



The River Thames – A study of change

CADRA is delighted to welcome Terry Marsh as the speaker for the autumn open meeting to be held at **7.45 on Tuesday 6th November in Thameside School**. Terry is a Caversham resident and a graduate of Reading University. He has spent most of his working life on the Thames floodplain – successively at the Water Resources Board, the Department of the Environment, the Institute of Hydrology and the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology where he led the National Hydrological Programme for over 20 years. He has authored a very wide range of scientific papers and commissioned reports on water resources, floods and droughts with a particular recent focus on the impacts of climate change.

Terry writes that in global terms the Thames is a mere stream, but it has played a central role in the history and culture of the UK. In a scientific context, it is probably the most extensively studied of all the world's rivers, contributing substantially to advances in river and water management both in the UK and internationally.

The Thames is often considered an ancient and unchanging feature of the landscape but it has undergone major transformations throughout its history. Physically, these changes were most evident through the Ice Ages but in historical times the river has served as a strategic barrier, an important source of food and power generation, a major transport hub (which largely determined the location of Reading Abbey), a focus for commercial development, a primary source of water supply and an important recreational playground. Less beneficially, its use as a conduit for sewage disposal, with attendant health risks which peaked in the nineteenth century, has impacted negatively on water quality and limited the variety of wildlife the river can sustain. Caversham has been directly, or indirectly, impacted by most of these changes.

Since the early 1960s, a revised legislative framework has enabled a more integrated management of the river, leading eventually to improved water quality and, latterly, greater ecological diversity. But continuing population growth and the threats posed by global warming have become a major focus of concern with a media perception that flood and drought threat in the Thames basin may increase substantially. In fact, whilst continuing floodplain development has increased vulnerability to flood events, river flow patterns in the Thames have displayed considerable resilience to the exceptional increase in temperatures over the last 50 years. Nonetheless, careful management remains essential to maintain a cherished regional and national asset.

CADRA looks forward to welcoming you to what promises to be a fascinating and very topical evening.