



Background information on Dorothea Smartt's poems for the Signature Ventilation Columns, commissioned by Tideway

Dorothea Smartt's poems for the Signature Ventilation Columns (SVC) relate to tales of people living or working near or on one of London's Lost Rivers.

Below is background information on the stories and histories that inspired each poem. The SVC site is listed, followed by the opening few words from the poem and some information. Also listed is the Lost River connected to the site and the century that the poem's story relates to.

King George's Park, London Borough of Wandsworth

'On watchful Wandle walks...'

The poem references Corporal Edward Foster, a Wandsworth-born First World War hero, who was awarded the Victoria Cross. He was also honoured by having a path near the River Wandle and King George's park named after him (Foster's Way). Corporal Foster VC came from working class roots and, after the war, became a dustman. The poem also references local industry around the Wandle, including the Ram Brewery.

Lost River Wandle

Date of narrative: 20th Century

Putney Embankment Foreshore, London Borough of Wandsworth

'Beverley Brook seeks the Thames...'

Here the reference is to women's sporting history in London, the energy and ethos of the 1920s period, the cleanliness of the River Thames at that time, and the geographical range of the Thames. The poem was informed by a British Film Institute film of the 1921 Amateur

Swimming Association's long distance swimming championship or 'Women's Thames Swim'. The championship took place between Putney and Kew. It is said that some of the women jumped in feet-first, rather than diving, because they didn't want to risk swallowing any of the dirty Thames water.

Lost River Beverly Brook

Date of narrative: 20th Century (1921)

Cremorne Wharf Depot, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea

'Chelsea terrace chants...'

The poem references the large crowds of Chelsea football fans walking to Stamford Bridge stadium. On match days, parking isn't allowed near the stadium, so there is a walking route across Albert Bridge and up to the grounds.

Lost River Counter's Creek

Date of narrative: 21st Century (and earlier)

'Barge and coaster kings...'

The poem refers to the 'local knowledge' training (similar to the 'Knowledge' of



London Black Cab drivers) of Thames Lightermen and Watermen, who have worked on the river for centuries. Ernest G. Murray write in his autobiography, *Tales of a Thames Lighterman* (1992), that, as an apprentice, his Master (Dad) taught him "tide times...the names of points, reaches, bridges, tidal sets...how to get to different wharves, docks, and Waterman's stairs...". Careless oarsmen carousing up the Thames were first brought into line when parliament established the Company of Watermen and Lightermen in 1555. Since then, generations of London families have undertaken an apprenticeship, specific to the Thames. Apprentices finish with a rowing competition on the river, the Doggett's Coat and Badge, from London Bridge to Chelsea.

Lost River Counter's Creek
Date of narrative: 16th Century to present day

Albert Embankment Foreshore, London Borough of Lambeth

'River Effra stubbornly underground...'

The Effra descends from Norwood, in South London, and was diverted to join the Thames near Vauxhall Bridge. Most of the River is now underground. A local newspaper cutting found at the Southwark Local History Library and Archive tells of the flooding of West Norwood Cemetery and a coffin that reached the Thames via the Effra.

Lost River Effra
Date of narrative: 20th Century

'In pleasure's garden...'

Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens, which used to be located near this site, was the first and

most important of London's pleasure gardens. It was established in 1729 by the entrepreneur Jonathan Tyers. Although its reputation became more dubious over time, Vauxhall was, at one time, known as a place for matchmaking.

Lost River Effra
Date of narrative: 18th Century

Blackfriars Bridge Foreshore, City of London

'The furious Fleet...'

The poem refers to Queen Boudica fighting off the Romans at Battle Bridge. Boudica was Queen of the Iceni people of Eastern England. She led a major uprising against occupying Roman forces. King's Cross was originally named Battle Bridge, referring to an ancient bridge over The Fleet where Boudica's army is said to have fought an important battle against the Romans in 60 AD. 80,000 Britons are said to have been slaughtered here. Some say that Boudica is buried underneath a platform at Kings Cross railway station, although this may be urban myth (several other locations around the country have also been suggested).

Lost River Fleet
Date of narrative: 60 AD

'The stillness of refuge...'

This is a reference to the pioneering present-day NHS mental health provision of Recovery College (Candi NHS Trust) near St Pancras Old Church, on the River Fleet. The poem links this recovery provision with the fact that this part of London would once have more generally been a place for tranquility and respite, given the placement of the river and the Church close by. Plaques in the Church



grounds show images of water and fields – a peaceful rural setting.

Lost River Fleet

Date of narrative: 21st Century (and St Pancras Old Church has a history dating back at least to the Norman Conquest in 1066)

‘St. Barbara’s defended...’

Saint Barbara is the patron saint of excavations, tunnelling, and explosions. The poem is also somewhat of a eulogy to those killed during the construction of the Embankment and sewers. The poet learnt about Saint Barbara's importance through hearing of the blessings of the Thames Tideway Tunnel Boring Machines.

Lost River Fleet

Date of narrative: 19th Century (and 21st Century)

Chelsea Embankment Foreshore, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea

‘Sloane’s Jamaican fortune...’

Physician and collector Sir Hans Sloane was a major figure of 18th Century Britain and his predominance in Chelsea is still very visible. As a young doctor, he worked on slave plantations in Jamaica and began collecting plants with assistance from both English planters and enslaved men and women from West Africa. After this, he returned to England and eventually imported cocoa to supply Cadbury. This, together with his marriage to Elizabeth Langley Rose, heiress to sugar plantations in Jamaica, considerably added to his fortune. Many notable figures are associated with the development of the Chelsea Physic Garden, including Sir Hans Sloane. He purchased the Manor of

Chelsea from Charles Cheyne in 1712. This included the land of the Physic Garden. In 1722, the grounds were leased to the Society of Apothecaries for £5 a year in perpetuity as a Physic Garden. Amongst its many plants, the Garden has the UK's largest fruiting olive tree. The Garden is located close to where the Lost River Westbourne joins the Thames, just west of Chelsea Bridge.

Lost River Westbourne

Date of narrative: 18th Century

‘Rearing, wings dip...’

There is a folklore regarding herons as "ghosts of drowned lightermen". This is referenced in the book, *Tales of a Thames Lighterman*, by Ernest G. Murray (worked the Thames from the 1930's onwards). The book also references the ceremony of swearing in to the Worshipful Company of Freeman of the River Thames, including an oath "to dwell and serve upon the said River Thames". Herons can also be seen along the Thames, particularly near sources of food, such as the present-day combined sewer overflows (CSOs).

Lost River Westbourne

Date of narrative: spans several centuries up to 21st

Victoria Embankment Foreshore, London Borough of Westminster

‘Did that petite Madame...’

The poem references the proximity of the River Tyburn to Madam Tussaud's first museum in Baker Street (opened in 1836) and the remarkable life of its founder, Anna Maria "Marie" Tussaud (1761 – 1850). Madame Tussaud learnt to craft wax figures from the physician, Phillipe



Curtius. Tussaud created her first wax figure in 1777: that of Voltaire. Many other famous portraits followed. She left France after the French Revolution because she was perceived as a royalist sympathiser. After Curtius died, he left her his waxwork collection and she toured this, together with her own work, around Britain, before settling in Baker Street. Tussaud's husband stayed in France and they became estranged. This left her a single mother, hence the need to create her own business. This last detail is from a 2018 biography of Tussaud, discussed on BBC Radio London's Jo Good programme, in October 2018.

Lost River Tyburn

Date of narrative: 18th-19th Century

'Dido, Mansfield's niece...'

The poem references Dido Elizabeth Belle (1761 – 1804), the niece of Lord Mansfield (daughter of Sir John Lindsay and an enslaved African woman in the West Indies). Dido was brought up as a free gentlewoman in Kenwood House. Her story is told in the 2013 feature film 'Belle'. Lord Mansfield was the most powerful British jurist of the century. His decisions reflected the Age of Enlightenment and moved England on the path to abolishing slavery.

Lost River Tyburn

Date of narrative: 18th-early 19th Century

Chambers Wharf, London Borough of Southwark

'A bygone tanner's pit...'

References a newspaper article found in the Southwark Local History Library and Archive. The article, from the early 1900's, reported on the story of Mrs Williams, who

narrowly escaped death after falling into a sink-hole in her garden. The tanneries were located near the watercourses (ever since the Middle Ages, Bermondsey was one of the main places in England for the manufacture of leather).

Lost River Neckinger

Date of narrative: 18th-early 19th Century

'Beyond muddy tides...'

The poem responds to three local references. The first is the inscription on a Southwark Council monument at St Saviour's Dock, which reads: "In the 18th Century the Thames was so busy that cargoes were often stranded on ships for weeks. The area became notorious for pirates who attacked the moored vessels." The second is the opening section of Charles Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend*. It is often quoted for its vivid and realistic depiction of the Thames in that era. Gaffer Hexman, Dicken's central character, is described by some as a river pirate, and he is certainly a river rascal – making his living as a scavenger, robbing corpses he 'finds' in the Thames. The third reference is from 1798, when Mr Colquhoun, one of London's magistrates, wrote of "...The lighter-buzzards, the 'light-horsemen', the sham of 'bummarees' and felonious 'stevedores', the 'teaskippers', whiskey-runners' and 'rough-scutlers' – in other words robbers, pirates and smugglers...who infested the Pool and the Port of London...whose work lead to the establishment of the Thames Police".

Lost River Neckinger

Date of narrative: 18th and 19th Centuries



‘Local law and land lords...’

St Saviour's Dock was created in the 13th Century by the monks of Bermondsey Abbey (founded 1082, three quarters of a mile to the south-west). The monks enlarged and embanked the Neckinger inlet, naming the dock after the abbey's patron. They built and ran a windmill on its bank, The Mill of St Saviour. Around 1536 (after the dissolution of the monasteries) the windmill was converted into a water mill to supply local inhabitants with water. The term ‘Devil's neckcloth’ is a slang term for the hangman's noose. A neckerchief is an old word for a cravat or other covering of the neck. Until the 18th Century, Thames pirates were executed near the mouth of the Neckinger inlet.

Lost River Neckinger
Date of narrative: 1082 – 18th Century

Deptford Church Street, London Borough of Lewisham

‘Sunlight crowds the evening deck...’

One of two poems for this site informed by oral histories of elderly people speaking of their childhood memories and regular boat trips to Southend and the pleasure palaces. These histories can be found in the book *On the River: Memories of a Working River*.

Lost River Ravensbourne
Date of narrative: 20th Century

‘New Year! Blowing boats...’

The poem references celebrations on the river and the significance of the Thames as a major busy and lively thoroughfare. At times, it was so full that you could not see the water for the vessels.

Lost River Ravensbourne
Date of narrative: 20th Century

‘To Southend...’

One of two poems for this site informed by oral histories of elderly people speaking of their childhood memories and regular boat trips to Southend and the pleasure palaces. These histories can be found in the book *On the River: Memories of a Working River*.

Lost River Ravensbourne
Date of narrative: 20th Century

‘Katherine of Aragon...’

This is a reference to Katherine of Aragon, the Spanish wife of Henry VIII, who arrived with her African attendants at Deptford Creek, from Spain. Catalina's story is outlined in the publication, *Black Tudors*, by Dr Miranda Kaufmann. Ladies-in-waiting were considered ‘noble companions’ who, by their status and nobility, could better advise a woman of high station. Catalina de Cardones was married to Oviedo, a bow-maker. Catalina and Oviedo are one of a few examples of marriages between Africans in England at that time. Katherine of Aragon is spelt with a ‘K’ (references to her include both spellings with K and C) to emphasise the difference between the two women.

Lost River Ravensbourne
Date of narrative: 16th Century