

LAND REGISTRATION ISSUES ON THE SURREY BANK OF THE SUNBURY TO MOLESEY REACH OF THE RIVER THAMES

The Environment Agency (EA) submitted a 'statement of truth' for adverse possession of the riverbank from Cherry Orchard Gardens to Sunbury Lock on 20th June 2018. This land includes the former waterworks' wharves, which have now been occupied by squatting boats. In this statement, the EA claim that they have treated this land as their own for 20 years (ie from **1998**).

In fact, Wikipedia suggests that it was in **1996** that the EA actually inherited the land from the National Rivers Authority. Previously the land had been owned by the Thames Water Authority, and before that, the Thames Conservators, and before that, the various water companies.

The first water treatment works in the world were built at Seething Wells, but Wikipedia reports that:

"The inlets at Seething Wells sucked up too much mud with the water because of turbulence caused by the River Mole, River Ember and The Rythe. The Chelsea Waterworks Company attempted to build works opposite Hampton Court but followed the Lambeth Waterworks Company to a new installation at Molesey in 1875 where the Molesey Reservoirs were built."

The riverbank was taken over by the Thames Conservancy and then:

"On 1 April 1974, the Thames Conservancy was subsumed into the new Thames Water Authority, although much of the organisation remained intact as the authority's Thames Conservancy Division. However when Thames Water was privatised in 1990 the river management functions passed to the new National Rivers Authority and in 1996 to the Environment Agency."

Sea Scouts

After the Second World War, the local Seas Scouts were granted permission to build a boathouse on the grounds behind the double gates leading to the former Lambeth and Chelsea Waterworks Wharf. The scouts moored their boats alongside the wharf, and also moored some boats on the opposite riverbank next to Aquarius Sailing Club.

The scouts cut the grass on the towpath and recreational motorboats were allowed to moor alongside when the scouts were not there. Thames Motor YC and other clubs also used the wharf.

When the EA inherited the land they rebuilt the wharf and built a set steps down to the rivers to assist the scouts. This was said to be during the period when Eileen McKeever was the EA Harbour Master.

Planning permission was granted in 1998 for the extraction and processing of sand and gravel from Molesey Reservoirs, with the construction of ancillary plant and a concrete batching plant, the siting of a concrete crusher, demolition of the redundant reservoir structures and processing and recycling of waste.

The Scouts were evicted, moved their boats to Walton Road and launched on the slipway at Hurst Park.

With the scouts gone and extraction of sand and gravel ended, the wharves were neglected and left to slowly decline by the EA, leading to the situation we have today with squatting vessels moored alongside, blatantly ignoring EA notices to move.

Cherry Orchard Gardens

The last houses in Cherry Orchard Gardens backing onto the river were built in 1955 and the residents began extending their back gardens and cutting the grass on the land on the other side of the towpath, running down the river. Some also installed landing stages and moored their boats alongside. These landing stages are defined by the EA as Section 60 'accommodations' and are subject to annual licensing charges, but a no time have they been used as residential moorings, unlike the unconsented moorings upstream.

Most people would see the residents' extensions as improvements or 'tidying up' the riverbank. Certainly they have opened up views over the river, which walkers welcome. Some people may argue that they would prefer to see a natural riverbank, but there is no threat to the right of way on the Thames Path.

In contrast local residents and river users have complained vociferously about unconsented moorings and sunken and derelict boats further upstream. The squatting residential boats upstream have no electrical hook-up and typically use environment unfriendly wood burners and petrol generators. Nor do they have any connection with services such as water or sewage. Meetings have been held with EA officers at which promises were made that this issue would be addressed, but at no stage was it mentioned that the EA were planning to challenge the Cherry Orchard residents extension of their back gardens.

I am confident that the vast majority of river users and 'friends of the river' who attend RUG 8 meetings would:

1. **support** the EA's adverse possession order for the land above Cherry Orchard Gardens
2. **oppose** the possession order for the gardens of the Cherry Orchard residents.
3. **support** a compromise agreement between the EA and Cherry Orchard residents.

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Bell Weir to Teddington Lock