

# The Arcadian Thames: A Royal Landscape for all to Enjoy



## The Royal Landscape

The Thames Landscape's association with Royalty dates back many centuries. Saxon Kings chose a small island in the Thames at Kingston to be crowned – the mystical Coronation Stone is still in place near the river. The Thames continued to form part of Royal life, although it was not until the late Tudor period that the short stretch of river between Hampton and Kew really came into its own. Up until this time, the area consisted largely of quiet riverside villages, orchards and market gardens supplying the capital with food. Following the construction of Richmond and Hampton Court Palaces however, the landscape began to quickly evolve as successive royal and aristocratic families moved to the area. Up and down the river a series of great palaces, houses, gardens and hunting parks were constructed amid the water meadows and woodland, linked to one another by grand avenues of lime trees.

## A Landscape of Inspiration



During the eighteenth century, this concentration of wealth and power together with the area's stunning beauty attracted the most influential thinkers, poets, artists and landscape designers of the day. This short stretch of the Thames quickly became the focus of culture, inspiration, taste and design that ultimately changed the face of the English countryside.

Inspired by Thames and in particular by the View from Richmond Hill a radical new way of perceiving beauty in the landscape was born. For the first time a view was seen as a 'collected' whole where villas, gardens, groves and meadows all formed a perfect picturesque scene. These ideas ushered the end of the formality of Tudor and Stuart gardens in favour of a much more romantic landscape where the boundaries between nature, art, poetry and gardening were merged. These

new naturalised gardens were imagined at the time as the dawning of a new Arcadian age – the classical imagery of a simple pastoral life as enjoyed in ancient Greece transferred to the banks of the Thames. Arcadia was in essence an idyllic pastoral paradise, a place where man and nature co-existed in perfect harmony. These ideas led to the formation of the English Landscape Movement and would ultimately spread across Europe.



## The People's Landscape



During the nineteenth century the delights of the Arcadian Thames were opened up for the enjoyment of the public so by the late Victorian age, the once privileged landscape of the C18<sup>th</sup> had become the 'Playground' of London where Londoners came to walk, relax or simply to mess about on the river. Arcadia had been democratised.

A century ago however, the now world famous landscape was almost lost as suburbia crept relentlessly up the Thames. It was only the successful 'Indignation!' campaign led by local people to halt the proposed development that saved 'The View from Richmond Hill' and much of the Thames riverside we enjoy today.

It is often said that Arcadia helped to inspire something else we value dearly – the foundations of the modern town and country planning system and the principle that the public has a legitimate right in the development of private land.



## A countryside in the city

Today, the Arcadian Thames offers unrivalled public open access and recreational opportunities and collectively contains more listed buildings, conservation areas, wildlife sites and registered parks and gardens than in any other comparable location in the UK. The river meanders through the largest connected open space in the capital – a landscape of parks, palaces, towpath walks, wild open spaces, working communities and places of cultural importance that still has the capacity to inspire. Each reach of the Thames offers its own special delights, and leads to new discoveries around every corner.



The amazing combination of natural beauty and Royal history has created a real countryside in the city – a pastoral haven, on the doorstep of Central London where humans and wildlife live in harmony. It is a place to escape the hustle and bustle of modern city life, to relax, unwind, explore and have fun. That such an amount of the wonderful riverside parks and open spaces have survived to the present day is due largely to the generations of people who shaped, cared for and protected them over the past 500 years.



## The Thames Landscape Strategy

The Thames Landscape Strategy (TLS) was established in 1994 to understand these events of the past in order take them full circle to conserve, enhance and promote the watery landscape for the next 100 years.





Information Leaflet No. 1

A Message from Sir David Attenborough  
Patron of the Thames Landscape Strategy

Thames Landscape Strategy Leaflet No. 1

# The Arcadian Thames



THAMES LANDSCAPE STRATEGY  
Hampton to Kew



“The Thames Landscape Strategy is that very rare animal: an organisation with real popular appeal and an imaginative sense of what it is about landscapes that fires people’s imagination. We need to take active steps now to ensure

that we maintain a varied wildlife habitat, support traditional river activities, and manage the landscape to complement the marvellous historic buildings, nature reserves and parks that line this stretch of the Thames. The ideas proposed by the Thames Landscape Strategy are truly groundbreaking and really moving forward. We should rejoice in having such an enthusiastic and committed organisation to guide this process and I look forward to continued success throughout the coming years”.

During the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, Arcadia, an idyllic pastoral landscape was created along the Thames between Hampton and Kew. Magnificent royal and aristocratic palaces, gardens and parks were constructed and linked by a series of avenues, set within a framework of meadows and woodland.

Today this stretch of the Thames is recognised as one of the world’s great urban landscapes, allowing Londoners to escape the hustle and bustle of modern day city life.



The Thames Landscape Strategy is one of three sub-regional partnerships for the Thames in the greater London area, whose focus is the remarkable river corridor between Hampton and Kew. Launched in 1994, the strategy is a 100-year blueprint for the Thames, whose vision is to conserve, enhance and promote for the future, one of the world’s great urban landscapes. To achieve its aims, the strategy brings together a partnership of statutory and non-statutory organisations, local groups and individuals to inform strategic policy and to implement a broad range of projects and management proposals.

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## The Arcadian Thames

The Thames Landscape Strategy in Action

DISCOVER THE ARCADIAN THAMES



Thames Landscape Strategy Leaflet No. 1

‘Conserve, promote and enhance for the future, one of the world’s great urban river landscapes between Hampton and Kew’

