

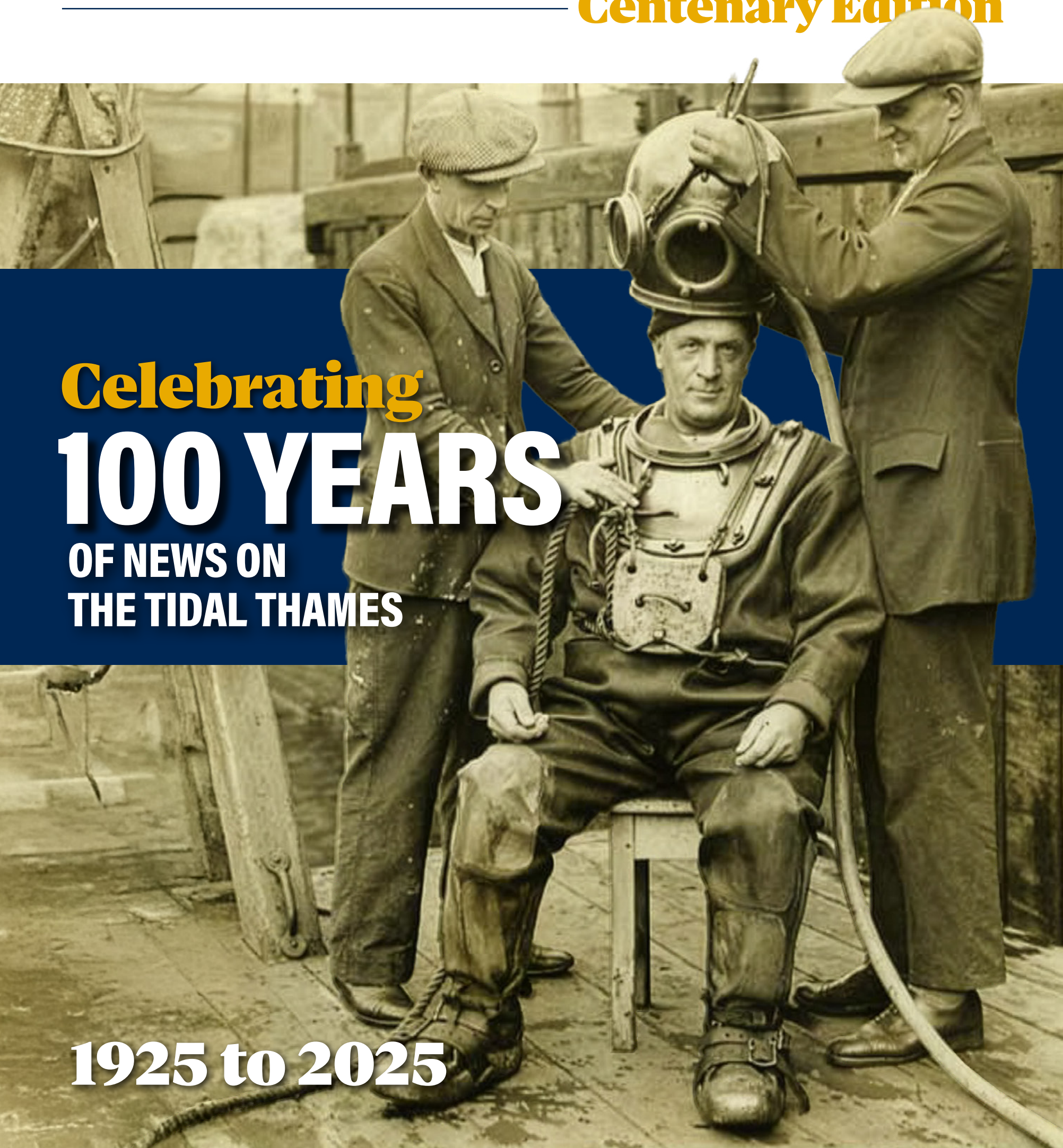
2025

# PORT OF LONDON NEWS

## Centenary Edition

**Celebrating**  
**100 YEARS**  
**OF NEWS ON**  
**THE TIDAL THAMES**

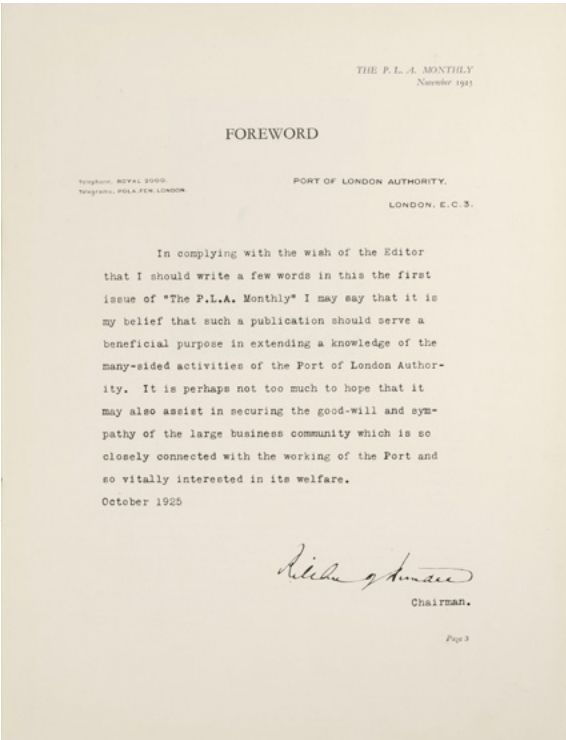
**1925 to 2025**





“Where has commerce such a  
mart so rich, so throng’d...  
as London.”

William Cowper, quoted in the first edition, 1925



Foreword from 1925

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Welcome to the  
Centenary Edition of  
Port of London News,  
celebrating 100 years  
of reporting life on  
the tidal Thames.

It is a great honour to be asked to pen the Foreword for this centenary edition of the Tidal Thames News.

In 1925, the then PLA Chairman Baron Ritchie of Dundee, wrote that he hoped the new newsletter would serve the purpose of “extending a knowledge of the many-sided activities of the Port of London Authority”. He also hoped that it would build “goodwill and sympathy” amongst the business community connected with the Port “so vitally interested in its welfare”.

These continue to be the twin goals of the Tidal Thames News. To share information about what is happening on and around the river, including the PLA’s activities; and to build a sense of a River Thames community through the shared interests of its readers.

Over those hundred years it is easy to think about the huge changes that have occurred on the Thames - the role played by the Port during the Second World War, the decline and re-invention of the London Docklands, and the growing diversity of people working on the river - to name but three. (I hazard that there were no women watermen or lightermen in 1925, but happy to be corrected if wrong!).

I am pleased to confirm that the range of parties with an interest in the use and success of the Port is at least as wide ranging as it was in 1925, and most probably more so. I’d also like to pay tribute to the women and men of the PLA who today serve such varied stakeholders, just as their predecessors did a century ago.

But I’m also struck by some of the things that are unchanging: London remains the UK’s

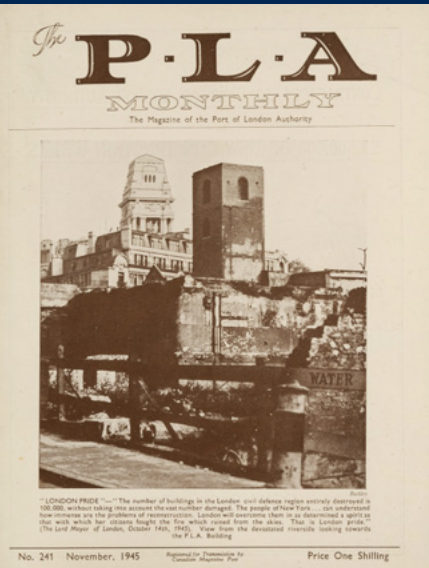
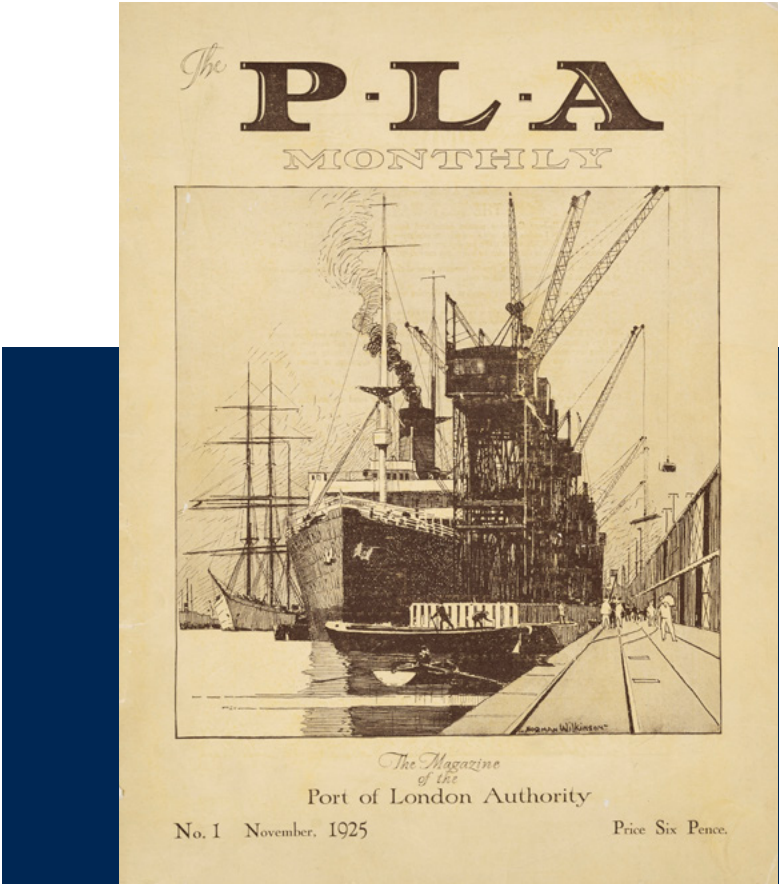
biggest port and the Thames its busiest inland waterway; the river continues to provide tens of thousands of great jobs and opportunities; and above all, the Thames remains very much at the centre of our national life and sense of what makes London and the Estuary what they are.

One final thought on this comparison between 1925 and now. In the 1920s, much merchant shipping was steam powered; coal ruled the waves. The uptake of new diesel-based technology was underway, but many thought a complete energy transition would never happen. I hope our successors writing in 2125 will be able

to look back on our era as a similar transition point, by when the idea of burning fossil fuels to power vessels will seem like steam power does to us. I also have every confidence that our successors will be able to continue celebrating the enduring role of the Thames in the economic and cultural life of this country.

Jonson Cox CBE  
Chair

Lord Ritchie makes the first call on the PLA’s new automatic telephone system - signalling a future built on connection





# Timeline

1890

1197

CONSERVANCY POWERS GIVEN

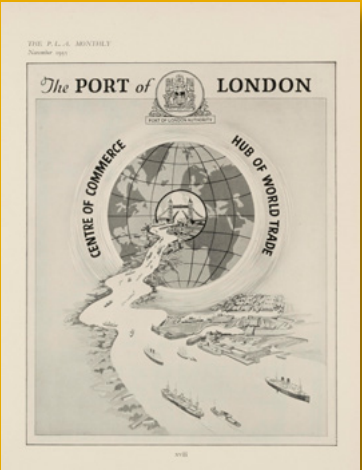
1894

RICHMOND LOCK AND WEIR OPENED

1900

1909


PORT OF LONDON AUTHORITY ESTABLISHED



1910

1910

PLA POLICE FORCE ESTABLISHED




1920

1920

THE PORT OF LONDON (CONSOLIDATION) ACT 1920 MERGED ACTS RELATING TO THE PORT

1925

FIRST NEWSLETTER PLA MONTHLY PUBLISHED




1930

1931

FIRST PUBLIC DOCK AND RIVER CRUISES OPERATED BY PLA

1938

PLA FILM CITY OF SHIPS RELEASED



1940

1939-1945


WWII

1940

FIRST BOMBS FALL ON THE DOCKS (7 SEPT)

1948

PLA INTRODUCES SHORT-WAVE RADIO COMMUNICATION



1950

1951

PLA FILM WATERS OF TIME MADE

1955

PLA INTRODUCES RADAR

1959

THE THAMES NAVIGATION SERVICE (TNS) WAS ESTABLISHED - A MAJOR STEP FORWARD IN RIVER SAFETY

1960

1964

PLA SETS UP NETWORK OF WEATHER STATIONS ALONG THE THAMES

1968

THE PORT OF LONDON ACT FURTHER CONSOLIDATED ENACTMENTS

1969

FIRST GENERAL DIRECTIONS FOR THE RIVER ISSUED

1970

1971

TRINITY SQUARE HEAD OFFICE SOLD

1972

NATIONAL DOCK STRIKE

1974

PLA TRANSFERS RESPONSIBILITY FOR MONITORING WATER POLLUTION TO THAMES WATER


1980

1984

PORT OF LONDON RIVER INFORMATION SYSTEM (POLARIS) INTRODUCED, THAMES BARRIER WAS OPENED

1985

VESSEL TRAFFIC SERVICES (VTS) - IMPROVED TNS - BECOMES OPERATIONAL




1988

PLA BECOMES A HARBOUR AUTHORITY, ASSUMING RESPONSIBILITY FOR PILOTAGE

1989

FOLLOWING THE TRAGIC MARCHIONESS INCIDENT IN WHICH 51 PEOPLE LOST THEIR LIVES, NEW SAFETY MEASURES WERE INTRODUCED



1990


1992

THE PLA STOPPED TERMINAL OPERATIONS, WITH THE PRIVATISATION OF THE PORT OF TILBURY

LONDON RIVER HOUSE, GRAVESEND, COMPLETED

1993

THAMES OIL SPILL CLEARANCE ASSOCIATION (TOSCA) FORMED




1997

PLA HOSTS BIENNIAL CONFERENCE OF IAPH

1998

THAMES CLEAN JOINED WITH PLA DRIFTWOOD OPERATION TO FORM THAMES 21



2000

2000

ALEXANDRA HOUSE, GRAVESEND, ACQUIRED

2007

PLA PUBLISHED FIRST ENVIRONMENTAL REPORT


2009

100 YEARS OF THE PLA

2010

2015

FIRST THAMES VISION LAUNCHED



4 PORT OF LONDON NEWS: CENTENARY EDITION 2025

PORT OF LONDON NEWS: CENTENARY EDITION 2025 5

Credit: PLA Pilot Gareth Minter



# 1925



In November 1925, the Port of London Authority launched its first staff and industry publication, PLA Monthly. Priced at sixpence, it marked the start of a new era in how the Authority communicated with its workforce and the wider maritime community.

Britain was still rebuilding after the First World War, and shipping was modernising fast - electric cranes, automatic telephones, and new liners were transforming dockside life.

## A New Voice for the River



Armed troops leading a food convoy into London

### On people's minds:

Opening of the PLA's Trinity Square headquarters (1922)

Growing global trade links with the Commonwealth

Rapid advances in communication and mechanisation

New PLA Chair (1925)

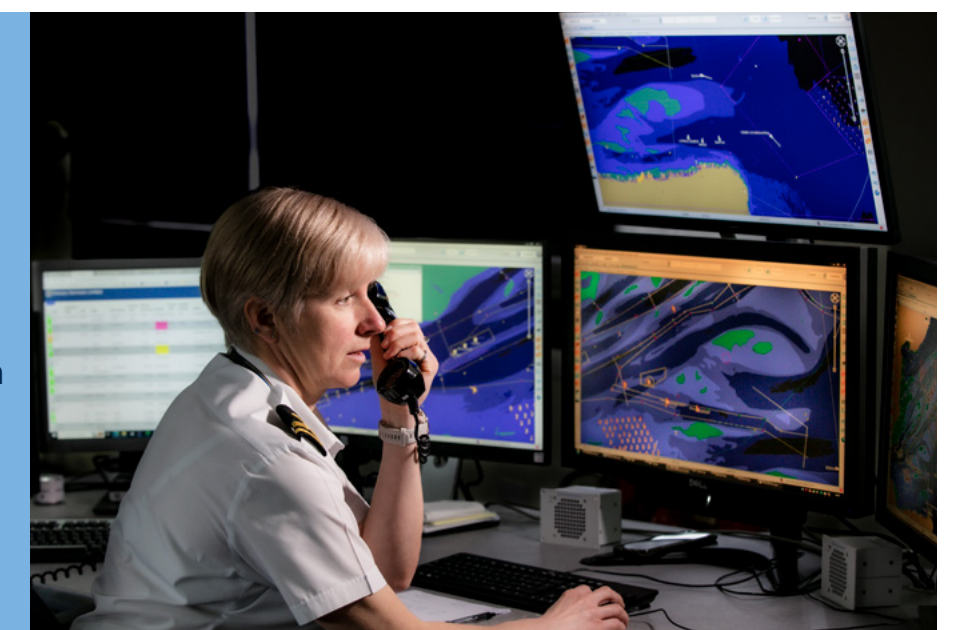
The first river cruises (WW1)



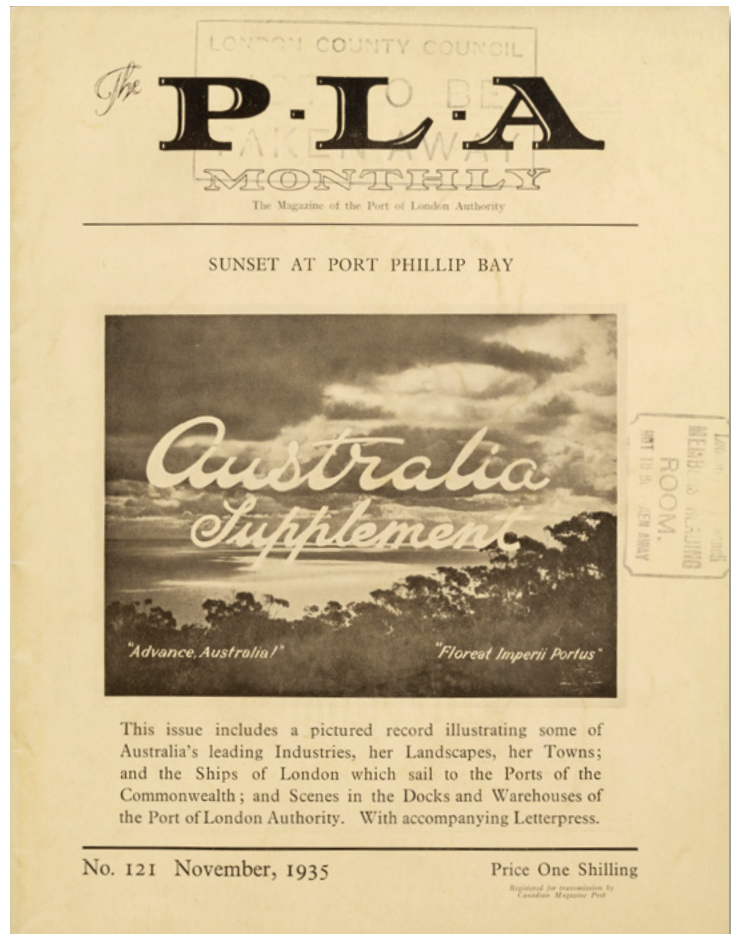
King George V Docks opened in 1921

### Modern echo:

In 2025, communication remains at the heart of what we do - from real-time vessel tracking to digital engagement with river users.



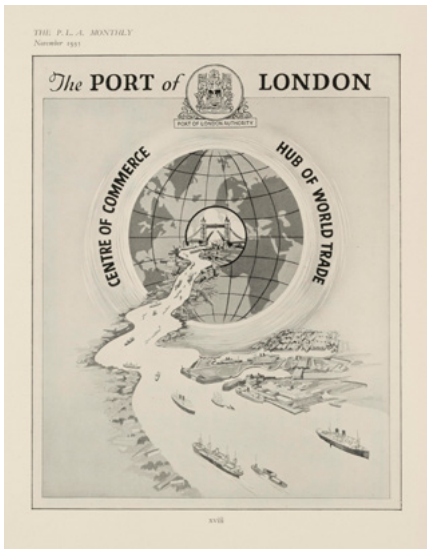




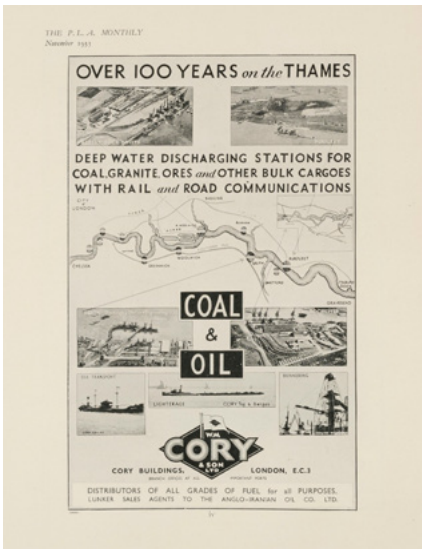
# Cruises, Commerce and the Commonwealth



Three PLA Policemen engage in their annual life-saving practice at West India Dock around 1930



The Port of London Authority's advert in 1935



CORY was already celebrating being 100 years old

## On people's minds:

Recovery from the Great Depression

Expanding international trade and exports

Birth of river leisure and cultural activity

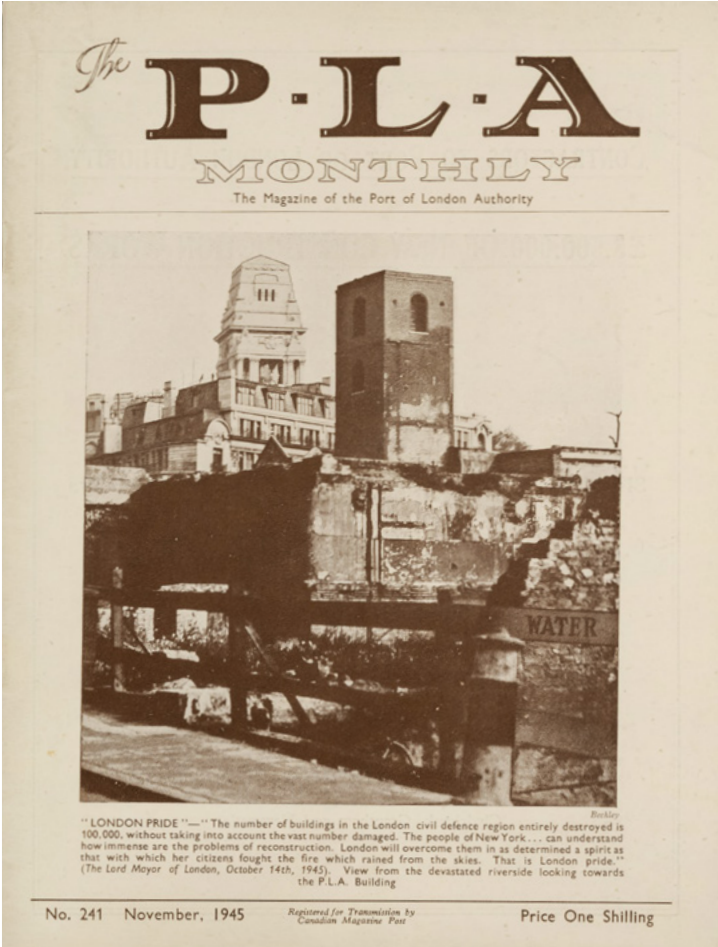
## Modern echo:

In 2025, the Thames carries millions of passengers a year - from commuter hybrid and electric ferries to entertaining tourboats - continuing the PLA's long-standing mission to keep the river open, accessible and alive.



Early signs of PLA community work: PLA police organise trip for dockworkers' children to the beach





Winston Churchill with PLA General Manager and the PLA auxiliary firemen team, surveying the docks in 1945

WWII women began taking PLA jobs on the river including volunteering for the River Emergency Service



# From Wartime to Recovery

## On people's minds:

### Rebuilding London's docks after the Blitz

### Wartime innovation: radar, radio, and communication advances

### Return to peacetime trade and employment



Tanks in the London Docks prepare for embarkation for D-Day landings in 1944



A detachment of the PLA Local Defence Volunteers, later the Home Guard, in training at the Royal Docks in 1940



Warehouses in St Katharine Docks ablaze during the Blitz September 1940

During World War II, the Port of London Authority (PLA) was central to Britain's survival. As the governing body of the Port of London, it managed one of the busiest ports in the world, ensuring the steady movement of essential imports such as food, fuel, and munitions. Despite the devastation of the Blitz, the PLA kept the port operational, organising the repair of damaged docks, warehouses, and cranes, and coordinating closely with the Royal Navy and the Ministry of War Transport to maintain Britain's supply lines.

One of its major warehouse complexes in Whitechapel, the Commercial Road Goods Depot, housed the East End's single biggest bomb shelter. The building which comprised a London, Midland and Scotland (LMS) goods sidings below a large warehouse became known

as the Tilbury Shelter and during the Blitz up to 14,000 took shelter at night.

When bombing reduced London docks capacity and getting ships to London became a riskier challenge, the PLA extended its activities to other British ports. Glasgow, in particular, became a vital centre for shipping crossing the Atlantic. The PLA helped coordinate the transfer of 300 barges and cargo-handling operations to the Clyde as well as staff, ensuring that wartime imports continued to reach Britain. This cooperation between the London and Glasgow ports demonstrated the PLA's national reach and adaptability in crisis conditions.

In addition to domestic operations, the PLA contributed to the war effort overseas by deploying stevedores and dockworkers to Allied ports worldwide in over a dozen PLA Dock Groups. Skilled

London dockers, were sent to strategic locations such as North Africa, the Middle East, and later to continental Europe following the D-Day landings and even Burma. Their expertise in loading and unloading military equipment, fuel, and supplies was vital to supporting Allied operations and maintaining the momentum of campaigns abroad.

Through its resilience, adaptability, and global coordination, the PLA proved indispensable to Britain's wartime logistics. Its leadership at home, its assistance in Glasgow, and the overseas service of its stevedores ensured that the flow of personnel and material continued helping to secure ultimate victory for the Allies but at the loss of over 125 employees and a badly damaged port infrastructure.

**James Stride**  
Chief Harbour Master





By 1955, the Port of London had been transformed from a bomb-damaged landscape into one of the busiest docks in the world. Trade was booming again. Ships were getting bigger and the PLA was investing heavily in radar, short-wave radio, and new vessel-handling systems to keep pace with modern shipping.

The PLA Monthly of that year was thicker than during wartime, filled with adverts and optimism. Stories celebrated the return of international travel, the rebuilding of dockside facilities, and the revival of London as a global trading capital.

# Back in Business

## On people's minds:

Jobs and prosperity after years of rationing

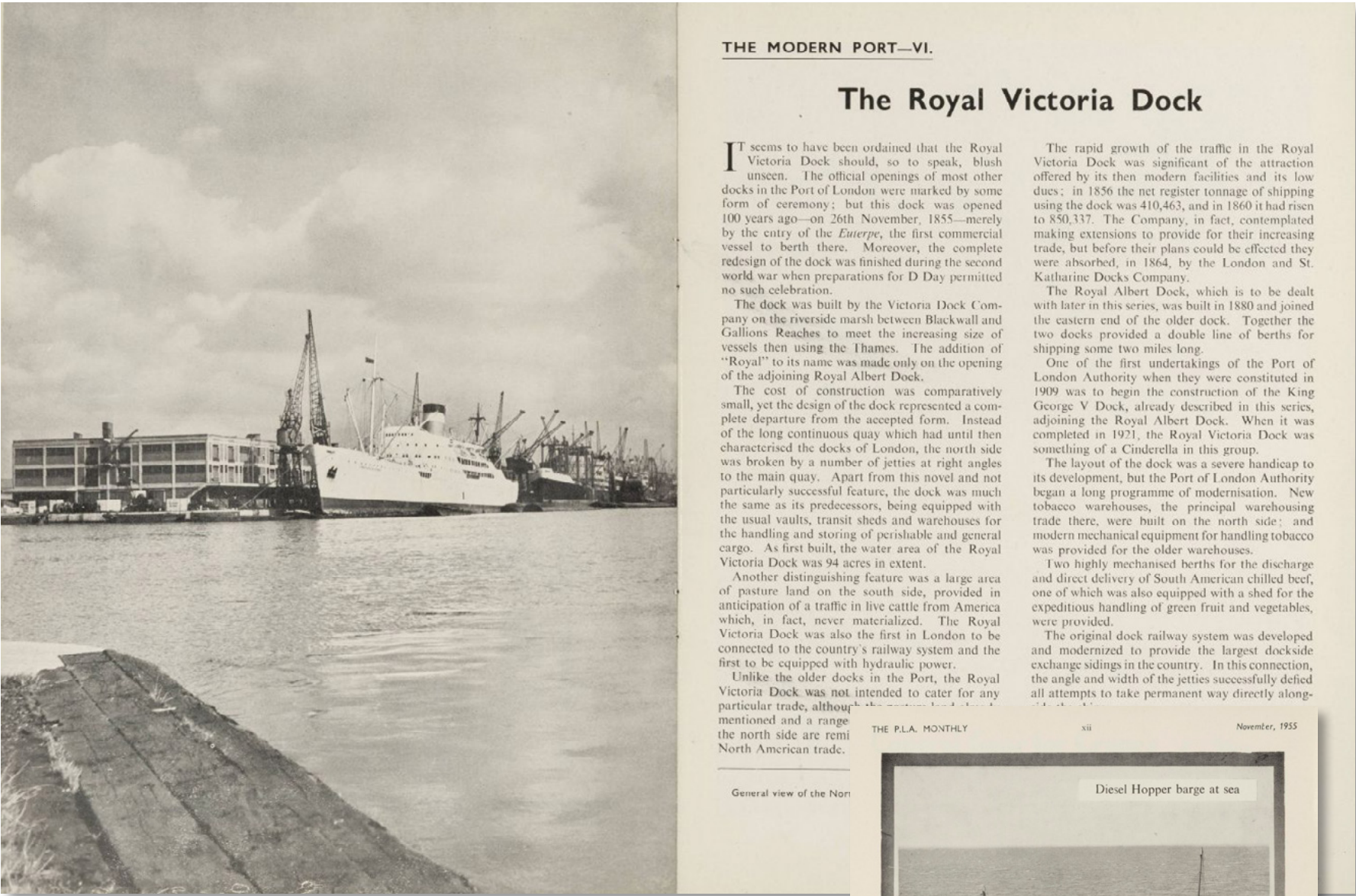
Modernisation of the docks with radar and radio systems

The birth of post-war tourism and troop transport routes

There were many active sports teams in the PLA



PLA Staff Club Darts team in 1951



General view of the North Side, Royal Victoria Dock

## Modern echo:

Just as radar revolutionised the river in the 1950s, today's digital navigation and VTS technology continues that legacy of safety and innovation on the Thames.



Advertising for dredging services





In 1965, PLA Monthly burst into colour for the first time. The front cover and advertising inserts reflected the optimism of the swinging sixties; London alive with trade, design, and daring new ideas.

This edition captured the handling of the world's largest teak log from Burma, and growing concern for the river's health. By the late 1950s the Thames had been declared "biologically dead", spurring new scientific efforts to clean and monitor it. The PLA's establishment of a network of weather stations along the river marked a step towards the environmental awareness we recognise today.



The last vaultmen and coopers pose to record the last barrel out of London Docks in 1969

# A New Look, A New Era



Credit: PLA Assistant Harbour Master, Jamie Gilbert

## Modern echo:

From colour print to digital dashboards, the 1960s' spirit of innovation continues in today's push for sustainability and real-time river data.

## The development of Hydrographic Services from the 1960s to the present

The late 1960's saw the PLA significantly expand its jurisdiction into the Thames Estuary. For the Hydrographic Service responsible for mapping channel depths, this meant not only a 300% increase in area but one that's a significant distance from the shore making accurate positioning more challenging as well as more susceptible to adverse weather. Surveys were conducted using single beam echo sounders to measure depth and sextant angles from a network of wooden beacons for position.

The 1970's brought decimalisation which meant all charts being converted from feet to metres. This presented an opportunity to re-define the charts. Cartographers annotated the charts with soundings and drew contours by hand.

The 1980's saw the opening of the Thames Barrier and collaboration with what is now the Environment Agency on monitoring tidal levels, important for shipping as well as managing flood risk.

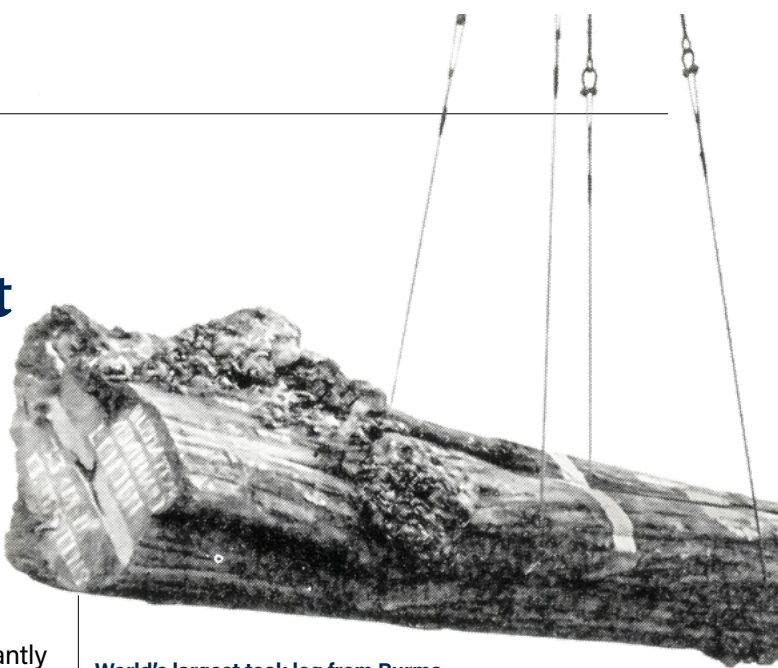
The 1990's saw the first use of global positioning systems and electronic charts first appearing on the bridges of ships. It was also the dawn of desktop computers and the internet meaning digital compilation of charts.

The 2000's saw the PLA invest in multibeam echosounders enabling full seafloor coverage to be achieved for the first time in line with evolving international survey standards. It was thought the new technology would speed up surveys, but in practice it primarily greatly improved accuracy and resolution (meaning we found a lot more wrecks and obstructions!).

The 2010's saw the use of laser scanners mounted aboard the survey vessel to map the exposed foreshore without having to send a vessel into shallow water. The building of London Gateway and the Tideway Tunnel required significant monitoring to ensure no adverse impact on the riverbed.

The 2020's has seen the use of unmanned aerial vehicles (drones) and autonomous surface vessels added to our capability. The decade will also see all chart products produced from a single electronic navigation chart source, with opportunities to further rationalise and improve speed of delivery of our chart products.

Alex Mortley  
Conservancy Manager



World's largest teak log from Burma

## On people's minds:

Colour printing and the rise of modern advertising

Growing concern over pollution and the river's future

Expanding hydrographic and weather-monitoring services

The Thames Navigation Service TNS was established in 1959, which was a major step forward in river safety





By 1975, the publication - now simply titled Port of London - reflected a port in transition. Containerisation was reshaping global trade, and new types of ships dominated the headlines: LNG tankers, grain carriers, and the largest vessels yet to enter the Thames.

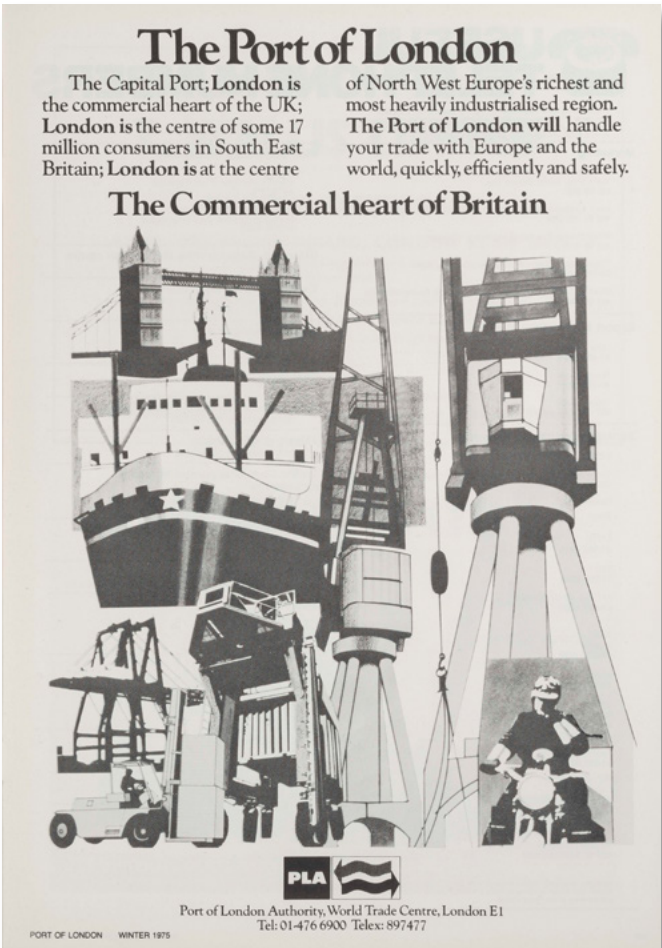
Design had evolved too; with bold fonts, full-colour covers, and creative advertising celebrating the vitality of London's docks.

The PLA was diversifying its role: promoting the Clipper Regatta, showcasing leisure on the river, and balancing industrial growth with environmental responsibility.

# Trade, Technology and Transformation



PLA supports Clipper race, 1975



Credit: Dartford and Cambria Sea Scout Group, Active Thames Grant Recipients

## Modern echo:

Half a century later, the PLA has a dedicated Active Thames partnership programme to encourage and enable watersports and leisure activities on and next to the tidal Thames.

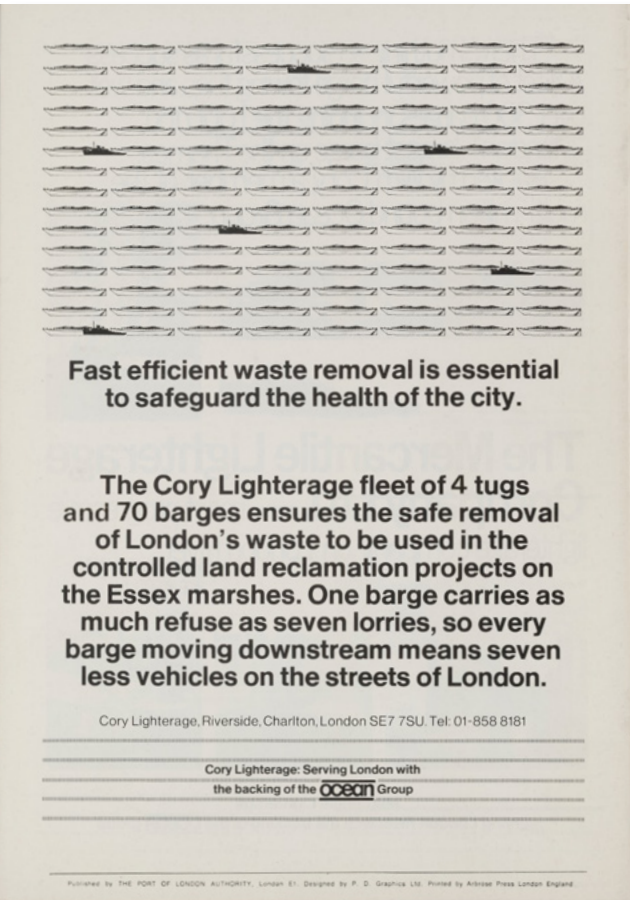
## On people's minds:

Containerisation and the rise of Tilbury as a modern terminal

New safety regulations and General Directions for river traffic (1969)

The 1972 national dock strike and shifts in the workforce

Royal Visits (Queen, 1973, and Queen Mother, 1975)



CORY promoting river freight of waste





By the mid-1980s, the Port of London had entered the computer age. The docks of old were giving way to container ports and automated systems, while safety and coordination on the river were being revolutionised by new technology.

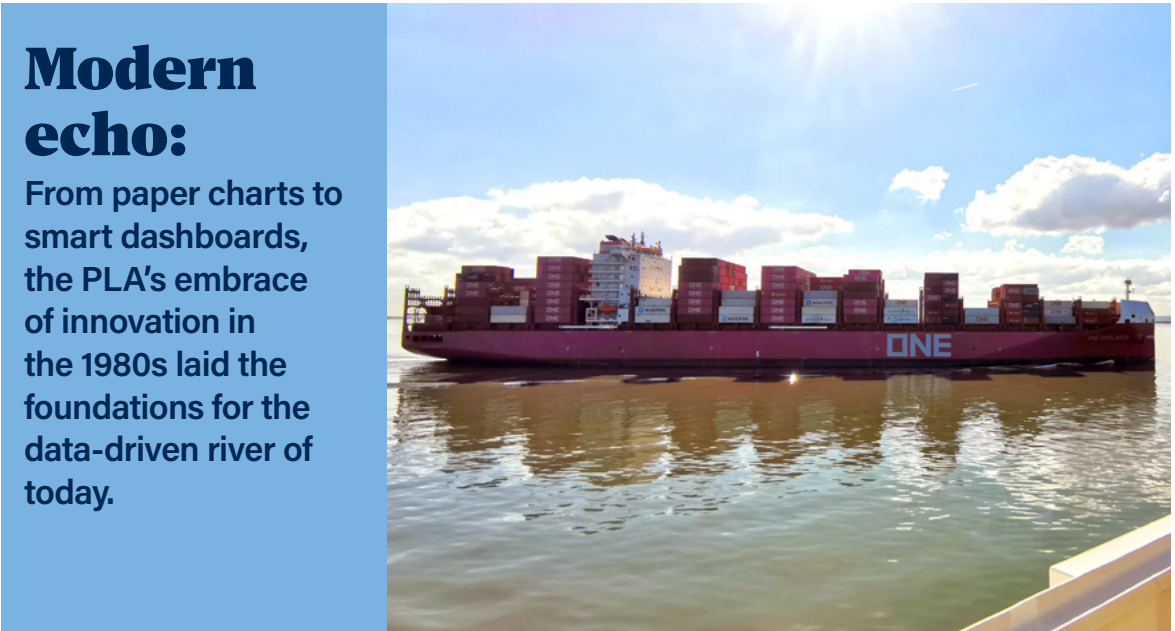
The 1985 Port of London magazine highlighted a series of breakthroughs, from the introduction of the Port of London River Information System (POLARIS) to the first modern Vessel Traffic Services (VTS) network, ensuring safer, more efficient navigation across the Thames. Cargo was changing too: fewer crates and sacks, more containers and high-value goods that reflected a new global economy.

# Technology Takes the Helm



PLA advert November 1985

Bulk Grain Terminal of Tilbury with concrete aprons designed for container storage



Credit: PLA Pilot Ivaylo Bratovanov

The 1980's were the most important years in modern history for Pilotage Operations, with the formation of the UKPA(M) in 1985 and the passing of the 1987 Pilotage Act.

In 1985, when facing the impending changes to Pilotage, two pilot organisations, UK Pilots Association and the Marine Pilots Branch of the TGWU, combined to become UKPA(M) and eventually the UKMPA that represent pilots today.

The 1987 Pilotage Act was passed to modernise the pilotage system in the UK, ensuring it responded effectively and enhanced navigational safety in British waters. The Act transferred responsibilities from central government to competent harbour authorities.

In the early eighties, UK ports were served by pilots, and pilot launches from the Trinity House Authority (THA). The PLA was served by the London District – which was the largest THA District – spanning from Dungeness to Felixstowe. Approximately 400 pilots worked in the London District.

There were four main pilot stations and five chief classes of pilots: River Thames Pilots, Channel Pilots, Cinque Ports Pilots, North Channel Pilots and River Medway Pilots. The various classes of pilot were controlled by Superintendents at Dover, Harwich, Gravesend and Chatham. The Superintendent at Gravesend had the title of 'Ruler of Pilots', dating back centuries to the time when pilots formed small groups to put up funds for a cutter (Trinity House, 2018).

On 1st October 1988 Pilotage for our district was transferred to the PLA, and as part of a 'transfer of Undertakings' a number of people and assets were transferred. THA pilots applied for positions and 140 pilots were employed by the PLA. No. 001 pilot was John Yarrow, who was a North Channel pilot. Mike Whitton, Mike Belsey and Paul Relf joined as the Pilotage Management team.

In March 1989, the PLA began direct recruitment and training of additional pilots. The first of these was No. 141, Roger Tappenden, who retired in September 2019 after a distinguished career.

Nowadays, the PLA Pilotage Management team has 8 team members and operates out of the PLA headquarters in Gravesend. They support over 121 pilots to serve over 13,000 pilot acts each year.

PLA Pilots operate 24/7, 365 days a year. With their detailed knowledge of the river and its depths and tidal currents, Pilots therefore play a vital role in the day-to-day operations of the Port of London. They also have a huge input into planning for the demands of the future.

Boarding and landing of pilots now takes place from Sheerness, Ramsgate, Harwich and Gravesend. The pilot cutters at Sheerness and Ramsgate are purpose-built craft operated by Estuary Services Ltd (ESL) which is a wholly-owned subsidiary of the PLA. Boarding and landing services at Harwich are provided by the Harwich Haven Authority and for operations at Gravesend the PLA uses its own pilot cutters. The majority of PLA pilots are Sea Pilots, however, specialist River Pilots work in the stretch of the Thames upriver of Gravesend.

**Dave Newbury**  
Marine Pilotage Manager

Reference: Trinity House, 2018. *Up and down the rivers*. Available at: <https://www.trinityhouse.co.uk/articles/up-and-down-the-rivers>

## On people's minds:

The rapid automation of port operations

Cross-sector collaboration to revitalise the river (the new Thames Estuary Partnership)

Industrial change and modern safety management



Credit: PLA Pilot Jack Daly





# From Industry to Environment

Looking out over the Thames in central London, you might assume it's a lifeless stretch of brown, murky water. However, the Thames was brown when the Romans arrived, its colour reflects the fact that it is a tidal river and in reality, decades of investment and collaboration have transformed the UK's most iconic river.

Once, the Thames was choked by sewage and waste from the capital. Despite Sir Joseph Bazalgette's pioneering Victorian sewer system, untreated effluent and industrial discharge left the river so polluted that, in 1957, it was declared "biologically dead."

That declaration marked a turning point. Waste treatment improved, water quality standards rose, and oxygenating "bubblers" were installed to support aquatic life. In the 1990s, the National Rivers Authority evolved into the Environment Agency, tasked with protecting rivers from flooding and pollution and enforcing the EU Water Framework Directive – introducing integrated river basin management to reverse decades of damage.

Throughout this period, the Port of London Authority (PLA) worked with the Environment Agency and other partners, such as Thames21, to tackle pollution. Gradually, fish returned: flounder, bass, eel and even salmon. Today, more than 115 species thrive in the Thames, including seahorses – clear evidence of improved water quality.

Yet the work is far from over. The PLA's Clean Thames Plan brings together public, private and third-sector organisations to address modern challenges. Ending industrial pollution in the 1950s was a milestone and today, the recent construction of the Thames Tideway Tunnel will divert millions of tonnes of sewage effluent away from the river. But new threats – such as microplastic, urban runoff and climate change – demand bold, innovative solutions.

A clean Thames is a commitment to future generations. By working together, we can ensure this historic river remains a living, thriving ecosystem for decades to come.

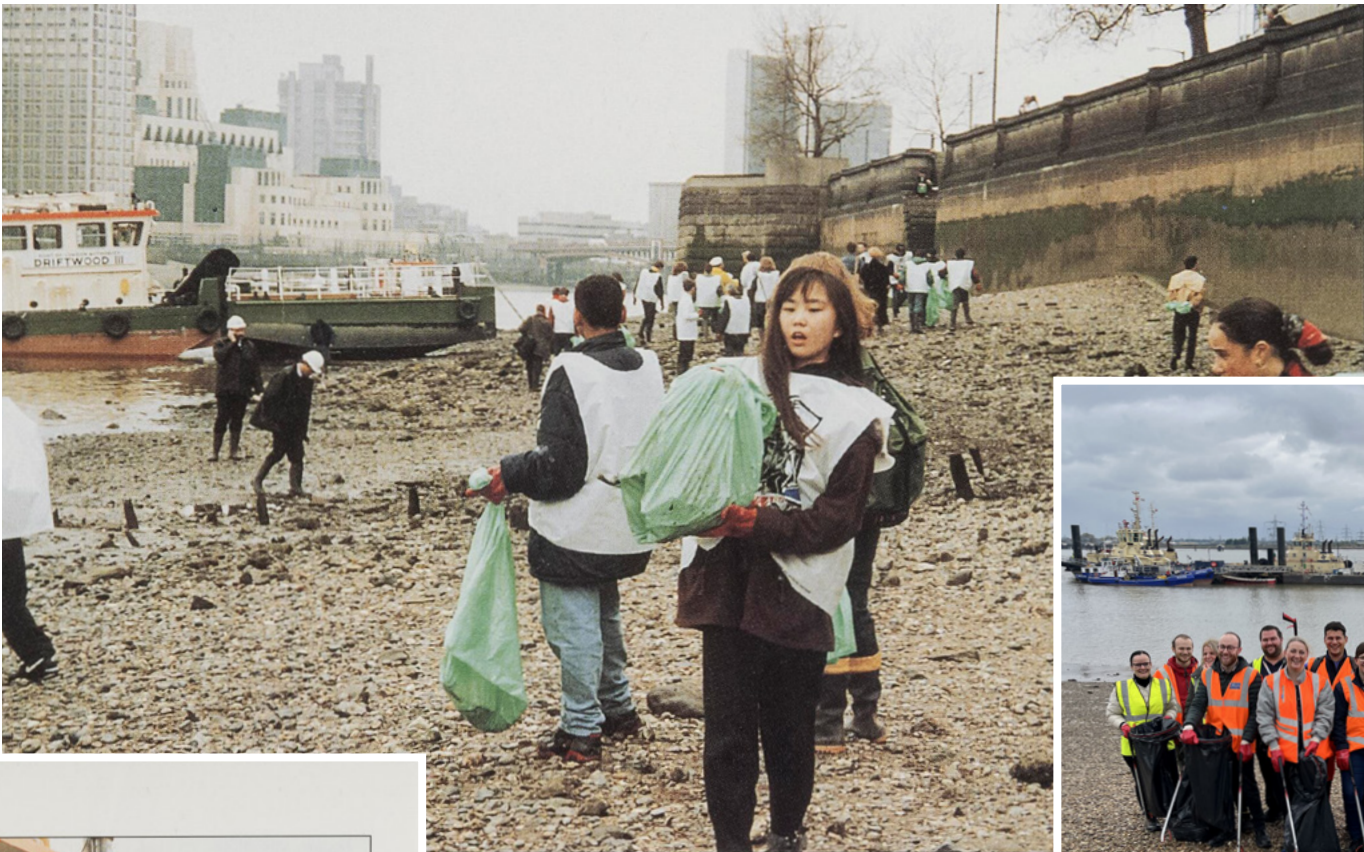
**Emily McLean**  
Senior Advisor – Technical & Project

## On people's minds:

Environmental recovery after decades of pollution

The rise of digital monitoring and data-driven port management

The centenary of Richmond Lock and Weir (1894–1994) and growing pride in river heritage



Volunteers during the 1994 spring clean between Lambeth and Vauxhall Bridges



PLA Staff Litter Pick at Denton 2024


By 1995, the river had changed beyond recognition. Tilbury had been sold to Forth Ports, containerisation was complete, and the focus had shifted from heavy industry to sustainability, recreation and renewal.

Editions celebrated the PLA's growing environmental leadership – highlighting partnerships with the National Rivers Authority and the launch of Thamesclean, a campaign to improve water quality.

We also introduced POLATIDE, a pioneering computerised tidal monitoring system that placed the PLA among the industry's early digital innovators.



Richmond Lock and Weir. Credit: Andy Wallace



PLA Driftwood II supports Thamesclean.

## THE ENVIRONMENT ACT: WHAT IMPLICATIONS FOR THE TIDY BRITAIN GROUP'S WATER PROJECTS?

*Professor Graham Ashworth*  
Director General  
Tidy Britain Group

Tidy Britain Group has been working with the National Rivers Authority on a number of litter abatement projects throughout Britain

over the past five years. In Manchester, the NRA has been the chief source of funding and support for the 'Water Watch' project, which is working to clean up the Mersey Basin's many waterways. In Wales, the River Taff has been subject of a four year programme, funded by the NRA, to reduce fly-tipping and sewage-derived litter. In London, the Tidy Britain Group and the NRA initiated 'Thamesclean', a partnership project to clean up solid waste in the Thames and its tributaries.

The PLA's "Tidy Britain" collaboration



Credit: Luke Sampson

## Modern echo:

Today's Thames Vision 2050 continues that journey - building on 1990s innovation to create a thriving, net-zero, biodiverse river corridor.





Port of London Authority divers being fitted with their copper-helmet gear before a dive

On people’s minds:

Regeneration of the Thames Gateway and Docklands

Environmental awareness and river wildlife stories capturing public imagination

In the 2000s, Port of London News took on a new look - newspaper-style layouts, more photographs, and a livelier tone reflecting a fast-changing city. The PLA's focus was shifting once again: investment in London Gateway, support for river freight revival, and a renewed commitment to making the Thames central to London life.

Articles covered everything from the rescue of a stranded whale to the opening of Marine House, while new passenger services were reshaping daily travel along the river. The newsletter was evolving too, bridging the gap between print and digital ahead of the 2015 online launch.

Modern echo:

Today's Tidal Thames News continues that digital tradition - reaching thousands of readers every month and sharing the story of a living, working river.



Marine House at Denton completed in 2006



Michael Russell PLA Diver, 2009



PLA Marine Surveyors Clayton Layton and Tom Parham



Credit: PLA Trainee Pilot, James Kitney





PLA Deputy Harbour Master Mark Towns and Marine Surveyor Tim Prior in 2009

PLA Pilot Ed Hadnett boards a container ship off the Kent coast in 2009



# The Thames Goes Online

By 2015, the PLA's long-running publication had fully entered the digital age. Tidal Thames News launched as an online newsletter - reflecting a new era of instant communication, video storytelling and global reach.

The river itself was busier than ever: passenger operators expanded their fleets, the Great River Race was drawing record crowds, and the Thames continued to appear on the world stage, even in a James Bond chase sequence. Behind the scenes, apprenticeships, new safety campaigns, and environmental partnerships were reshaping the PLA for a changing century.

## On people's minds:

The revival of river transport for freight and passengers

London Gateway's expansion and major river investments

The digital transformation of PLA communications and data systems

Over the past few decades, rapid advances in technology have transformed the way ships are managed and navigate at sea. One of the relatively newer areas of the maritime sector to benefit from this progress is Vessel Traffic Services (VTS) – the systems and teams that monitor and coordinate ship movements to keep the river Thames safe and efficient.

Originally, 'Port Control' relied heavily on radar, radio communication, flag and light signals to track vessels and relay information between ships and the shore. While effective for its time, these tools offered only limited coverage and depended largely on human observation and interpretation. Today, however, VTS has entered a new digital era.

Modern systems now combine solid state radar, Automatic Identification System (AIS) data, CCTV and real-time weather and tidal information to provide a comprehensive picture of maritime traffic. This not only improves safety but also reduces delays and fuel consumption, contributing to a more sustainable and efficient port.

The growth of cloud computing and high-speed data networks means that information can be shared instantly between ports, vessels, stakeholders and maritime authorities around the world. Remote monitoring and digital twins – virtual replicas of ports or systems within ports



Harbour Patrol Service PLA General Purpose Coxswain Steve Mordue in 2009

## Modern echo:

A decade later, Tidal Thames News continues that mission, linking every part of the river network through stories that celebrate innovation, safety and stewardship.

– are beginning to play a role in simulating traffic scenarios and planning for future increases in traffic volume and port expansion.

Looking ahead, technological growth shows no sign of slowing. Developments in automation, machine learning, and satellite communication promise even greater levels of accuracy, coordination, and environmental protection. Artificial intelligence (AI) and data analytics is being developed to detect potential collisions or bottlenecks before they happen, which will allow VTS Operators to 'look into the future' and take early proactive measures to deconflict traffic. Developments in remote and autonomous vessels will further impact VTS and how the service is delivered, particularly to vessels with no crew on board! As the maritime industry continues to embrace innovation, Vessel Traffic Services will remain at the heart of global trade – smarter, safer, and more connected than ever before.

To ensure the Port of London is ready for these developments we are investing in the Marine Centre Transformation Project (MCTP), a new modern operations centre capable of delivering our important Vessel Planning and VTS services now and into the future.

**Simon Phillips**  
Harbour Master (SMS & VTS)



PLA Harbour Master (Upper), Adam Layer





Modern echo:

The spirit of innovation that launched the PLA's first newsletter in 1925 continues to guide the Authority today - ensuring the river remains vital, connected and future-ready.



PLA participated in the 'Pride in London' parade in 2024



Marine Services Team supporting the Boat Race 2023

On people's minds:

Delivering Thames Vision 2050 - a sustainable, inclusive and resilient future

Expanding the green port network: decarbonisation and digitalisation

Heritage, culture and public connection with the river

A Century of Connection

Maritime Minister Baroness Vere with PLA Chair Jonson Cox CBE and the UK's first fully-electric Remote Surveying Vessel, 2023



PLA's Ronnie Richardson competing in the Doggett's Coat and Badge Wager in 2024

A hundred years after PLA Monthly first hit the presses, the Thames stands as one of the cleanest urban rivers in Europe, and one of the most dynamic. The themes of that first issue still resonate: communication, technology, and people.

In this decade, the PLA is leading a new phase of transformation: supporting net-zero shipping, championing alternative fuels, and welcoming a new generation of electric and hydrogen-powered vessels.



PLA Pilot Cutter Leader. Credit: Austin Coutts



Laura Maersk the world's first ammonia-methanol-fuelled ship at London Gateway





# THAMES VISION 2050

PORT OF  
LONDON  
AUTHORITY

## The next chapter



As we look back across a century of headlines, it's clear that the Thames has never stood still. Every generation has faced its own challenges - from war to renewal, pollution to climate change - yet the river endures, adapting and inspiring in equal measure.

In the coming years, the river will face new challenges (rising sea levels, shifting trade routes, and an ever-evolving growing capital city). But the PLA and its partners are investing in the future, just as those before us did.

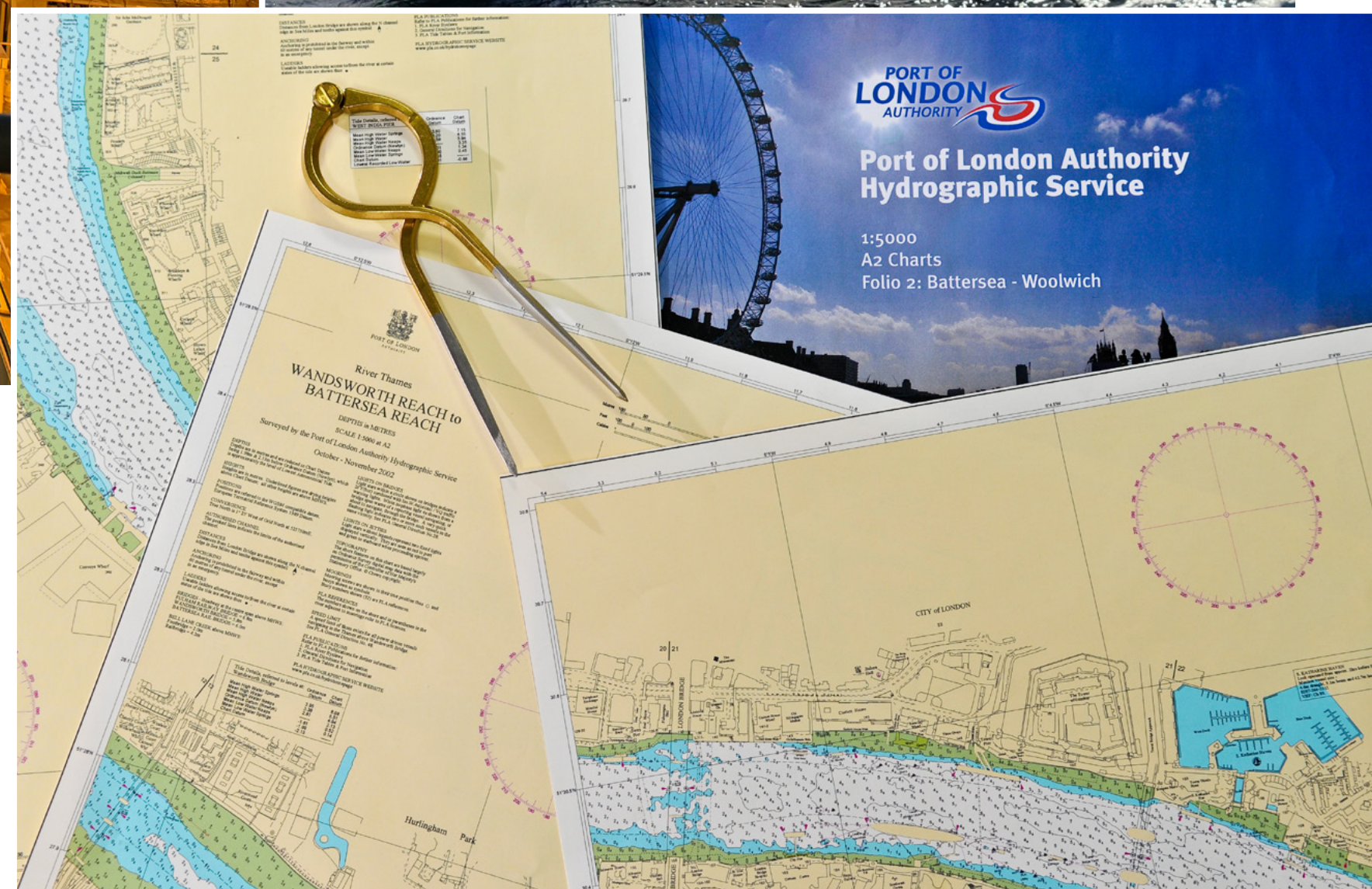
The Port of London Authority's story is, above all, a story of people: those who keep the river working, safe, and alive.

Here's to the next hundred years of news on the tidal Thames.

**Robin Mortimer**  
Chief Executive Officer

Credit: PLA Pilot Gareth Joynes

Credit: PLA Pilot Jack Daly



Port of London Hydro department. Credit: Andy Wallace





# Closing Reflection

Harbour Service Launch Middle District on duty. Credit: PLA Field Engineer Bob De Ville

**I'm Director of Corporate Affairs at the Port of London Authority, and it's my team who are responsible for collating, writing and publishing the Tidal Thames News each fortnight. It's a privilege to continue the tradition of a regular newsletter, even if its format has changed a little over the 100 years.**

As I write this, I'm thinking of the generations of Port of London people – our employees and those of all the businesses based along 95 miles of the tidal Thames, our communities and elected representatives - whose stories have been captured over the past century. The changing landscape, shifting economic hubs and evolving priorities. It has been fascinating to learn a little bit more about their lives at the port and I've loved reading the perspectives of their counterparts today.

I'm also thinking of my predecessors and the people who chose what to capture, who wrote and edited the stories, who took the photos and designed the layouts. Who took the decision to publish the very first PLA Monthly in 1925 (was it a difficult sell to their bosses or was it welcomed as a great new innovation?!) and then keep it going through a world war and significant periods of change for the port.

I particularly loved reading that at an exhibition in the "Palace of Engineering" at Wembley in 1925, "The huge totals of the shipping tonnage using London was another source of amazement to visitors who had not realised that [in 1924] over forty-five million net register tons of shipping entered and left the Port of London". In 2024, around 52 million tonnes of cargo passed through the Port and yet people are still surprised to learn that we're the UK's biggest port!

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to our newsletter over the years. But, in particular, a huge thank you to everyone involved in putting together this special edition and to the team at London Museum Docklands for taking such great care of our archives.

**Siân Foster**  
Director of Corporate Affairs

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**We would like to say a big thank you to London Museum Docklands and archivist Fiona Keates for their assistance in putting this special centenary edition of Tidal Thames News together.**



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