

Famous Boat Builders on the Thames

By Steve Jennings

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Turks are a London founded family company who have a long history which dates back over 3 centuries to 1710, when it was founded by Mr Richard Turk. But documentary evidence concerning Turk produced boats extend back very nearly a thousand years to the eleven-hundreds. The focus was largely on making passenger transporting wherries and fishing boats, though their reputation soon extended and Turks enhanced their craft into building vessels for English and overseas Royal families in addition to the exportation of pleasure craft - in particular touring canoes and also skiffs - with clients in most of the known world, many times being awarded prizes at foreign exhibitions. A single project even involved building boats for the amusement of HRH Queen Victoria on the Home Park waters. The present day company was pioneered by Michael Turk who was a Swan Master and Bargemaster to the Vintners' Company and a Queen's Waterman. He is also a Past Master of The Company of Waterman & Lightermen of the River Thames. Michael challenged himself to take on the serious project of construction of the Grand Turk in 1997, a full size reproduction of a powerful British Frigate from the 18th Century. Which today sails with a full 12 cannon, three 100 foot masts and twenty two functioning sails. She is a formidable sight, the first of her type to be crafted in more than one hundred and fifty years and boasts TV and film appearances which include the ITV television series 'Hornblower'. Michael's son, Richard Daniel Turk today operates Turks and continues the traditions associated with Turks river enterprises whilst also successfully expanding the business to match present day demands.

After 3 centuries of successful boat building and operation of a stunning fleet of passenger vessels, Turks stands proudly as one of Kingston's few surviving family run small businesses. Fostering a core ideal in high standards and intricate organisation, Turk's busy fleet carries 1000's of passengers each year and are the proud hosts of hundreds of unique events afloat the River Thames. Nowadays the firm extended down the Thames to Chatham with the launch of Turks Shipyard Ltd with a focus on slipway operations and maritime maintenance. Turk Film Services are extremely active in the TV and film trade specialising in marine coordination, vessel construction and hiring out props and has an assortment of more than 300 historic boats. Turks Film Services credits

include recent productions such as the Harry Potter Series and Guy Ritchie's Sherlock Holmes film. Turks is going to be honouring the 300th anniversary of the family business this year and have a range of functions planned to give thanks to patrons prior, existing as well as future, and hope to be still around in another 300 years.

Today Turks operates a range of [boat hire on the Thames](#), and a [Thames river Cruise](#) service. They have regular timetabled boat trips on the Thames, and also offer party boats on the Thames which can cater for up to 150 family and friends in lavish surroundings.

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