Britain Collectors Club introduced the Golden Jubilee series recreating the gala coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. One of the leading elements in the procession was the Queen's Royal Watermen, led by the Queen's Royal Bargemaster.



ABOVE Barge banner with Queen Victoria's cypher (author's collection)



The Royal Watermen



RIGHT The Royal Bargemaster

This illustrious contingent traces its ancestry to Henry VII (1487). Queen Elizabeth I made active use of her barge in travelling between her palaces in Greenwich, Whitehall, Richmond and Hampton Court.

Travel on the Thames was much more comfortable than being jolted in a coach over potholed lanes. Roads were narrow and unpaved. The only bridge was London Bridge, which was choked with pedestrians, vehicles, horses and commerce, and which required long roundabout detours. The river provided a welcome alternative and contributed to London's growth as a port.

Today, the State barges are in museums and the duties of the Royal Watermen are purely ceremonial. Nevertheless, the legacy is still very much in evidence. The Queen still

The Royal barge (or more correctly, shallop), used by King George V in 1912 at the Henley Regatta. Note the banner on the bow.



has a Royal Bargemaster who wears a scarlet tail-coat with white stockings. The Royal Watermen, of which there are 24, wear a scarlet skirted tunic, scarlet stockings and a dark blue cap. On the front and back of the tunic is a large, solid silver badge with the Royal cypher.

The Waterman ride as boxmen on Royal carriages at Royal weddings

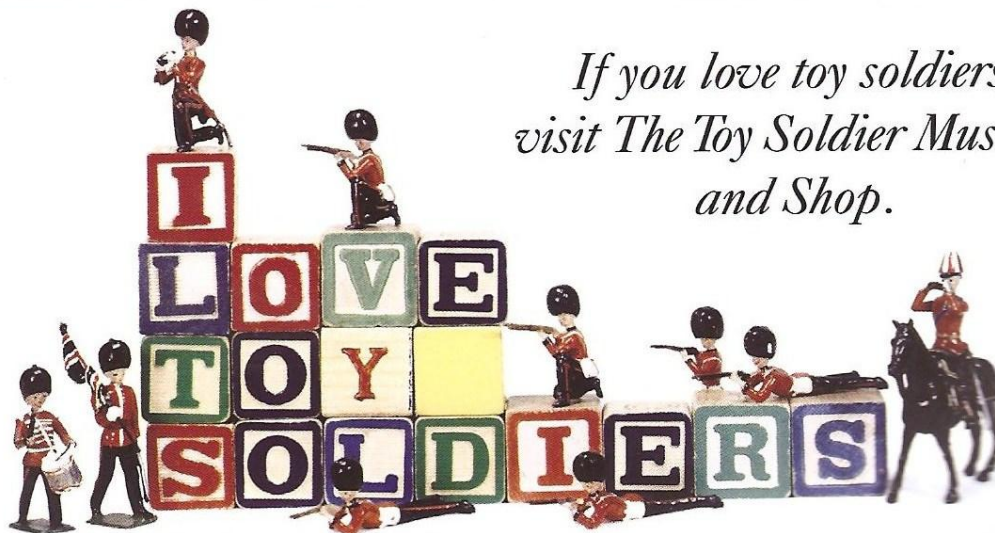
and jubilees. At Royal Coronations, they walk in the procession with the Royal Bargemaster.

To speed his trips down to the city from Hampton Court, Henry VIII had a special clock installed which showed the time of the tides. "Going with the flow" instead of against it made for smoother, fast travel down to London. Speed was desirable not just to save

time – the Thames was famously polluted. To counter the stench, Henry VIII had herbs burned en route, masking the offensive odours rising from the river – an interesting, if odiferous, footnote to History! 📖

Jim Hillestad is the proprietor of The Toy Soldier Museum and shop in Northeastern Pennsylvania and a frequent contributor to The Standard.

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