

London Landscapes

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Perivale Wood

and Tower Bridge Moorings
under threat

TERESA LUNDOQUIST



Tower Bridge Moorings at Downings Road are under threat

Lucinda Blythe

For regular attendees of the Open Garden Squares Weekend, held annually in June, the Downings Road Ancient Moorings will certainly be familiar, and quite probably also memorable and special. However, for those who have not yet explored this superb example of river-based urban regeneration it would surely come as a revelation to find this thriving, almost hidden, floating community in close proximity to majestic Tower Bridge and with a City of London backdrop.

These historic, 'ancient' or private barge moorings have been in existence since at least the first half of the 19th century, possibly longer, and over 100 residents live here in historic, former working craft. The infrastructure of the Moorings is provided by seven Garden Barges, planted with trees, shrubs and annuals; fruit trees include plum, quince and medlars, and vegetables are also grown. On a recent visit I was captivated by the Moorings' quirkiness and inventiveness: it's a thoroughly

contemporary space, with sustainability at its heart, and has won numerous UK and international awards for the community gardens, yet the Moorings date from a time when the Thames was a very busy communication and trading artery through London. It struck me that possibly the Moorings could only be in London, not just because of the river, but more due to the palpable sense of collaboration with and integration into the locale, which will have surely

LEFT
Tower Bridge Moorings taking part in The Thames Diamond Jubilee Pageant

BELOW
Visitors enjoying the Tower Bridge Mooring gardens

contributed to their longevity, and for which Londoners themselves would possibly like to think they have a reputation.

But, sadly, this year will be the tenth in which Nick Lacey, the Moorings' owner since 1983, has battled for their existence – an on-going threat which seems to be missing a clear legal argument, but which hinges on the issue of licensing in the Thames and importantly the exemption of private moorings from this requirement. What is certainly evident is that legislation governing the conduct of the tidal Thames defines a private mooring as "a mooring chain placed in the Thames before 29th September 1857", and documents show that in 1855 the Moorings at Downings Road were in existence and were recognised as such. Unless some sensible compromise can be reached, the case might yet go to trial at the High Court as a date in May has been fixed. Quite apart from the considerable expense this would entail, London risks losing an historic site on the Thames with its beautiful floating gardens and unique craft.

Please visit www.towerbridgemoorings.co.uk, to find out more. You can also register your support for the continuation of the Moorings at Downings Road.

The Garden Barge Square will be available for visits by Open Garden Squares Weekend ticket holders on Saturday 8 and Sunday 9 June between 14:00 and 17:00.

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