



THE UMPIRE'S LAUNCH.

The Consuta Trust

The advancement of education in the history of steam launches, by preservation, maintenance and exhibition of the steam launch **Consuta**

News Letter No. 38 — Summer 2009



Dear Supporter,

It is over 10 years since the Consuta Trust became a registered charity, our first Newsletter was issued in Spring 1999. So after this time it's worth looking at our Trust objects to see how we are meeting it's aims.

The Trust has been very successful at displaying Consuta in many different ways and keeping the launch in good condition. Consuta gives lots of pleasure to those who visit the various events we attend, even a positional river trip provokes much interest from general onlookers. Sadly not all of our objects have yet been achieved. A key part of these is helping people learn about the history of Consuta, S.E. Saunders and the era of the Thames steam launches. This really is quite an ambitious aim but does need the right sort of base.

It is a sobering thought that very few small historic steam launches are kept on public display as operational exhibits – ever wondered why not? The River Thames had a rich history of pleasure boating resulting in a wide variety of surviving historic boats that are kept in use by private owners for their own pleasure. Consuta it seems is the only operational historic steamboat on the Thames which is held in public trust. The problem is that we don't have a base open to the visiting public.

Of course there are several other historic Thames steam launches which have survived and are held or owned for public benefit and shown as public exhibits, but it's a fact that there are no operational examples. Look at the list:- Eva in the River and Rowing Museum, Waterlily in the National

Website: www.consuta.org.uk

Trustees: Derek Brown Tony Cundick David Eager Colin Henwood Geoff Newton Brian Smith Registered charity No. 1076505

Maritime Museum at Falmouth, Donola the Conservancy Inspection launch held in store at Wroughton (Donola is not even accessible by the public) and the delightful Cygnet displayed at the National Powerboat Museum in Basildon (Essex). Another question is why are most of these historic Thames launches not even located by the Thames? There are a few commercial operators with the larger passenger steamers on the Thames such as Windsor Belle, Nuneham, Alaska and Streatley (Streatley however has not steamed for two years so might be considered at risk).

One has to ask whether the Consuta Trust is doing the right thing? maybe our charge is too valuable to be used; it was suggested to me that Eva can only be a static exhibit because she is too valuable to steam. Is it because the public aren't interested in operational steam launches?, or is it just too difficult or too expensive to keep them running.

Probably a major reason is that it's too difficult and expensive for a museum to display historic boats in working condition. For example Consuta's operational costs are about £5000 per annum, there is also the need to provide competent crew. Fortunately for our Trust we have volunteers who give their time for free and we have a supporters group who provide donations to meet the costs; so thank you all for your support.

One sad fact is that we have discovered that there is no support or recognition whatsoever from local authorities or government bodies for Consuta, this is tragic perhaps even a national disgrace. Amazingly Consuta would stand a better chance of qualifying for government statutory support if it was a static exhibit. Cutty Sark is classed as a part of our national heritage because it is a fixture, so receives funding support, presumably this would not be the case if it was still sailing; what strange values our authoritarian bureaucrats have. The National Historic Ships is a governmental advisory committee who might be able to improve things over time, but the proposed draft of a new Heritage Bill would seem to offer little hope of any improvement in the short term.

Now what is happening about our projected base for Consuta:

We have applied for an HLF grant for the floating boathouse based at Beale Park, the cost will be around £70/80,000 and we are asking for an HLF "Your Heritage" grant of £50,000. The grant is needed for the main part of the structure however we will be relying on volunteer work for most of the completion work. Decisions on HLF Your Heritage Grants are fairly quick ie within 10 weeks.

Report on activities this year. Spring Maintenance work

The deck varnish has been repaired by David and his helpers, the funnel has been repainted by Colin Henwood. The boiler passed its inspection, we have had a positive hull survey report provided by John King and have managed to obtain a reduction in the cost of boat insurance.

Consuta back on the water

The Spring launching was managed by a smaller crane (50 ton) in time for the Beale Park Boat Show. We made our donation box easier to reach, and this produced a surprising total of some £130 in the box with extra cash donations given later. During the 3 day show we carried well over 200 adults and children, despite drizzle during most



of Saturday. This really is a great show and you should come along if you have any interest in boating.

Consuta was then moved down river to Henley for a celebration of the 150th anniversary of the first boat race. The event was arranged by Derek Brown and Jack Waterfall of the Boat Race Founders Society; two other steamboats took part to carry all the visitors (Derek Brown's Vanessa and Dick Bradford's Surabaya). The party had lunch at the Leander Club, then followed by a look around the museum.



A film job for Channel 4

A week later Consuta was used for a television film job with Sir James Dyson who was presenting a programme about science for C4. He was thrilled to have a chance of handling Consuta during the filming. David Eager provides this report:-

In a Spin with Sir James (How a little steam boat became a magnificent steam launch)

"Well yes, I think we should do it". With these words began a very significant amount of form filling, risk assessments and all the other activities required for about 30 seconds of TV coverage nowadays.

We had been approached by a producer from Channel 4 asking whether they could use Consuta to film the opening sequence of a programme in a series called "Genius of Britain", they asked if Consuta could be taken to Bristol. So Brian Smith had suggested they use a steam boat based in Bristol - I suspect his experience in the TV industry meant he knew how much time would have to be spent for what will, in the end be a very short TV appearance. The owner of the steamboat in Bristol must have known as well - he had an excuse - so it was back to us, yes they were now wanting to do the filming on the Thames.

The series is about the British Scientists and Engineers who have changed the world and Consuta was to be used to introduce Sir James Dyson's programme on the industrial revolution & James Watt. Prior to the actual filming there were extensive discussions with the assistant producer:-

AP "which of Watt's innovations did Consuta use? "

DE "well none really, she's a cross between a bonfire and a dragster.....built for acceleration..... condensers and the like are too heavy!

AP "I'll read your Sir James's script - This little steamboat...."

DE "Consuta's not a little steamboat..."

AP "Well that's the script and we're not changing it"

We needed a photogenic location and asked for permission to film at the Henley Business School. Caroline Bowers, the estates manager was marvellous and ensured everything ran smoothly shore side. Lucie Henwood volunteered to collect Sir James with the film crew and the Henwood & Dean van was given a special clean and polish. Phil Green the Environment Agency Chief Navigation Officer of the Henley area asked that we behave "sensibly".

On the big day, the morning started dry and sunny but with the threat of thunderstorms later. We took Consuta down a calm and empty river, towing my 17 foot long dinghy for use as a camera platform. The contrast between the two boats was enormous. Consuta was gliding along at 5mph (well about 5mph!) creating no wash while the dinghy was climbing up its own bow wave and upsetting the ducks. Consuta was looking her best after a dedicated program of "if it's metal and not moving - polish it, if its metal and moving - oil it, ". The dinghy by contrast was camouflaged with willow leaves and river weed.

We arrived at the Business School on time, as did Sir James and the film crew. Within 15 seconds of stepping aboard the script had changed from "This little steam boat" to "This magnificent steam launch"



There were rain showers to the north and west of us but we remained in bright sunshine. We filmed going up river, down river, fire door open, fire door closed. The cameraman seemed mesmerised by the motion of Consuta's engine and marvelled at how quiet it was. He then asked to film Consuta's whistle from about two inches away and complained about losing his hearing - well he was warned.

We ended 2 hours of filming with Sir James at the throttle for a racing start. The camera crew and production team were on the shore and Consuta accelerated to a very respectable umpire launch speed very quickly. Unfortunately we were on a collision course with the Environment Agency tug "Churn" - I was just reaching for the main steam valve



Filming party on board by the Henley Business School – and on the way back up to Shiplake

but Sir James, undoubtedly an instinctive engineer, was already throttling back.

My dinghy was never used but ended up looking much cleaner courtesy of Nigel Gourley. We bought her down as a camera ship so I followed (struggled to keep up with) Consuta on the way back trying to get that classic photograph with the Henley skyline in the background. By the time we reached Marsh lock I was deaf and Consuta's crew were tired of waiting for me so the tow line was attached again and I was able to switch off the noisy outboard. Long powerful steamboats are wonderful things!

The series is due to be shown on Channel 4 early in 2010. We heard that the production team were very pleased with the results from the day but it remains to be seen how much of a star Consuta turns out to be in the programme.

In true TV style we need some credits for the day.

Skippers - Alan Douglas and Colin Henwood, Engineer - Nigel Gourley, Crew- David Creasey, John Porter and Sarah Hodgson . Shoreside:- Lucie Henwood and Caroline Bowers

Brian adds:- and credit to David Eager for managing the Consuta arrangements

Umpiring at the Henley Woman's Regatta

The main highlight of June was use of Consuta as one of the umpire launches at the Henley Woman's Regatta. This event is expertly staged with races starting every four minutes. The course is 1.5 Km about two thirds the length of the Royal Regatta course, the start is the same at Temple Island. There were five IC umpire launches there as well and I'm told that two of these suffered engine problems during the weekend.

Consuta had no trouble at all except that we have found that there is a serious risk of hot cinder throwing by using too fierce an application of the throttle during race starts. We think that this can be resolved by better management of boiler air control and engine throttle during the start.

Consuta sported a blue umpire flag during the racing, the flag was donated by a supporter.

There are some good video clips of Consuta at this event on Youtube. Just type in Consuta and make your selection from the range of videos offered.

Judith Packer of the HWR wrote:-

"It was a pleasure to welcome Consuta to the Henley Women's Regatta for the first time this year, everything went really well and we even had people on Sunday requesting to have a ride on your launch. It's been great to break the ice and hopefully dispel a few myths and maybe next year do a little more promotion"

Finally

Consuta has been out on many more steam trips over the period, these have been either for private parties or for repositionals. Just a reminder that we carry passengers on all repositional trips so why not consider coming along sometime in future.

More mid summer cruising news in the next newsletter, plus an update on our floating boathouse project.

Brian Smith July 2009

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Important announcement:- Derek Brown is wishing to step down as Hon. Treasurer, so we need a volunteer to take on this important role. If you are interested in finding out more please give Derek a call on:- 0118 972 3895



Henley Woman's Regatta photos

Top left: Moored at Hobbs the umpire launches getting ready for a days work at the Womens' Regatta.

Top right: Enchantress is the oldest IC engine launch built in 1912.

Mid Left: A team group photo on Consuta

Mid right: Skipper's view of a race.

Bottom right: Umpire's view looking from the start of the race course towards Henley Church. The tower was a favourite view point for photographers 100 years ago.

Left: not at the HWR but a mystery photo of a Thames waterwheel. Do you know where? More in the next newsletter.



Above a private party outing for Tony Dunn. In Marsh Lock on the way back from Henley
Sunday activity at the Beale Park Boat Show
Photos used in the newsletter were provided by David Creasey, David Eager, Lyn and Mark Smith

