Steamboat Passenger Ferries in Nineteenth Century London: A Cultural Survey

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge my family who supported me during this entire process. I also would like to acknowledge my professors, Dr. Porter, Dr. Stone, and Dr. Chiarappa, who helped tremendously during the research and writing of my thesis. I would also like to thank my friends who stood by and supported me as well. Finally, I would especially like to acknowledge my father, who during the early stages of research always knew when to say "If you were a guy, you’d already know that.” Thank you everyone.

Jennifer Wohlberg
Traditionally, steamboats and their history have belonged to the area of antiquarians. Many sources in my bibliography focus on the design and use of the boats and neglect the social and cultural impact the boats had on mid-Victorian London life. Steamboats, however, were an important transportation system in mid-Victorian London, so that a study of steamboats can provide an insight into mid-Victorian times. In this thesis, I will place steamboat design construction and use in the context of the social and cultural worlds of mid-Victorian London and the River Thames.

The results of my research yielded a thesis describing the main design features and evolution of Thames steamers during the nineteenth century. My thesis examines the fights surrounding the jurisdiction of the River Thames and of the steamboats themselves to reveal the social and cultural worlds of mid-Victorian London and the River Thames. It also relates the design and operation to issues of Victorian social class and gender, such as steamboat accidents and their responses. The growth of suburbs and other transport networks are examined and placed in the Victorian context as well.

Steamboats, as seen through my thesis, were an important part of Victorian social and cultural life.
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I. INTRODUCTION

The nineteenth century was a time of rapid growth in London. The population grew from just under one million inhabitants in 1800 to 4.5 million in 1881, and by 1911, Londoners numbered over 7 million.\(^1\) As London grew, it swallowed up the neighboring towns and villages. Londoners, as I discovered through my research, had a sense of their city’s boundaries. I took those boundaries, Hammersmith to Woolwich, as the boundaries along the river for my thesis.

The River Thames divides London North from South. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, there were four bridges to cross the river, and each charged a toll to do so. By the end of the century, however, nearly every major north/south road in London, 15 in all, had a toll-free bridge crossing the Thames.

The Thames is also a tidal river. Tides made it difficult to build proper and safe piers and wharves to pick up and land passengers. The piers and wharves could not be a permanent height because as the tide ebbed away, they would be far above the level of the boat’s decks. The tide also made it difficult to set a regular pattern of when boats could land and embark passengers on services. Plus, during the eighteenth century and earlier, the only means of traveling along the river was by sailboat, or rowboat, which the tide slowed down. For sailboats, there was the added problem of their dependency on the wind. Many factors caused travel on the river before steamboats to be unfeasible for a transport system.

Steamboats played an important role in the transport system in nineteenth century London by carrying passengers across, up, and down the Thames from one London borough to another. After their early development in the late eighteenth century, until the 1860s, steamboats were the most accepted way to travel east and west across the metropolis. Even though steamboats occupied such an important place, a surprising lack of a cultural history exists about the role they played in London transportation, social life and culture. The antiquarian sources fail to provide cultural and social contexts. They also do not connect developments in steamboat business with developments in metropolitan government, nor do they report changing attitudes toward the kind of “progress” steamboats represented. In this thesis, I intend to 1) describe the currently available sources, 2) sketch a preliminary history of steamboats in London, including the change that society went through because of steamboats, and 3) describe the relevant cultural contexts surrounding steamboat ferries.

A cultural context is a set of values that a group of people holds about a particular object or event. Cultural context also concerns class differences and attitudes, and comprises gender roles and concerns, including the differences and shared historical experiences among and between men and women. The beliefs, myths, rituals, assumptions, traditions, social activities, and social conventions of a culture or society belong in cultural context as well. For this thesis, it includes how Victorian Londoners in the nineteenth century thought of steamboats. Victorian
attitudes towards technology and the gradual expansion of the city’s suburbs are important to the cultural context of the nineteenth century.


Wiebe Bijker and Karin Bijsterveld, in “Women Walking Through Plans”, demonstrates the theoretical and political relevance of housing in the Netherlands. To do so, they “address the issue of strategies for changing our technological culture and thus will focus on normative choice.” They examine how “citizens influence the technological building of society”, especially “women and their relation to public housing, architecture, and city planning.” Bijker and Bijsterveld examine the success of the Women’s Advisory Committees on Housing (VACs) influence on the male-dominated technology of architecture for public housing. To do this, they first provide a brief history of public housing, then begin their more thorough examination

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3 Ibid., p. 486.
4 Ibid.
of public housing in relation to the VACs. The VACs, they discovered, represent the housewife, who often did the living in the public housing, and would make suggestions to improve their efficiency in housecleaning\(^6\). Gender is an important area for Wiebe and Bijsterveld. The VACs often intruded on a male gendered technology that was building a female gendered domain. The VACs, they argue, were fighting for the women who had to live and work in the public housing.\(^7\) Another consideration Wiebe and Bijsterveld examine is the power relationships engaged between the architects and the VACs. They see that the VACs had varying power and that they gained and maintained their power, on the one hand, by educating themselves in the language of architecture. They maintained their power, on the other hand, by invoking that they, as women who are housewives, knew best how the women in the house would use the space and how to present practical solutions.\(^8\) They make their comments to make housecleaning and the living in the house more efficient. A final consideration is why the VACs maintained their non-feminist stance. Through probing this field, Wiebe and Bijsterveld found that in order to influence the designs of public housing, the VACs had to focus more on their experience as housewives than associate with radical feminism to gain acceptance by the male dominated architectural world.\(^9\) Often, Wiebe and Bijsterveld discovered, these women would use “gendered dichotomies in describing the usefulness and

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\(^5\) Ibid.
\(^6\) Ibid., p. 498
\(^7\) Ibid., p. 503-504.
\(^8\) Ibid., p. 504.
\(^9\) Ibid., p. 507.
content of their activities.”10 Their article is important for my thesis because they analyze a type of technology, architecture, and place it in a social and gender context, while exploring the issue of power relationships.

“Tool and Symbol”, by Ronald Jager, probes the culture of the double-bitted axe. He argues that “the history of the double-bitted axes lies at an intersection of disciplines”11 such as lumbering, technology history, tool making, and design and economic history. He analyzes two questions (what characteristics of the double-bitted axe prompted its swift adoption in the North American forest and what circumstances of culture and industry combined to give impetus to its development?)12) to examine “the larger framework of national values and cultural pressures that would mold the technologies of a people.”13 He examines why the double-bitted axe succeeded in the United States in the eighteenth century and not anywhere else. He is able to use the double-bitted axe to look at larger cultural factors in the United States that explain why it succeeded. The commitment to innovation, the entrepreneurial spirit, the new class of logging professionals found in the United States, and the cultural attitude about its tools explain, for Jager, the success of the double-bitted axe. Jager’s article is an excellent example for my thesis to follow. He examines a common piece of technology to understand the greater cultural background that greatly influenced its success. I attempt a similar analysis in my thesis.

10 Ibid., p.511.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
Chiarappa’s “Affirmed Objects” examines New Jersey’s regional wood carving crafts and sees that the regional crafts play an important role in cultural history. As he states on page 399, “the crafts express enduring elements of local economy, local history, and cultural fabric.”\(^\text{14}\) To find the historical and cultural significance, Chiarappa examines the historical process by which certain crafts have assumed a significantly representational role for the region. Chiarappa finds that these crafts provided a voice of historical and cultural representation. Many who have interpreted the craft before see it as having sympathies with the anti-modern organization. Since carvers use traditional methods or tools, they reject the modern, so the earlier authors believed. They yearn for a time past without modern technological advances and to show that they carve wooden duck decoys in traditional ways. But also, according to earlier authors who have examined the craft, there is a link with environmental and technological issues. The artisans are concerned with modern environmental and technological issues, such as commercial fishing technologies and channel dredging.\(^\text{15}\) The main concern for Chiarappa is artisans and their craft’s potential for historical interpretations. As he notes on page 407, the artisans conceptualize and convey regionally relevant issues through spatial perspectives that integrate geographic perspective, artifact production, and artifact use. They are consciously invested in local history and culture.\(^\text{16}\) Chiarappa then gives three examples of local artisans and how they are consciously steeped in and use


\(^{15}\) Ibid, p. 412.

\(^{16}\) Ibid., p. 408.
local history and culture. Chiarappa examines a local craft to gain greater cultural understanding of a region, a movement, and even a nation. He wanted to recast regionalism as a concept that informs, and continues to shape, interpretations and meanings that accrue to these craft. Chiarappa depicted themes and activities that are entrenched in community folk art, as an expression of tradition and thus history.

Chirappa’s article is a model cultural history for me to follow. He investigates a piece of technology often forgotten by many historians. He uses this technology, the craft of wood carving, to gain a greater cultural understanding of a region (New Jersey), a movement (the anti-modern), and the nation. He sees that the wood carving craft in New Jersey provides a voice of historical and cultural representation.

Dale Porter in *The Thames Embankment* examines a particular piece of technology in its social situation. He argues that the historical function of technology is to work as an interface between a community and its environment. Throughout his book, Porter places the Thames Embankment in its social situation, especially during its planning and construction phases. He argues that the Thames Embankment and the London Main Drainage are icons of mid-Victorian ideas and practices of their society, technology, and environment. He explores the varying interest groups, their conflicts, and their ideas about the Thames Embankment to discover Victorian values and ideals concerning their society. To do this, he links the piece of technology, the Thames Embankment, to its social contexts. However, in order to link the Thames

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Embankment to its social contexts he must examine each of the concerned institutions and organizations and sort out the legal issues they raised, which he does throughout his book.\(^{21}\) Through his examination of the various interest groups, he discovers that they had a profound impact on the development of the Thames Embankment and its meaning and intended use.\(^{22}\) He examines the different interest groups who had a stake in the creation of the Thames Embankment and the meaning and impact of the Embankment on their life. He also looks at relevant interest groups to see who they were, how they were connected to the Embankment and to each other. He examines their influence on the Thames Embankment and how they viewed it. How the different interest groups viewed the Embankment had an impact on the design and intended meaning of it. Finally, Porter sees that the Embankment became an engineering response to problems of environmental degradation and urban expansion, a response the Victorians continually used to approach their problems.\(^{23}\) The Thames Embankment affected the environment at its first occurrence and continues to impact new generations.

Porter's thesis has many implications for my research on steamboats. Steamboats, too, can serve as a technological response to problems Victorian Londoners faced in urban life and transportation. They also serve as icons to help understand mid-Victorian ideas and practices concerning their society, technology and environment. Another way Porter's work influences my thesis is by setting an example to examine a piece of technology in its social and cultural context. Porter

\(^{21}\) Ibid., p. 136.  
\(^{22}\) Ibid., p. 147.
does so with the Embankment, I do with the steamboats. I place steamboat ferries in the social and cultural context of nineteenth century London. I also look at steamboats in Victorian society to gain a better understanding of Victorian views and values concerning government, technology, travel, city life, and social classes. I will also distinguish the perceptions of men and women of different social classes towards steamboats.

II. OVERVIEW OF SOURCES

An overview of the sources relating to steamboats is important for many reasons. First, it demonstrates that a full-length cultural history of the London steamboat ferries is possible. Enough primary sources exist and provide details of the steamboat ferry business to make such a study possible. Second, the overview shows that no one else has covered this sort of approach. Most works examining steamboats have looked at either the design of steamboats, their engines, or the economic aspect. Third, the overview is necessary, as stated above, because no inquiries into the steamboat ferry business have linked the developments of the business with contemporary progress in metropolitan government and changing attitudes towards technological progress.

A wealth of information about steamboat travel in London lies in the city’s many archives. Guildhall Library, Alderbury is the local records office for the City of London. Its holdings, a variety of ecclesiastical, business, commercial, and civil records, the earliest which date from the eleventh century, reflect its location in

London as the center of Great Britain’s financial activity. They consist of probate records, records of City wards and parishes, ancient livery companies, military and taxation records, family and estate wills, records of foundations originating in London as well as records from the London Stock Exchange, Lloyd’s of London, and the London Chamber of Commerce. Guildhall also maintains records of banks, insurance companies, stockbrokers, and merchants of London. Since steamboat companies, such as the Commercial Steam Packet Company, were formed in London, the Lord Mayor gained the right to regulate the steamboat traffic and trade in accord with the Thames Conservancy Act of 1856 as steamboat trade was an important part of London life. Guildhall, as the letter in Appendix 1 shows, carries many useful sources for my thesis.

The records of the London Chamber of Commerce, which appointed the Thames Steamboat Service Committee to consider resuming the passenger steamboat service on the Thames in 1896 after the decline of steamboats, are found at Guildhall. It also retains a collection of broadsides that describe the Thames shore for steamboat passengers, catalogs that contain the conditions of the sales of steam piers, and proposals for new piers and wharves to pick up and drop off passengers. The Lloyds’ Marine Collection at Guildhall, although an important ocean-going maritime source, does not contain any relevant information pertaining to the ferry service in London.

A related archive about London and Londoners is the London Metropolitan Archives (LMA), which was once the Greater London Record Office but is now an
affiliate of Guildhall. It is the largest local-authority archive in Great Britain. It houses the archives for the Greater London Council, the London County Council, the Metropolitan Board of Works, and the records of the County of Middlesex. The LMA also houses the former Members' Library, and the print and map collection of the London County Council. The LMA holds sources such as the *Thames River Steamboat Service* (4 Edward VII – Session 1904), which is a collection of the drafts for the 1904 Thames Steamboat Bill. This collection contains the minutes of evidence, the session proceedings, petitions against the act, and the minutes of the select committee. Through the collection of drafts of the bill, one can follow the process that carried the proposal through Parliament. The LMA also manages the London County Council records, which include the *Thames River Steamboat Service Bill* (Session 1903) and its original communications. These provide an outline of what happened during the discussion of the bill. Pamphlet 59 of the London County Council's Descriptive Pamphlets (1904 – 1905) concerns the inauguration of the London County Council's steamboat service on the Thames by the Prince of Wales on 17 June 1905. The LMA's Metropolitan Board of Works records contain many plans of steamboat piers, wharves, and services. Plans for a ferry service between North and South Woolwich in 1884 show the location of piers and ferry service. Plans for the Greenwich Ferry of 1884, and even the earlier Gravesend Pier plans of 1869 – 1870, depict similar proposals. The London Metropolitan Archives possesses many records on steamboat ferry services on the Thames during the nineteenth century.
The British Library collects primary and secondary sources relevant to British history dating from the tenth century to the present. It holds maps and atlases of Britain and its colonies, music scores of English renaissance composers, plus manuscripts and published humanities material ranging from historical, political, literary, and antiquarian themes to sound archives. An example of the sources available in the British Library is *The London "Omnibus" Guide of 1877* by W.A. Brown and P.C. Kamerdyk, which charts a transport system in London by using omnibuses, tramcars, steamboats, and railways. It incorporates all transportation methods to travel in and around London and provides a map that indicates the location of steamboat piers and routes. The *Guide* shows the mixing of steamboat transport with railways and other transport systems. One may also find *Tract No. 97 of the Fabian Municipal Program (Second Series)* No. 8, 1900 and 1901 written by the Fabian Society, a London-based Socialist group, whose intellectual members served on the London County Council at the turn of the century. Concerned with many social problems, including steamboats, they addressed the difficulties London steamboat companies had and proposed a plan for them to succeed.

The British Library also holds the *Lloyd's Steamboat Directory and Disasters on the Western Waters* by James T. Lloyd (1856). This book, even though discussing accidents of steamboats in the United States, provides an account of the development and evolution of the steamboat. *The Time Tables of the London and South Western Railway and Steam Packets* published in the 1850s provides the routes and fares for overseas travel through railways and steamboats. The tract also includes
advertisements for hotels, clothes, banks, theatres, and new inventions directed at
tourists and travelers. Joseph Kinnicut Angell’s *A Treatsie [sic] on the Law of
Carriers of Goods and Passengers, by land and by water, with an appendix of
statutes regulating passenger vessels and steamboats* (1857, 1877) pertains mainly to
the United States but it provides a legal definition of various types of carriers and
provides examples of steamboat travel in London. Angell does examine the United
States laws and cases concerning steamboat passenger vessels and in the appendix
includes “English forms of Pleadings by and against Carriers”. This document offers
a comparison between British and American regulation of steamboats in the
nineteenth century.

The Public Records Office (PRO) in Kew houses the national records and
archives for Great Britain, including Crown offices such as the Commissioner of
Works. It contains sources concerning family history such as wills and service
records. The PRO also possesses sources concerning regimental histories and local
histories, namely journals, directories, and maps. Some of these sources can
contribute to a history of steamboat ferries.

The PRO has the *Lloyd’s Shipping Register*, like the Guildhall Library and
National Maritime Museum. It also stores sources such as the examination of
competence and service for engineers and certificates of competency and service for
masters and mates. The certificates for engineers registered those qualified to be an
engineer aboard a steamboat. The certificates for masters and mates contain the name
of the person, place and date of birth, register ticket number, rank examined for or
served in, and the place and date of certificate issuance. This pair of documents provides a history of how a person became employed on steamboats. The register of seamen and the accompanying agreements and crew lists furnish an account of who worked on the ferries. These sources recorded the names of officers, seamen and others employed on the boat, along with their home address, date of birth, when they joined the boat, their wage rate, and their job. One must recognize, however, that the PRO only has a ten percent sample of the years 1861 to 1913, which is no way representative. The PRO also contains official logs for ocean-going steamboats, which recorded what occurred on board the ship such as illnesses, deaths, and misconduct. From these sources one can gain a picture of how individuals got work on the steamboats and how the workers were regulated.

The Parliamentary Archives, previously known as the House of Lords Records Office, maintains Parliament’s records of Bills, petitions, minutes of sessions and select committees, and reports. Between 1830 and 1860, due to the amount of petitions it was receiving, Parliament became increasingly interested in steamboat travel and accidents on the Thames. The Archive holds the resolutions, bills, petitions, and committee minutes of Parliament concerning steamboat travel and accidents on the Thames.

The Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE), as a society of engineers during the nineteenth century, was concerned with the technical aspects of steamboats. Its members discussed all aspects of steamboats and steamboat travel in their meetings, from boiler design and explosions to fares charged for passage. Looking at the more
common topics among the discussions of the ICE engineers, construction and performance of marine steam boilers and engines, the causes and ways to prevent corrosion of boilers, the differences in paddle wheels and their location on the boat, and the governmental relations to steam ships were their major concerns.

The ICE has its own library and archives, which hold many books relevant to the steamboat passenger ferries on the Thames. One such book, titled *An Account of the Origin of Steamboats, in Spain, Great Britain, and America, and of their Introduction and Employment upon the River Thames, between London and Gravesend, to the present time*, was published in 1831. Other books give information about the explosions aboard the boats. One example is by John Wilder, published in 1847, titled *Causes and effects of explosions in steam engines investigated, with an easy and certain means of preventing their destructive effects*. Another field covered in the ICE library and archives is construction and design of boats, piers, and anything related to the maritime domain. Examples include the *Description of the Brighthelmston Suspension Chain Pier, with a Narrative of its Erection, of its Opening..., Proposed Thames Steamboat Piers* by J. B. Redman in 1846, W. Boland’s *Experimental essays on the Principles of Construction in Arches, Piers, Buttresses..., Descriptive Account of Gas Buoys, Lightships, Lighthouses, Pile Lights, Lightboats, Steamboats, etc. (1881, 1885)*, and G. E. Redfern’s 1888 *An Improved Method of Construction Harbours, Piers, Breakwaters, and the Like*. The ICE library and archives also contains sources that assess the value of steamboats and steam ferry companies as part of the transport system, such as the London County Council’s 1895
Return of Services and Routes by Tramways, Omnibuses, Steamboats, Railways, and Canals in the County of London and in Extra-London. The ICE also collects relevant legal cases and outcomes, including John S. Voorhies' 1856 *The Argument of E. N. Dickerson, ...the Charge of Judge Nelson, and the Verdict of the Jury, in the Case of Sickles V. Borden, defended by 'The Novelty Iron Works' and Mr. H. Allen*. These show the interest of ICE members relating to maritime technology and engineering.

The Caird Library at the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich does not hold many primary sources relating to steamboat passenger ferries. In its goal to focus on the Admiralty and commercial maritime history, its main primary source is the *Lloyd’s Register of Ships*. It also had the *Rhodes's Steamship Guide* in its 1903-04 and 1907-08 editions. This Guide contains advertisements for travel ships, lists the different lines and port destinations, and provides information for the passenger, such as when to travel, where to travel, and how to book travel. It also provides a steamship guide with fares, destinations and times of departure.

The information to develop a narrative about steamboat passenger ferries in London does exist. By using these records, plus secondary sources, I developed a preliminary picture of steamboats and the perception of them among nineteenth century Londoners.

I found no sources that considered steamboats in a cultural context. The three main types of sources I encountered not only confirmed my suspicion that a study of this kind was necessary but also showed that I could gather indirect information that I could compile and examine toward my true end. In order to frame an appropriate
cultural context with steamboat travel, I looked at three main types of secondary sources: 1) sources that deal with boats, their engineering, and comparisons for the development of steamboat passenger ferries, 2) books concerned with London transport and social life, 3) sources on Victorian thought and culture.

The books in the first section discuss the design and engineering changes boats experienced, especially in the nineteenth century. As the demand changed for steamboat use and technology improved, the design and construction of steamboats changed. These books disregard the role steamboats played in Victorian culture and life and focus on the antiquarian side. However, they provide a picture of what the boats and their engines looked like, necessary to do a cultural history of steamboats.

The best study that deals with steamboat passenger ferries is Frank Dix’s *Royal River Highway: A History of the Passenger Boats and Services on the River Thames* (1985). Dix “provides a clear view of the history and progress of boats and services on the Thames from Norman times to present.” 25 Two chapters are dedicated to steamboats and their rise as passenger ferries in London. He provides fares, boat names, passenger capacity, and the names of the steamboat companies. He fails, however, to consider the steamboat ferry traffic in a comprehensive cultural context, only briefly mentioning how the London County Council’s steamboat ferry service (setup in the 1890s) was intended to attract working class London commuters.

The National Maritime Museum’s Caird Library has many secondary, antiquarian sources relating to steamboat ferries. These sources provide extensive

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details about the boats but do not provide a social or cultural context for steamboat travel in London. One such source is F. C. Hambleton’s *Famous Paddle Steamers* (1948), which provides the names of companies and boats that plied on the Thames and that Londoners used to travel through the city. The Library also has Frank Burtt’s *Steamers of the Thames and Medway* (1949). Burtt provides names of ferry companies, their boats, the boats’ dimensions, and the numbers of passenger the boat could hold. If a boat was sold to another company or a company went out of business he provides information such as when the boat was sold, to whom, and if known, why. E. C. B. Thornton’s *Thames Coast Pleasure Steamers* (1972) is mainly about pleasure steamers but the London County Council Woolwich Free Ferry also appears in the narrative. Thornton gives the names of the ferry service’s boats and a description of the boats dimensions, engines, and paddles. These three works are typical of the sources concerning steamboat passenger ferry travel and demonstrate the need for more social context in steamboat history.

Geoffrey Body’s *British Paddle Steamers* (1971) is probably the best book about the development of the steamboat. Body provides a picture of the development of British paddle steamers in all their major forms, roles, and spheres of operation. He represents each main aspect by typical or notable boats. He begins with a concise history of the steamboat’s development from the seventeenth century and moves to its decline and preservation during the mid-twentieth century. He briefly considers steamboats as part of the transport system in chapter four where he discusses wharf dues and boat fares, the problems with landing piers, navigation acts and regulations,
and the companies’ routes. However, Body presents his information like an antiquarian and does not place this information in its Victorian cultural context. His information, however, is useful to develop a cultural context.

An interesting way to look at the development from sailing to steam boats is through images, since they can provide some detail and show the development of boat propulsion from sails to steam where descriptions of boats are missing. John Falconer, in his *Sail & Steam: A Century of Maritime Enterprise, 1840-1935: Photographs from the National Maritime Museum Greenwich* (1993), demonstrates, with the use of photographs, how the maritime environment permeated British history and life, emphasizing the material advances achieved in the nineteenth century. He explores, thematically, the changing British relationship to the sea and the role of the sea in British fishing, trade and empire, exploration, and the British navy. Even though he does not discuss local river traffic in London and its role in Victorian culture, he recounts Britain’s history with the sea and nineteenth century boat building developments.

Anthony Burton’s *The Past Afloat* (1982) also uses images to put the remains of the British maritime tradition into a historical context. Burton charts the transition from sailboats to the large ironclad battleships of the early twentieth century to prove his thesis that boats were designed and built for their intended use. Burton avoids putting the maritime tradition into any cultural context. While he equally fails to discuss the steamboats’ use on rivers or as part of the London transportation system,
he does present a concise history of the development of paddle steamers in chapter three.

Basil Greenhill and Ann Giffard, in their book *Travelling by Sea in the Nineteenth Century* (1972) explore passenger accommodation in ocean-going sail and steam ships. They provide a short history of the development of interior design and construction of these vessels until the nineteenth century. When treating the nineteenth century, they describe the conditions and accommodations aboard ships for emigrants travelling across oceans. They do not consider river transport but rather focus on ocean voyages and the interior design.

There is also a dispute among scholars concerning the origins of the steamboat *Comet* on the Clyde River. The article “Henry Bell and John Thomson: Questions about the Origin of the *Comet*” (*Transport History* 1980) by W.S. Harvey discusses the origins of the steam passenger ferries on the Clyde, but it is relevant because it provides a comparison to River Thames steamboat ferries. Harvey’s contention is that John Thomson deserves more credit for the development of the *Comet* than Henry Bell. He examines their pamphlets on the conception and growth of the *Comet*, one of the first steamboats, for their intentions concerning their experiments with steam propulsion on boats. Bell claimed that he was the sole inventor of the steamboat. Bell, however, did not build or design the steamboat. Thomson also published a pamphlet in response to Bell’s. Thomson argued that he carried out the experiments with the Comet and that he gave Bell the ideas for propulsion. According to Thomson’s pamphlet, he met Bell in Helensburgh and after he returned
home, Bell contacted him to put in the machinery in the boat he was having built to carry passengers to his bath-hotel in Helensburgh. The original design did not work for the machinery, and Thomson made some changes, like adding a flywheel and covering the paddles, and continued the experiments. The one benefit of this article related to my thesis is a general image of boat builders and those involved in developing and designing steamboats.

Another article investigating the origins of the steamboat and its use in Great Britain is A.I. Bowman’s “John Smith & Buonaparte: Eighteenth Century Lancashire Steamboats” (Transport History 1980). Bowman examines the early experiments on the canals in Lancashire and tries to determine when John Smith made his experiments with steamboats at the end of the eighteenth century. Through his investigation, Bowman shows how the difficulty to date experiments hinders one from determining when the first steamboat experiment occurred and by whom. One interesting aspect of this article is that it demonstrates that sometimes the patron is given credit for the experiments with steamboats even though they did not actually perform the experiments or have the ideas for it. “Bromilow mentions that Thomas Baldwin supported John Smith’s experiment, and it is not unlikely that Baldwin, as the patron, was given credit really due to John Smith. When William Symington was experimenting with a steamboat four years later, under the patronage of Lord Dundas, local papers gave the credit for the invention to Dundas, and did not even mention Symington.”26 One final aspect of this article is that it demonstrates how engineers

and their ideas interact. He mentions how it was possible that William Symington
and Robert Fulton could have influenced John Smith

A. I. Bowman presents another history of the experiments with steamboats in
his article “Steamers on the Forth and Clyde Canal” (Transport History 1980). He
explains the technological changes steamboats went through while being tested on the
canal. Bowman deals with three issues in his article: 1) he briefly discusses why
steamboat experiments occurred slowly, 2) provides a typical description of the
engines used on the steamboats, paddle design and its changes, and 3) who owned the
steamboats. Bowman does not touch on the social aspect of the steamboats. Even
though he briefly brings passenger ferries into his discussion, the steamboats he treats
are mostly tugboats that pulled the passenger boats. An advantage of Bowman’s
article is that he charts the steamboat history on the Canal from the late-eighteenth
century until the end of World War Two, providing one approach to the study of
steamboats on the Thames.

An important book in discussing the development of the steamboat is Sir Eric
Roll’s An Early Experiment in Industrial Organization (1968). Roll relates an
economic history of the Boulton-Watt partnership that developed and produced many
new steam engines. He emphasizes the problems of business organization and
attempts to show how the firm’s history compares with the general economic
structure of the time.27 Through his retelling of the economic and business practices

of the Boulton-Watt firm, Roll demonstrates the firm’s ingenuity and its use of modern practices while recounting the development of their steam engine.

The development of the steamboat was a long and complicated process. There were many ideas and designs that did not go far and many that did. The next few books discuss the reasons why the evolution of steamboat took a long time and the opposition it encountered along the way.

Paul Bernard’s article “How Not to Invent the Steamship” (East European Quarterly 1980) shows the antagonism the European leaders held towards Denis Papin and other early inventors of steam engines for financial, national, and socio-economic reasons. Bernard is concerned with ocean-going boats and trade. He discusses the problems Papin encountered in obtaining funds and recognition for his invention of an early form of the steamboat.

Peter Hore’s article “Lord Melville, the Admiralty and the Coming of Steam Navigation” (The Mariner’s Mirror 2000) argues that Lord Melville and the Admiralty were not as opposed to the increased use of steamboats in the navy as previous historians surmised. He traces the accusation against Melville, which is that he “had retrograde proclivities’ and…that he was opposed to the introduction of steam”28, and shows that it is a tainted and inaccurate quote from John Henry Briggs. Hore then proceeds to assess the Admiralty’s views on steamboats arguing that, based

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on the records, the Admiralty wanted steamboats but the War and Colonial Offices procrastinated over the steam plan. Hore also relates interestingly that many men in the navy, when off duty, worked for the merchant marine or on commercial boats. These men may have comprised a part of the labor aboard the steam passenger ferries on the Thames.

One article that illustrates the importance of technological advances, especially in steamboat development, is “The Tools of Imperialism: Technology and the Expansion of European Colonial Empires in the Nineteenth Century” by Daniel Headrick (Journal of Modern History 1979). Headrick seeks to “argue that technological changes were indispensable to the expansion of Europe in the nineteenth century and profoundly affected its timing and location and to add a new dimension to the debate over the causes of the new imperialism.” Headrick reasons that the steamboat allowed Europeans to conquer the African interior and aided Europeans to expand their empires. He also discusses how the British merchant colony in China recognized the value of the steamboat for river transport and how it altered Anglo-Chinese relations.

Anthony Burton’s 1987 book Steaming Through Britain provides a history of the steam engine and is a nostalgic examination of the remaining steam railways, engines, and boats. Steam railways mostly concern Burton, but a few steamboats do make their way into his discussion. His general treatment of steamboats includes a

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29 Ibid., p. 167.
brief history of steamboats, their introduction in 1788 and their evolution from the
paddle steamer to the screw steamer. Burton notes that even though the paddle
steamer’s use waned it remained the favorite for excursions. Burton uses the River
Dart Steamboat Company, formed in 1836 on the River Dart, as a starting point to
look at steam engines. He also glances at the Windermere Steamboat Museum in the
Lake District. Although Burton provides some relevant information about steam
engines, this book is really a travel guide to some of Great Britain’s steam travel past.

A few sources deal with steamboat lines not located in London that provide
comparisons for the London steamboats. One such book, John Maber’s *North Star to
Southern Cross* (1967), surveys passenger and shipping lines from Europe to
Australia and New Zealand. Maber focuses on the first sixty years of steam in the
Australian trade. Another book is Grahame Farr’s *West Country Passenger Steamers*
(1967). Like Body, Farr presents a general overview of the rise of steamboats, but
unlike Body, Farr is concerned with the Bath services and their steamboats. Farr
briefly furnishes an economic history of each West County steamboat line.

Edward Mueller’s article “East Coast Florida Steamboating, 1831-1861” in
*The Florida Historical Quarterly* (1962), outlines the history of steamboat use in
Florida. “It is the story of these early steamboats, their advent on the scene in Florida
waters, and their progress through the years with which this narrative is concerned.”
Mueller discusses the problems steamboats encountered and provides a description of
them. As on the Thames, steamboats eventually surpassed sailing vessels and other

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marine craft in the transport of people and goods. However, after the second 
Seminole Indian War, which generated business for the steamboat industry in Florida, 
the high demand for steamboats ended. Mueller’s article presents a comparison for 
Thames steamboat development.

“Paddle Steamers in the Murray” by Arthur E. Tonkin, in *The Victorian 
Historical Magazine* (1972), is another article that is a comparison to the steamboats 
in London. Tonkin summarizes how steamboats helped develop navigation on the 
Murray River in the Colony of Victoria, Australia and helped to expand transport and 
travel further into the Australian interior. He charts the competition between the boat 
captains and their boats to carry goods and passengers into the interior and to travel 
the furthest distance. Tonkin claims that the advent of the railway in New South 
Wales, along the Murray River, hindered the continued use of steamboats on the river. 
The railway system was able to reach places that the steamboats could not, thus, 
stealing the steamboats’ cargoes and passengers from river travel. The Thames 
steamboat traffic, like Tonkin’s Australian steamboats, experienced a loss of business 
due to the advent of railways, and also suffered competition from the London 
Underground. As railways emerged, became faster and more efficient, steamboats 
could not compete since they did not provide a comparatively direct and fast 
transport. The railways that competed in London typically crossed the river and 
headed south, while the Underground provided access to travel around London. 
Steamboats could not compete, being unable to go beyond the river’s shores. This
article is good for a comparison to the Thames steamboats and their fight against railways.

Allan Morris’s “River Transport on the Greater Murray Network” (*The Victorian Historical Magazine* 1973) is similar to Tonkin’s article. Morris, like Tonkin, examines the rise of steamboat transport on the Murray River. Morris discusses how the steamboats helped to end the isolation of the Australian interior and how the completion of the railway changed trade and communication for the interior, eventually taking trade away from steamboats. Morris focuses on the trade of the Murray River area and provides statistics to illustrate the volume of trade the river carried for the area. Unlike Tonkin, Morris treats shipping and not passenger traffic. The article is mostly irrelevant for my thesis because of this point, but it does provide a comparison concerning the advent of railways and its effect on river traffic and trade.

“The Development of Steamboats on the Volga River and its Tributaries, 1817 – 1856”, by Richard Mowbray Haywood (*Research in Economic History* 1981), researches the economic and technological complications involved in the development of steamboats in Russia. Mowbray deals with shipping interests in Russia along the Volga, including passengers when relevant, and concentrates on steamboat development and use throughout the region, not in one city. He argues that steamboat use in Russia lagged behind the use of steamboats in America and Western Europe. Beginning in late 1842 to early 1843, when Russian governmental officials began to make efforts to increase steamboat use, steamboats became more
economically viable than other forms of water transport in the Volga region. This article is also good for a comparison to the Thames.

General articles and books provide a basic and necessary overarching history of the development and various uses of steamboats throughout the western world. They also provide a description of the steamboats and how they were designed. They give an idea of the capacity of and where the engines were located. Limitations, however, do exist lying mostly with the lack of social and cultural contexts. They do not show how the steamboats affected the society, transportation systems and the river’s cultural and development environment. These books and articles, however, lead to a few conclusions about London’s steamboats, such as that when steamboats first began they were a popular and efficient mode of transportation compared to what was before.

My second category of historical studies and period portraits discusses the growth of London and its transport systems during the Victorian era. Focusing on the city itself, these books provide an image of how Londoners used railways to travel around the city in connection with other forms of transport.

Gusatve Doré and Blanchard Jerrold, in their book *London: A Pilgrimage* (1872), “study some of the salient features of London.”\(^{32}\) In the late nineteenth century, they explore both upper and lower class life, though it was dangerous to travel through some neighborhoods unescorted. Throughout the book, they provide an excellent description of the Thames and the steamboats on it, which emit “faint

thuds of paddles battling with the tide.” Doré and Jerrold express that “the Thames was the citizen’s daily highway”, and that the “Express and Citizen steamboats are covered from stem to stern with advertisements”; “people at Westminster took water (hopped on boats) at ‘the gate’ to go to London.” They describe the role steamboats played as part of London’s transportation system, helping place the steamboat in a Victorian cultural context.

Doré and Jerrold begin their pilgrimage with a narrative of London as approached from the River Thames; they finish with walks through the various neighborhoods and boroughs of London. Through their portrayal of the river and its activity, they depict the chaos experienced on the river and its banks and an idea of the relationship between man and river. They also view the boat races and horse races, compare the West End to the East End, and depict the markets of London. Doré and Jerrold display a busy image of London during the late nineteenth century.

Geoffrey Trease’s London: A Concise History (1975), a social history of London beginning with the Roman city and moving to the present, provides a picture of London’s importance. For the nineteenth century, Trease describes the condition of the working class, especially the sanitary conditions and methods of travel. Horse-drawn omni-buses, trams, and railway lines, according to Trease, allowed the worker to live further from his place of employment. He neglects, however, the importance of the river and its transport system while describing London.

33 Ibid. p. 22.
34 Ibid. p. 33.
Aldon Bell observes what happened in the nineteenth century in London in the Age of Dickens (1967). Bell presents a general history of nineteenth century politics and London's government while providing general statistics and information about daily life in the city. He discusses transportation and its impact on the more prosperous workers; they were now able to leave the old neighborhoods for the newer suburbs. In his final chapter, Bell discusses more social and living aspects of London. However, Bell fails to discuss steamboats themselves. It is possible to link the steamboat travel with the social life of London and it is possible to begin to understand how steamboat passenger ferries failed because of Bell. Bell mentions the horse-drawn omnibuses, the railways, the underground, and how these forms of transportation linked parts of the metropolis, how they allowed rapid expansion of suburban areas, as well as making it easier for the middle classes to travel into the city from their homes in the suburbs.

Hermione Hobhouse's Lost London: A Century of Demolition and Decay (1971) is a book that calls for the preservation of many Victorian buildings and structures. The author presents a history of preservation in London and the reasons for protecting certain structures. These motives state that rehabilitation of historic buildings can keep Central London human in scale and attractive to residents, buildings themselves have value as a work of art, and redevelopment and demolition can have a negative psychological effect on people. Though she focuses on buildings, a discussion of the importance of the river and transportation does enter her

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book. Hobhouse explains that the river was important to the Victorian inhabitants of London because it was a highway that did not have the inconvenience of road travel. As improvements in road conditions and railways grew, during the nineteenth century, they usurped the river’s importance as a center for transport. The main reason for her book, however, is to draw attention to the fact that London is losing many historic buildings and structures, including those along the river. Hobhouse is particularly concerned that the majority of piers used by steamboat companies, who provided a fifteen minute service to more than twenty-seven piers, have disappeared.

Just as boats have been explored through photographs, so has London. John Betjeman’s *Victorian and Edwardian London from Old Photographs* (1969) investigates London life, buildings, and streets through photographs. A few images of steam passenger ferries appear and these show that steamboats played a substantial role in traveling through London.

The final section of this survey of sources deals with books on Victorian thought and culture. This section is useful in gaining an understanding of Victorian Londoners and their culture. The Londoners, themselves, are the focus of this section. These books help place the steamboat passenger ferries into the Victorian cultural context by identifying those who used the steamboats, and their attitudes toward the river, steamboats and their safety.

Virginia Woolf wrote five essays describing London, published in 1975 under the title *The London Scene*. The first essay, “The Docks of London”, examines the consumer society that had transformed the Thames riverside into a utilitarian
warehouse. The next essay, “Oxford Street Tide”, continues the consumer critique by extending it to where the goods delivered to the docks are actually sold to the middle-class consumers. Both of these essays provide illumination about the life surrounding the docks and Oxford Street. They also provide an idea of the workers’ life and what they endured.

An article that discusses Victorian images of steamboats is William S. Rodner’s “Humanity and Nature in the Steamboat Paintings of J.M.W. Turner” (Albion 1986). Rodner argues that Turner’s depictions of steamboats demonstrate the Romantic idea of humanity versus nature and that humanity is always subordinate to nature. To support his contention, Rodner presents a quick history of steamboats and examines Turner’s steamboat paintings depicting the man-made vessels always failing against nature. Rodner also discusses the continuing march of modernity and technological improvements seen in Turner’s paintings. Turner clearly studied the impact, potential, and implications of steamboats, and their increasing prominence, as his paintings demonstrate. “Such steamers [river steamers] quickly became popular and ubiquitous, and provided the itinerant Turner with frequent opportunities to view them close at hand, to study their operation, to evaluate their impact, and to draw inspiration from their peculiar vitality.”\(^{36}\) Rodner’s art historical interpretation of Turner’s steamboat paintings provides valuable information concerning river steamboats. This article, despite the focus on sea-going paintings, is useful to understanding the cultural impact of steamboats.

John Stevenson’s essay collection *London in the Age of Reform* (1977) surveys the pre-Victorian political history of London from 1725 to 1848. The majority of the essays in this collection deal with the development of the political opposition within London and its impact on the city. It does not deal with the London transportation system but does provide a political background for understanding Victorian London.

Novels are another way to understand steamboat passenger ferries in the social and cultural world of London and the River Thames. Charles Dickens is one of the most famous British writers who wrote about London. In *Our Mutual Friend*, published 1865, Dickens illustrates that the middle classes traveled through London on steamboats. He also describes the steamboat noises that filled the air, explains how steamboats caused many smaller boats to be swamped and turned over, and even presents how some Londoners felt about the steamers. For example, the following quote taken from chapter eleven depicts a common perception about steamboats in mid-Victorian London:

> Nothing was clear but that the unpopular steamer was assailed with reproaches on all sides. She was the Murderer, bound Gallows Bay; she was the Manslaught erer, bound for Penal Settlement; her captain ought to be tried for his life; her crew ran down men in row-boats with a relish; she mashed up Thames lightermen with her paddles; she fired property with her funnels; she always was, and she always would be, wreaking destruction upon somebody or something, after the manner of all her kind.37

Dickens, as one of many British writers, illustrates the cultural image of steamboats on the Thames and in London society.

Many facets come together to create a social, cultural, and technological understanding of the steam ferry trade in the nineteenth century. These facets include a general history of the steamboats; an understanding of the design and construction of boats, piers and other facilities; business organization; knowledge of accidents; regulations; public perceptions; and an understanding of why steam ferries failed. They also include the beliefs, myths, rituals, assumptions, social activities, and attitudes of the average Londoner towards technology, all gathered through a range of eclectic primary and secondary sources.

III. DEVELOPMENT OF THE STEAMBOAT

Steamboats, at the turn of the nineteenth century, were not a prevalent form of travel. The steamboats required too much coal for long distance travel and were not cost effective enough for extensive use on the Thames. Yet within thirty years they were the most popular form of transport in London. To understand this sudden change requires an examination of the history of the steamboat.

A. History of the Steamboat

Despite the recent debate about the origins of steamboats in the United Kingdom, we can say that the steamboat was invented at the end of the eighteenth century and the improvements made to the steam engine since then aided the vessels’ evolution. The origin of using steam for navigation can be traced to the United Kingdom, although its developmental history is long, and incorporates many countries and conflicts.
Steamboat experimentation and development took time. Often the developers could not attain money from their governments to make steamboat development and improvement possible. They had ideas, and schematics of the boats and engines, but not the funds to build the expensive boats. Running experiments on existing boats were expensive, as well. In many cases, the rulers and wealthy merchants could not see the practicality of the steamboat, so they withheld their money. This was true especially in the early years of steamboat development and experimentation. A fine example is Denis Papin, described in Paul Bernard’s article “How not to Invent the Steamboat” (1980). In the 1690s, he had the idea to build a steamboat using pistons in steam cylinders to propel boats by using racks and pinions, but could not get money for it. There were academic disputes above him that controlled the flow of money, and the sovereign’s advisors cautioned that steamboats were not the most economically effective way to move goods and people around rivers.38

Frequently, interest did not focus on steamboats and lack of money followed lack of interest. Most potential backers found other, new industrial experiments, like developing new processes to produce cotton, more profitable and useful than steamboats. In many cases, when the focus was on steam engines, it was not for use on steamboats or transportation in general but to extract iron ore and other valuable minerals from the ground. James Watt and his clients are excellent examples of this. Watt designed and built huge low-pressure Newcomen steam engines to empty water from wells and extract ore and coal. Watt did not design, or plan to design his steam

engines for transport. When it was suggested to him, he refused to do it because he did not see it as profitable. 39

The next mention of propelling a boat with steam occurred in 1737 when Jonathon Hulls published a pamphlet with the first representation of a steamboat. His boat had a propeller attached at the stern (back) of the boat and was driven by a steam engine. Then, in 1765, Dr. Robison of Edinburgh proposed to James Watt to use steam to propel vessels on land and sea. 40 Watt, however, was not far enough along in his engine to apply it to boats and travel. But he took out extensive patents on his steam engines, so if someone else found them useful for transport, they were unable to use any engine similar to his until 1800 when his patents ran out. His obstruction patent on the rotary steam engine hindered steamboat development.

In the end, the development of the use of steam engines in a boat was dependent on a small, high-pressure engine. A turning point occurred in 1787, when Watt overcame one of the main difficulties and helped prepare the way for the nineteenth century system of steam navigation, by perfecting a steam engine capable of rotary motion. 41 In 1788, Patrick Miller, owner of Dalswinton Estate in Dumfriesshire, after winning a race in his steamboat against a boat propelled by oar, became convinced that the steamboat only needed greater power. In the same year, James Taylor, tutor to Patrick Miller’s children, proposed to apply steam engines to boats, and solicited the help of William Symington, who had run other experiments

using steam engines on boats, to employ steam engines for paddle-wheels. After many unsuccessful experiments, on 26 December 1789, on the Forth and Clyde Canal, Taylor and Symington ran an experiment, which proved the merits of applying steam engines to boats. They did not pursue patents on their invention, but, as the President of the Institute of Civil Engineers claimed, “left it to others to work out and develop the powers of their extraordinary invention, which was destined, at no distant period, to produce such a wonderful revolution in the social world.”42 With Watt’s development of steam engines capable of rotary movement and Taylor and Symington’s experiments with steam propelled paddle wheels, the improvement of the steamboat reached a defining moment. In a matter of thirty years steamboats would usurp sailing and rowing vessels, as well as horse-drawn vehicles as the main mode of transportation in London.

Another driving force during this development period of steamboats was an increase in the demand for improved transportation.43 With industrialization and higher wages, more people could afford to live further away from where they worked, but to do so, they needed better, faster, and cheaper transportation to travel between work and home. Steamboat owners were quick to accommodate the demand and began steamboat services along the Thames. As the owners made money, they improved the boats, creating more demand for steamboat’s swift travel. Thus, slowly during the first quarter of the nineteenth century, steamboat companies helped change the commuter travel patterns to incorporate the steamboats.

41 Ibid.  
42 Ibid. p. 84.
The major innovation during this period was the general introduction of piers and wharves to land and embark passengers on steamboats. The number of passengers using steamboats and the number of steamboats themselves grew quickly during the 1820s and 1830s. This led to a desire to maintain an adequate water depth and build more piers. In 1828, for example, St. Katherine’s Dock Company finished St. Katherine’s Wharf and made it available to steamboats. The General Steam Navigation Company (GSNC), a steamboat company, began to use it immediately, resulting in a decrease in the need for watermen to row passengers between the shore and the steamboats. The watermen became upset with this new threat to their livelihood, what they considered their right. This fueled the fight between the Watermen’s Company, an old guild for rowers and longshoremen, and the steamboat companies. Piers and landing stages increased accordingly at the beginning of the 1840s. Each steamboat company constructed landing piers where they wished. For example, in the 1840s, Greenwich watermen built a landing stage for the passengers who were using their service.

The peak of steamboat ferries came between 1840 and 1860, but their fate had been decided in 1834 with the introduction of a railway line between London and Bristol via Reading. In 1840, the London & Blackwall Railway Company opened its line along the north bank between the Minories and Brunswick Wharf.

The Great Western railway reached Reading in 1840 and Oxford in 1844 after a prolonged struggle with the Thames Commissioners and the Kennet and Aron Canal

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Company. The Commissioners, according to Frank Dix in *Royal River Highway*, realized the railway would hurt river traffic by taking away the river’s passengers. The Commissioners realized this would result in less money available to maintain the river, which would fall into disuse and disrepair. Another disadvantage of the railway, the Commissioners argued to gain support from the general public, was that the towns along the river would find their trade injured and their property would decrease in value. Despite their arguments, the Commissioners could not fight the railway and, just as they said, the Thames fell slowly into disuse and disrepair above Richmond.

Slowly during the 1840s, railways built up their services and began to attract steamboat passengers away. The railways took the commuter traffic that, as Frank Dix puts it, “the steamboats had so effectively created and nurtured.” However, during this time of increased railway lines and services, steamboats grew and survived in the fight for passengers.

Initially, steamboats and the railways acted as an integrated transportation system when railways were less pervasive. Once railways expanded and improved, steamboats, which did not improve, fell into disuse. Steamboats, however, aided in urban sprawl and helped change commuter traffic patterns that would assist railways gaining ascendancy. Steamboats also helped railways in another, as well. When steamboats first came into being, they challenged Londoners view of technology. After slowly changing Londoners view from negative and hesitant to accept new

technology, society came to accept and embrace advancing technology to the point that they would reject an accepted standard, the steamboats, to admit a new, more innovative technology, the railway.

In the 1850s the river was relatively primitive and undeveloped. Its depth varied, there was no place to safely and adequately drop off and pick up passengers. Adding embankments, after 1870, aided steamboat travel. It made the river deep enough for the steamboats to travel anywhere in the river. It also provided adequate landing stages to pick up and land passengers. After 1851, it was cheaper, quicker, and safer to travel by railway than by water, especially after 1870 when the embankment provided railway lines, in tunnels along the banks of the river, that competed with the steamboats. The commuter weekday traffic began to operate at a loss and the steamboat companies went out of business, but not without a fight. The Steamboat Act of 1851 controlled the number of passengers and ensured the safety of steamboats. It was hoped that these regulations would entice commuters to use steamboats. However, it did not. In 1852, the Woolwich services were reduced by railway competition but the GSNC bought five of their boats and put them on the Richmond service. In 1855, the London & Westminster Steamboat Company was taken over by the Woolwich Steam Packet Company. These two companies, the GSNC and Woolwich Steam Packet Company, hoped to survive in the face of railway competition.\textsuperscript{46}

\textsuperscript{46} Dix. p. 87-88.
Smaller companies could not compete with the railways, so they merged or were sold in order to form larger companies and fleets. The new, combined companies, however, tried to continue services despite the railway. The London Steamboat Company, for example, began a ten-minute service daily in each direction between London Bridge and Chelsea. It called at Blackfriars, Waterloo, Charing Cross, Westminster, Lambeth, Millbank, Nine Elms, Pimlico, Vauxhall, Battersea Park, Chelsea, and Chelsea Bridge. The boats also ran downstream from London Bridge and stopped at Cherry Gardens, Tunnel, Globe Stairs, Limehouse, West India Dock, Commercial Dock, Millwall, Greenwich, Cubitt Town, Blackwall, Charlton, and Woolwich.

When the Woolwich Steam Packet Company finally failed in 1875, it marked the beginning of the steep decline of steamboats. The London Steamboat Company took control of the Woolwich Steam Packet Company’s twenty-seven sea-going and thirty-one up-river boats, along with their eighteen piers, their premises and dry dock at Struther’s Wharf. The London Steamboat Company also took over the City’s Steam Packet Company’s dry dock and building yard at Battersea. It attempted to retain local traffic by operating a half-hourly, year-round service between Chelsea, Greenwich, and Woolwich but despite its efforts the business became seasonal. The winter steamboat services were likewise reduced as the commuters used other means of transport when the conditions on the steamboats were at their worst. Passengers
disliked sailing in the winter conditions and thus used steamboats only during the
warmer months. Steamboats were mostly used for excursions now.  

The 1880s were notoriously bad for the remaining steamboat companies. Many experienced no profits, causing them to foreclose on or mortgage their vessels. In 1884, the London Steamboat Company was liquidated as railways and omnibuses used the increase in numbers of bridges to draw potential steamboat passengers. In 1885, the River Thames Steamboat Company was formed to take over the London Steamboat Company, but it failed in a year. The company attempted to sell the boats in the autumn of 1886, but no one wanted to buy them. They tried to continue service through the 1887 season, but like the previous year there were not enough customers to make it profitable. The thirty boats were then laid up. In 1888, the Victoria Steamboat Association formed to take over the River Thames Steamboat Company assets and set up their own services. The Victoria Steamboat Association hoped to break the GSNC’s monopoly on the Thames and to get the Thames Conservancy to improve the piers.  

Since commuter traffic had dried up by the 1890s, the majority of steamboats were used for excursion travel. A spiral began to happen to the boats. As the railways and omnibuses took away passengers, the steamboat companies had less money to maintain their steamboats or acquire new ones. The service the steamboats provided deteriorated.

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In 1895, in order to combat this deteriorating spiral, the London Trades Council petitioned the London County Council (LCC) to free piers from tolls, arguing that tolls on bridges had been lifted previously and that piers should have the same consideration.\textsuperscript{49} Two years later, in 1897, the LCC Rivers Committee reported that the first step to providing an efficient steamboat service on the Thames and restoring the Thames to its old highway status was to free piers from tolls. They also determined that the piers needed improved landing stages with better approaches after nearly seventy years of use.\textsuperscript{50} But this determination came too late to help the fate of the steamboats.

A final consideration for the decline of steamboats is the development of turbine and diesel machinery. As these new engines improved, they proved to be better than the steam engine and eventually ran steamboat companies out of business.

Many factors aided the rise of the steamboat and also helped in their decline. Steamboats began with much suspicion but overcame it to attract large numbers of commuters to become the first real mass transit system. But then they quickly lost their influence with the advance in technology resulting in railways, who took away steamboat commuter traffic. Also seen in this rise and fall is the changing perception of Londoners toward technology. First they were suspicious and wary of new technology and modernization, which is why it took long for steamboats to develop and become popular. But by the end of the nineteenth century, the population accepted technology and modernization through its long struggle to deal with

\textsuperscript{49} Dix. p. 107.
\textsuperscript{50} Body. p.107.
steamboats and hence quickly became attracted to the railways – the newest form of technology.

B. Brief Design History of Steamboats

One of the most obvious comparisons in steamboat design, construction, and handling was with the United States because of the ties that existed in the vessels’ development. Both countries were dependent on steamboats for travel, more so than the rest of the Western world. The United States used steamboats primarily for long distance trips on the Mississippi River system, but steamboats were also used on the Great Lakes, the Hudson Valley, and parts of the Gulf Coast; Great Britain used steamboats for long and short trips on all its rivers and for ferry services on the Irish Sea. The distinct uses between the two countries caused variations in design, construction, and handling.

The conditions and uses of the boats caused a structural design difference as well. The New York steamboats mostly used as ferry boats like in London were semi-circular at each end. The sponsons, expansions applied to the platforms on each side of a steamboat’s paddlewheels to provide stability, supported narrow cabins on the sides and the whole boat was roofed over except for a small space at each end where the passengers landed and embarked from the boat. The hull contained the dining rooms, bars, and boilers, while the main deck held the ladies’ cabins, offices, cargo space, and the engine room. The upper deck had two main saloons and more staterooms. The pilothouses, finally, were above this level. The captain steered from
one of the two pilothouses on the roof near the bow and stern of the boat.\textsuperscript{51} The United States, especially in New York, adopted an end-on system of loading, where goods and passengers were loaded at an end of the boat. Americans were able to embrace the end-on system because they had such a small tide, while the Thames steamboats had a large tide that did not allow boats to load end-on. The United States also used trusses to strengthen the long, shallow hulls. It was believed that the trusses would greatly strengthen the vessels without increasing the weight too much.

The Americans also used a walking beam-engine with a beam overhead and in most cases, employed a single cylinder. The engine, driven by double beat valves, worked off a camshaft instead of a slide valve like most British marine engines. The double beat valves allowed the steamboat to stop and reverse quickly, which proved an advantage.\textsuperscript{52} Hatches were located over the engines at one end of the boat and around the funnels at the other end.\textsuperscript{53}

With the advent of hydraulic power, the Americans’ steamboats changed their design further. The steamboats became bigger and bulkier yet gained engine power of “8 indicated HP per square foot of mid-section of 20 miles per hour on a draught of 6 feet.”\textsuperscript{54} They were able to remove the sponsons, expansions applied to the platforms on each side of a steamboats paddlewheels to provide stability, because hydraulic power allowed more control over the steamboat. Hydraulic power also facilitated the

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., p. 122.  
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., p. 122.  
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., p. 140.
approach to piers and enabled passengers to board the ship.\textsuperscript{55} It also allowed the boat to clear shoal, a sandbank, and escape easier if grounded, it was stuck on the bottom of the river. Mr. E. W. DeRussett presents an image of the structural difference between London and the United States, stating steamboats in America projected the deck far over the side of the boat and supported it by struts.\textsuperscript{56}

Even the shape of the steamboats in America and Great Britain differed. The Americans adopted a spoon-shaped bottom to make the boats stable and maneuverable while carrying their heavy loads. The shape also allowed the steamboats to have a greater carrying capacity for cargo, cabins, and saloons. The part above water was often overburdened with cabins, saloons and staterooms, but despite the overburden and heavy load, the Americans still attained great speed per indicated horsepower employed.\textsuperscript{57} American steamboats were five times longer than their width, which made the boats handier. They also had an overhang, a strong deck extending several feet beyond the hull, which acted as a fender in collisions.

On the River Thames in London, two different types of steamboat ferry service existed, the above bridge and below bridge services. Above London Bridge stops were plentiful and passengers traveled shorter distances and went slower. Westminster, Parliament, and access to the West End are above London Bridge. While below bridge, passengers, especially members of the working class because they tended to live in areas below the bridge, tended to travel longer distances on faster boats that carried more people as part of commuter travel between Greenwich

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., p. 141.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., p. 134.
and the City.\textsuperscript{58} Below the London Bridge was busier than above the bridge because it
provided access to the dockyards and the Pool, which was traditionally where all
boats landed when they came to London.

Because of the differing needs of these two services, the design of the boats
differed. The steamboats above bridge were smaller, had a shallower draft, and
traveled at a moderate speed. For these reasons, they had great steerage power and
were “well adapted to deal with traffic of restricted and crowded smooth-water
area”\textsuperscript{59} The steamboats below bridge, however, were larger, bulkier boats that did not
handle well and were thus dependant on the crew’s and captain’s ability to handle the
boat in close quarters. The builder often gave boats used below bridge a stronger hull
to help the boat survive potential accidents and a fuller keel to help the boat’s
stability. Since comfort was essential for passengers, the designers and builders often
neglected safety considerations for the sake of those comforts, which explains the
bulky nature of the boats, and a fuller keel. A fuller keel, while giving the boat more
stability in the water, accommodates the passenger need for comfort. But this comfort
also made the boats wide and bulky. In the Institute of Civil Engineers (ICE)
presentation “The Passenger Steamers of the Thames, the Mersey, and the Clyde”, for
example, William Carson showed that in order to provide large passenger space
below deck, safety considerations, such as subdividing the bulkheads, the supports of
the boat inside, were disregarded.\textsuperscript{60}

\textsuperscript{57} Carson. p. 141.
\textsuperscript{58} See Appendix D.
\textsuperscript{59} Carson. p. 82.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., p. 93.
The British steamboat’s length was generally six times its beam, or the width of the boat. The American characteristics of great speed, handiness, comfort, stability, strength, durability, buoyancy and seaworthiness were lacking in British steamboats, which were long, narrow vessels and not well adapted for sea or heavy river traffic because they did not answer the helm quickly; they did not respond well when the wheel was being turned. They just did not have inherent stability. These steamboats also had poor accommodation, were slower, and took more risks than their American counterparts. These differences result partly from the difference between screw steamers that Americans used and paddle steamers the British used. On screw steamers, the cabin space could go from one end of the boat to the other, whereas the paddles intruded with the cabin space, although both countries used steamboats for similar situations like ferries.

Mr. Perkins, a member of the ICE who traveled by steamboats on the Thames and in the United States, claimed that the steering arrangement of London steamboats was as good as any he had seen. “The steersman performed a double duty – steering and carrying a fender to defend the stem. He had never known an accident happen to the riverboats. Naturally their consumption of fuel was very large, but they often stopped, during a great part of the day they did not run.” Mr. J. Femie, also a member of the ICE who traveled on steamboats around the world, commented that the London steamboat ferries were the worst in the world, especially when

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compared to the United States. He, however, did grant that the tide on the Thames created difficulties not encountered in the United States on the Hudson. He also provided a glimpse into the many structural differences between British and American steamboats. The main differences arose from their different conditions and uses.

Mr. Cutler, a member of the ICE, believed that the Thames steamboats, especially the Citizen and Woolwich boats, were among the most uncomfortable and dirtiest steamboats, which is ironic considering they were two of the longest surviving steamboat companies. The boats were not fast, provided no protection from the weather except in the miserable cabins, they wasted fuel, and experienced no mechanical improvement in more than thirty years. Other ICE members, such as Mr. Redman and Mr. Forbes, agreed that the Thames steamboats were among the dirtiest in the world and that they lacked comfort, shelter, and convenience. Mr. Redman also argued that since the Thames services had deteriorated by the 1880s because of an absence of discipline and cleanliness, steamboat travel was tabooed for the upper class. As the middle and upper classes abandoned the steamboats, however, the steamboat had become a popular mode of transport for the working class. The working classes allowed the dying steamboat business to stay afloat until its collapse in 1905.

62 Ibid., p. 143.
63 Body, p. 135.
C. **Steamboat Ferry Services**

Steamboat ferry services on the Thames in London experienced great booms then their popularity fell as railways usurped them and they failed to keep up with the advancing technology.

The 1830s are considered to be the beginning of the boom period for steamboats. Several companies came into existence, like the New Steam Packet Company in 1833, later called the Star Company. In 1834, more steamboat companies were formed. Two were the Diamond Steam Packet Company and the Woolwich Steam Packet Company, which started a new type of service that stopped at different wharves along its route. It began and maintained a regular day service between Charing Cross Wharf and Struther’s Wharf, and also called at Greenwich and Greenhithe. The London & Westminster Steamboat Company registered in 1835. It ran from Old Swan Pier to its own pier on the south side of Westminster Bridge. In 1837, the London, Westminster, & Vauxhall Iron Steamboat Company, later called the Iron Steamboat Company, formed and operated between Queenhithe and Kew. With the increase in competition, steamboat companies introduced other new services aboard their steamboats such as season tickets and meals. The steamboat companies also began advertising, hoping to discourage the public from using the competing steamboat companies.64

In response to increased competition, steamboat companies often distinguished their boats from their competitors by different funnel designs and boat

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names. For example, the Star Steam Packet Company had a black and white vertical spiral design, while the GSNC used a deep cream with a black top for theirs. The Iron Steamboat Company romantically named their boats with names such as *Daylight*, *Moonlight*, *Starlight*, and *Bride*. The London & Westminster Steamboat Company named their boats after flowers, while the Star Steam Packet Company used celestial names. The Diamond Steam Packet Company used names of gems for their boats. Through these means the steamboat companies were able to differentiate their boats from their competitors, and so could the public.\(^{65}\)

As many ship entrepreneurs saw the success of existing steamboat companies, they began their own steamboat companies. One of the most successful steamboat companies formed in 1824 was the General Steam Navigation Company (GSNC). The GSNC was not one of the first steamboat companies on the Thames. It was, in fact, an association between Thomas Brocklebank, who was one of the first people to begin steamboats on the Thames in the late 1810’s and a steamboat builder, and W. J. Hall. In 1828, Henry Maudsley of Richmond started a London to Richmond service. In 1829, the inhabitants of Margate formed their own company: the Margate & London Steam Packet Company.\(^{66}\)

To accommodate the higher number of passengers, as steamboats reached their peak, the Watermen’s Company added two new boats to their steamboat services in 1843 and three more in 1844. Also, in 1844, the South Eastern Railway built a line to Gravesend and provided half-hourly service to Woolwich directly competing with

\(^{65}\) Dix, p. 64 and 78.

\(^{66}\) Ibid., p.56.
steamboats for passengers. Steamboats now had to fight the exact same fight the Waterman’s Company fought against steamboats – fight a better, cheaper, faster mode of transportation. In 1845, the City Steam Packet Company formed, but instead of facing direct competition with the South Eastern Railway, they put their boats to work above the London Bridge traffic. In 1846, the London & Southampton Railway opened its line from Nine Elms to Woking via Surbiton. However in 1848, it changed its name to London & South Western Railway and extended the London end to Waterloo. The Citizen Steamboat Company joined the steamboat competition in 1847, beginning a line between London Bridge and Kew. In the same year, the Great Eastern Railway opened its Thames Wharf branch to North Woolwich. In 1849, the Clapham Junction Railway branch opened and carried passengers to Baines, Richmond, Twickenham, Staines, and Windsor just a few months before the Great Western Railway branch from Slough opened. Another railway branch from Surbiton to Hampton Court was opened in 1849. These railways competed with the up-river Thames services, as well as the down river services.67

The steamboats’ staying power is also seen in the increase in the number of steamboats in service. The number of boats that steamboat companies ran increased as well. Sixteen steamboats operated above London Bridge. The London & Westminster Steamboat Company added four boats to their fleet. The Thames watermen finally realized it was futile to oppose steamboats. They decided to start their own steamboat company. The Diamond Company ran seven boats to and from

67 Ibid., p.67-85.
London Bridge and an additional one from Hungerford. The Star Company ran six boats between Gravesend and London Bridge, with stops along its route in London.\textsuperscript{68}

While it appeared some steamboat companies were thriving, in general the steamboat trade on the Thames was slowly dying during the 1840s. The competition between steamboat companies, and the competition with the railways, led them to charge lower fares. Many older steamboat companies dissolved and went out of business because they did not have enough money to buy new boats and could not compete with the newer steamboats and railways. The Star Steam Packet Company folded in 1842, although in 1842 steamboats carried the highest number of steamboat passengers. The Margate & London Steam Packet Company was taken over by the Woolwich Steamboat Company in 1843. But the new steamboat companies, like the Commercial Steamboat Company and the Medway Steamboat Company, kept the number of steamboat companies relatively stable.

To keep the passengers, the steamboat companies tried to find new attractions. The GSNC had a new steamboat built in 1856 and paid attention to décor, furnishings, and fittings in the saloons, as well as first class catering. It hoped that these improvements would bring more passengers to their boats. Before steamboat companies did not typically divide the different classes into distinct and separate areas. The GSNC also hoped that these improvements would make them competitive with railways and also satisfy the excursionist taste.\textsuperscript{69}

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., p.67-72.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., p.88.
Beginning in 1861, the Citizen Steamboat Company began a ten-year replacement of their steamboats. The London Steamboat Company, in 1862, registered to take over the assets of the Iron Steamboat Company and the City Steamboat Company. Even though the companies operated under their own names for years after, the sale resulted in a significant reduction of steamboat companies on the Thames – another indication that steamboats companies were losing their battle with the railways. Then, in 1865, the Saloon Steam Packet Company was registered by J. Trozer and reported to have sailed the first saloon steamer on the Thames.\textsuperscript{70}

Steamboat companies were reduced again in 1865 when the Watermen’s Company Steamboat Company was taken over by the Woolwich Steam Packet Company. During the 1860s, the Woolwich Steam Packet Company increased its fleet by nineteen boats, including the twelve from the Watermen’s Company, and remained one of the strongest steamboat companies on the Thames throughout this period. On average, the Woolwich Steam Packet Company carried 250,000 passengers a year.\textsuperscript{71}

After missing a steamboat service for a number of years, in 1880, the people of Woolwich wanted their own ferry service to reach central London, so they petitioned the Metropolitan Board of Works. After nine years of requests and petitions, the MBW granted the power to carry passengers, animals, and goods across the Thames at Woolwich at no charge. The Woolwich Free Ferry, as this service was called, opened on 23 March 1889, was immensely popular, carried an average 8,000

\textsuperscript{70}Ibid., p.89-91.
\textsuperscript{71}Ibid., p.90.
passengers and 3,000 vehicles. It took nine years of going through the different governmental bodies to find the interest, money and support to run the endeavor.\footnote{Ibid., p.101.} Finally after many years of appeals by the people of Woolwich, the government took a role in steamboats and the Thames traffic.

In 1895, the Victoria Steamboat Association failed and was reconstituted the following year as Victoria Steamboat Ltd. The new endeavor went out of business soon thereafter and was replaced with the Thames Steamboat Company Ltd. in 1897, which took over many of the boats and had three new ones built. The company also procured piers at Battersea Park, Chelsea, Battersea Square, Nine Elms, Putney Bridge, and Grosvenor Road and leased piers at Woolwich, Fulham, Roff’s Wharf, and the shipyard at Woolwich.\footnote{Ibid., p. 106.} It is apparent through this that steamboat companies were finding it harder to compete for commuter traffic and maintain their lines against the railways.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the Thames Steamboat Company Ltd., with its four boats was the only commuter service working on the Thames in London. The threat of the railways and the LCC starting free river passenger services, like the Woolwich Free Ferry, deterred companies and others interested from starting new services. The railways, free bridges, and omnibuses took away steamboat river passenger traffic and helped change the steamboats from a prosperous commuter ferry service to small holiday trips.

\footnote{Ibid., p.101.} \footnote{Ibid., p. 106.}
IV. THE FIGHT FOR THE THAMES AND ITS JURISDICTION

Steamboat passenger ferries provide a way to examine Victorian ideals about technology and modernity by giving access to Victorian society. Like Dr. Porter, I look at the various interest groups, regulatory bodies, the Watermen’s Company and the steamboat companies, surrounding the steamboat ferry trade. Parliament, the London Aldermen, parishes, and many other regulatory bodies all fought over control of the Thames and the boats using the river, particularly steamboats. The steamboat companies and the Waterman Companies each had interest in the use of steamboats, and their interest in steamboats changed over time. Even groups like the ICE and average steamboat passengers had an interest pertaining to steamboats. Examining these interests and especially the conflicts between them leads to a greater cultural understanding of steamboat passenger ferries.

Most involved in administering London’s government did not know who controlled the river because of conflicting areas of jurisdiction. The fact that London did not have a central government, but many small local borough governments, confused matters as well. Jurisdiction of the River Thames was complex in the nineteenth century. Formed in the time of James II during the seventeenth century, the City of London Navigation Committee was responsible for dredging the river. The City of London held rights over the bed and banks of the river below London Bridge.

Even though greater London was the administrative center of the Kingdom, London itself did not have a central administration. The division of powers and the
dominance of sectional, elite interests ruled the meager London government. By the seventeenth century, these powerful divisions were represented in the City. Many parts of London had become associated with particular trades. For example, Deptford and Woolwich were known as dockyard settlements, while Grays Inn and Lincolns Inn were home to the lawyers' courts.\footnote{See Appendix D.}

Traditionally, the Lord Mayor and the Court of Aldermen ruled the Corporation of the City of London, which consisted of 600 acres. Royal charters spanning seven centuries confirmed their rule, existence, and privileges. The Lord Mayor was the voice of the City to the Crown and the Crown's voice to the city. The aldermen administered the city's money and charities, issued licenses, and heard grievances. Elected by the freemen ratepayers of their ward, the aldermen held their position for life, and annually elected the Lord Mayor. It is commonly known, however, the merchants, manufacturers, and financiers controlled the city through the Corporation and the Mayoralty and they institutionalized the powers of the guilds to continue their control. The ancient Corporation of the City of London ruled its own small area. It completely ignored the greater growing metropolis, refusing to enlarge its boundaries to govern the growing suburbs. The City used its prestige and influence to defend the status quo and keep outside interference away.

Many struggles over the river resulted from the chaotic and unmanageable nature of London's government. The guilds, wards, and parishes, along with the Court of Aldermen and the Lord Mayor conducted local control over many aspects of
life in the growing metropolis. The greater London metropolis had no unifying municipal government and the Corporation of the City of London took no responsibility for governing the metropolis. This nature of government made London more difficult to administer as it grew. From Norman times, most land in London, and nearly all trade, commerce, and manufacturing in London remained in independent hands. The traders, merchants, and manufacturers organized into guilds and trade associations, which became powerful. The guilds and trade associations controlled commercial life and much of the economic life of the entire country, especially London.

During the fourteenth century, London’s population began to grow more rapidly. It became crowded and filthy with refuse, odors, and industrial waste. No town planning occurred. The guild's interests ruled the interests of the city and thus took no responsibility or control over keeping London clean. The government of London was unwilling and incapable of fixing the problems London endured because the guilds and trade associations interests stood in the way. Whenever their interest was in peril of being municipalized, the guilds and trade associations waged campaigns against the municipalization or simply ignored and undermined it. Every time the central government attempted to fix and unify London’s local authority, the Court of Aldermen, the Lord Mayor, the guilds, and the trade associations undermined the attempts. For example, in 1609, Hugh Middleton, a Welsh businessman, began to erect a canal between a reservoir in Hertfordshire and London to pipe fresh, clean water into the city. Many householders resisted the piped water.
The water carriers, who carried Thames water through the city, claimed the piped water was fatal in order to secure their jobs. Some builders allowed sewage to flow into the canals. Vandals sabotaged the canals and pipes, while thieves stole the taps. Although the new piped water the New River Company did provide was a good source of water for London, the interests, such as the livelihood of water carriers complicated the change. The government of London, however, did nothing to help the project along.\textsuperscript{75}

The Lord Mayor of London was, according to royal orders, the official Conservator of the Thames. His deputy chair supervised the dredging of the river channel, removal of mud, gravel shoals and other impediments, anchoring of timber and barges near shore, construction of docks, steps, wharves and building that might aid navigation. He, and the City, retained the right to administer and tax the Port of London and were the governing authority for the Thames from Staines Bridge to the Medway since ancient times. Thus, whenever there was a problem on the river, the citizens applied to the Lord Mayor to solve the problem. No metropolitan authority, however, was capable of studying or authorizing improvements outside the square mile of the Corporation of the City of London. When Londoners requested the Lord Mayor to regulate the speed of steamboats outside of the square mile, during the 1830s and 1840s, he was unsure of his authority and often asked the petitioners to appeal to Parliament.\textsuperscript{76} He was also wary to regulate and govern any part of London outside the traditional boundaries of the Corporation of the City of London. As seen


earlier, the Court of Aldermen and the Lord Mayor considered themselves the voice of London but did not bother to govern the greater metropolis. As seen in a report about a meeting of the Court of Alderman and the Lord Mayor in *The Times* in 1847:

> The public, his Lordship stated, appeared to infer that because he, as Lord Mayor, was conservator of the River Thames from New Windsor to Yantlet Creek, he was, therefore the redresser of all the wrongs committed in that extensive and most important part of the river which lay within the limits of this jurisdiction. It was true that, as conservator of the Thames and the waters of the Medway, he possessed great power in removing impediments to the navigation and in preserving the fisheries; but as a magistrate, his jurisdiction was not co-extensive, for if an offence which had been created by an act of Parliament was committed upon the river beyond the city of London, such act determined the magistrate who should take cognizance of the offence. Now he had observed that every complaint which had been made to him was capable of being remedied by the Watermen's Act; but it was a singular fact that not one cause of complaint of the description to which he had referred had arisen within his jurisdiction as a magistrate of the city of London, that act requiring the complaint to be made to some justice of the peace acting for the place nearest to which the offence was committed.77

In response to the lack of a central, local government, the newer surrounding areas of the London metropolis developed their own local governments from the parishes. Prominent local parishioners met in the church vestry and formed executive committees and took on the church vestry’s name. After some time, the parishes registered baptisms and burials, controlled finances, punished moral offences, and administered collective resources. The parishes fostered a sense of identity, which made them difficult to replace, especially when Parliament passed the Reform Act of 1832. The vestries often intertwined with guilds, creating a dual loyalty. Those belonging to that guild in the specific location would not want to see the vestry broken up and their jobs disappear. The vestries, although concerned with certain
interests coinciding with those of the guilds, did labor to fix problems and improve their vestry. An example is seen in David Owen’s *The Government of Victorian London, 1855-1889*:

In the area of sewer building the record of the vestries was impressive. Lambeth, for example, had laid down fifty-three miles at a cost of nearly £200,000, and Camberwell and spent over £100,000 on fifty miles. Naturally the newer areas, in general, had had more extensive programs, but some of the older parishes also had added creditable lengths of sewers. In paving, the vestries as a whole had made fair progress – some of them remarkable progress. Indeed, the totals spent in the fifteen years 1855-1870 on sewerage, paving, and other improvements were substantial, though, again, they varied tremendously from parish to parish. St. Pancras had spent nearly £885,000, Lambeth over £700,000, Camberwell over £500,000 – all of these were large parishes – while St. George’s-in-the-East, Mile End Old Town, Clerkenwell, Chelsea, and others, had all fallen below £100,000, and some of them well below.

Two types of parish vestries developed: “open” vestries where all ratepayers were entitled to attend meetings, and “closed” vestries where power was restricted to a few dozen of the prominent inhabitants, particularly those of property. By 1832, there were over ninety parishes in the greater London metropolis. The parishes, by this time, took care of street paving, cleaning and lighting, poor relief, and public order.

Suburban vestries, in response to the lack of government from the City, managed local affairs from the boroughs and suburbs of greater London. However, they operated under no supervision and each vestry developed on its own. Most acted under the authority of acts of Parliament and received autonomous trusts and commissions responsible for paving, cleaning, lighting, and protection. There were

over 250 local acts that applied to metropolitan London and 300 different bodies administered these acts.\footnote{Briggs, Asa. Victorian Cities. 1963. p. 321.}

By the nineteenth century, London still had no central government. The historic split between the City and the metropolis still existed. The liverymen of the Companies of the City of London, along with the aldermen, selected the Lord Mayor, while other officers exercised judicial and administrative duties within the City of London. This group of administrators considered themselves the voice of London even though they ceased to provide any administration for the capital as a whole. The geographical concentration of power that resulted led the government of the City of London to make no attempt to extend the City’s territorial boundaries. The Court of Aldermen and the Lord Mayor, along with the guilds, did not want to disrupt the power they had under the chaotic nature of the government.

Even though London remained outside the Reform Act of 1832 and the Municipal Reform Act of 1835, for many reasons, London’s government did experience some reform. It was not incorporated in the reform acts because the City and Parliament were suspicious of a central government in London. Any extension of the metropolitan government would provide a strong voice and add strength to the greater metropolis as a challenge to the Corporation of the City of London. When the reform bills were presented, commissioners bribed and lobbied Members of Parliament to defeat the bills. Often Members of Parliament found their posts profitable and founded on the old regime based upon the system with the City
separate from the metropolis. According to Owen, “there was also a widely held feeling that the City was the acropolis of the trading classes, the place where they were supreme and where the aristocracy should have little influence.”

The City was the holding place for the merchants and they did not want to lose their authority. Thus Parliament feared a strong London government because, as the largest city in the country, it could pose a threat and take away their financial support of the Members of Parliament, and usurp Parliament’s authority, so they left London out of the 1832 and 1835 Municipal Reforms.

From 1837 to 1854, London’s government came under numerous attacks and calls for reform because it had proven ineffective, chaotic, and corrupt. All attempts to reform the metropolitan government were fiercely resisted by the Common Council, the parish vestries, and guilds whose interests were in jeopardy. By 1850, there were over 250 local acts setting up various local boards and commissions, and 10,000 commissioners served on lighting commissions, directorates of poor, and turnpike boards. All this did was to further the individual interests of those in power, aiding no one else.

Prior to 1855, the Crown executed most improvements in metropolitan London. The tradition of Crown responsibility lasted until an 1840s Parliament Select Committee was selected to study the congestion of London. As discontent grew in London among radicals and reformers, municipal reform was enacted. The idea of turning the metropolis into one municipality was rejected and Benjamin Hall

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80 Ibid., p. 233.
81 See David Owen’s work for more details.
proposed a continuation of the vestry system in a modified form. In his plan, the metropolis would be divided into municipal districts and a central body, the Metropolitan Board of Works (MBW), that would handle certain public services for the entire metropolis. Under this system the larger parishes could continue their vestries and the smaller ones could join together to form district boards. Each parish and district board would send two representatives to be members of the MBW. With this plan, Hall hoped to regularize the vestries while leaving their powers of local self-government intact. The Metropolis Local Management Act of 1855 set up the governing sanitary authority, the MBW, and laid down a code for its behavior. The service on the board was to be unpaid, with only the chairman to receive between £1500 to £2000 a year. The MBW derived its authority for reorganization from Parliament. The indirect election made the board remote to the ordinary London citizen. Even though the MBW was set up, the Court of Aldermen and the Lord Mayor were the voices for the Corporation of the City of London. With the Act of 1855, the MBW was established. The MBW was the first legislative attempt to tackle the problem of the metropolitan administration as a whole but it left out the City.\textsuperscript{82}

In 1855, with the creation of the Metropolitan Board of Works (MBW), the parish vestries experienced reform. The competing interests of the “centralizers”, those who wanted a central London government, and “localists”, those who liked the parish system, compromised under the Metropolitan Management Act of 1855. This act left the City untouched and kept the parish vestries as the basic units of

\textsuperscript{82} Owen. p. 23.
administration. Under the Metropolitan Management Act of 1855, the twenty-three largest parish vestries remained, while the smaller, remaining parish vestries were divided into fifteen boards where the vestry elected the members. The remaining vestries, the new boards, and the Common Council of the City (the aldermen) elected the members of the Metropolitan Board of Works. The MBW became responsible for sewers, drainage, fire protection, and water supply. Later, it gained control of the inspection of the gas supply, it formed an effective London fire service, it created parks and open spaces, and it cleared slums.\textsuperscript{83} It also raised the poor rates.

Eventually the government created bodies for additional functions, like the Metropolitan Asylums Board, Port of London Sanitary Authority, and the London School Board, to divide and prevent the MBW from becoming too powerful.

Nevertheless, this divide and rule policy also hindered the MBW from dealing with and solving many metropolitan problems like sewage, lighting, and water. Continued resistance from the parish vestries did not aid the MBW either. Many disliked the MBW since it was a central body, it seemed to go against London’s sensibilities of local self-government seen through the vestries.\textsuperscript{84} The vestries also feared a loss of power and control over areas that they normally controlled. The MBW, however, did have a few achievements. The most notable was the creation of the metropolitan sewer system and the Thames Embankment. Other accomplishments were new roads,

\textsuperscript{83} Owen, p. 126-127.
\textsuperscript{84} See Owen Chapter 12 for examples.
freeing ten Thames bridges from tolls, the creation and retention of parks, and clearing the worst slums. The MBW also set up the Woolwich Free Ferry Service.85

The MBW did not solve the difficulty of governing London. It faced continued resistance from the parish vestries and the Corporation of the City of London, as well as reformers who believed the MBW did not do enough to reform the government of London. The MBW persisted until 1888 but was finally replaced by the London County Council (LCC). The LCC was the first unified government in London. While the City kept its own power, the LCC had jurisdiction over 117 square miles and had 126 councilors elected every three years and twenty-one aldermen elected by the councilors every six years. The parish vestries and previous boards remained intact and throughout the LCC’s existence, they presented obstacles when their interests were at stake. Thus, the LCC did not implement many programs. The Conservatives, who opposed the Liberal/Radical Progressives who controlled the LCC, created twenty-eight borough councils with independent powers that conflicted with the LCC’s under the London Government Act of 1899. The boroughs, however, fell into leftwing hands, and the Conservatives gained control of the LCC in 1907. In addition, the LCC did not accomplish much because it was subject to factionalism, localism, and often subjugated by dominant personalities. The LCC, however, did manage to municipalize many services, such as the main drainage, the control of building, the fire service, and housing. It also municipalized the tramways, rebuilt six bridges, built two tunnels located at Blackwall and Rotherhithe, and initiated the

85 See Owen for more information.
London Green Belt. Even though the MBW and the LCC were given control over many aspects of governing greater London, they did not gain jurisdiction over the river or the steamboats.\textsuperscript{86}

During the last twelve years of the nineteenth century, the LCC was associated with the municipal “gas and water” socialism of Sydney and Beatrice Webb. The LCC also represented the belief in and commitment of the working class to the possibility of political reform through the ballot box. For many socialists, the LCC was a vehicle for gradualist transformation of society, until 1907 when the Conservatives gained control of the LCC. The Conservatives cautiously continued the municipalization. Throughout the Conservatives’ rule, which lasted until 1934 when Labour gained control, the LCC clashed with the local boroughs. Labour retained control of the LCC from 1934 until it was replaced in 1965 with the Greater London Council, which arose from the 1963 London Government Act. The LCC, during its lifetime, made some advances in the government of London, but it was always plagued by the division of the government that many retained as a check on London’s power.\textsuperscript{87}

The Crown and many of its agencies, likewise, had influence over the Thames by holding property rights over the bed and soil of all rivers in England and Wales by traditional law. For example, H.M. Office of Works had the jurisdiction over the bed of the river, while the H.M. Office of Woods and Forests had claims to the tidal portion of the Thames. Throughout the nineteenth century, the City of London and

\textsuperscript{86} Owen. p. 38.
\textsuperscript{87} Porter, Roy. p. 333.
the Crown were in a struggle for rights over the river. Part of this struggle concerned
the rents to be gained from the land reclaimed during embanking the river. The
Thames Conservancy Board, established by Parliament in 1856, was the settlement
between the City Navigation Committee and the Crown. The City Navigation
Committee withdrew its claims to the bed and soil of the river, while the Crown gave
its rights to the tidal Thames to the Thames Conservancy. It was set up as an
independent authority with fifteen delegates from the following: the Lord Mayor,
conservators elected by the aldermen of the City of London, Trinity House, the
Admiralty, the Board of Trade, but not the MBW. The MBW was never able to get a
seat on the Conservancy; thus communication between the Thames Conservancy and
the MBW was formal and strained. In 1864 six more delegates from private interests
were added. The parties who were affiliated with the Thames Conservancy gave it
their duties connected with the river such as embankment concerns; building and
maintaining wharves, piers or landing-places; collection of tolls from steamboats
using the piers; dredging and removing impediments from the river; the authority to
maintain and improve the steamboat piers and landings; and the authority to erect
buoys and moorings.

Another reason why the Thames Conservancy Board was organized was the
importance of steamboats to travel in London. Their importance and their lack of
regulation were shown in the clauses of the Thames Conservancy Bill. One clause

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88 See Dale Porter’s *The Thames Embankment* for further explanation.
89 See 10 Victoria - Session 1847, The Thames Conservancy Bill, Clause 108. Report from the Select
Committee on the Thames Conservancy Bill together with the resolutions, minutes of proceedings, and
the bill. 1847(623)xii. 143.
stipulates that the Thames Conservancy takes charge of providing safe and convenient places to embark and land steamboat passengers. By the 1840s, more people used steamboats because they were faster and cheaper than horse carriages, and railways were not yet prevalent in the city. Parliament felt it necessary to provide places to land the increased passengers. Before the Thames Conservancy, steamboat passengers were either picked up or dropped off the steamboats by the watermen who rowed between the shore and the steamboat. It was chaotic and unsafe, as the watermen would pick up passengers from the steamboats before they stopped moving. The other option for landing and loading passengers onto steamboats were unsafe wharves and piers, where the steamboat companies would try to shove as many people onto their steamboats, regardless of the passengers’ ultimate destination. They would trick the passengers into thinking that the steamboat was headed elsewhere.

90 “And be it Enacted, That it shall be lawful for the Conservators from time to time, for the convenience of the public, to license the erection, at any convenient places, of piers or landing-places, of such form and construction as they shall consider most advantageous to the public, and as causing the least obstruction to the navigation of the river, upon such terms and under and subject to such rules, conditions and restrictions as the Conservators shall think fit to impose; and also from time to time to cause the form and construction of such piers or landing-places to be altered at the expense of the owners of or persons licensed to erect the same, and also from time to time to cause any such piers or landing-places to be removed and taken away at the expense of the owners thereof or of the persons licensed to erect the same, and in case such pier or landing-place shall not be altered or removed within Seven days after notice from the Conservators to alter or remove the same shall have been given to the owner thereof, or to the person licensed to erect the same, or shall have been left upon or affixed to such pier or landing-place, or any part thereof, such pier or landing-place shall be liable to be abated and removed by the Conservators, in the same manners and any other nuisance may be abated or removed under the authority of the Act.

“And be it Enacted, That it shall be lawful for the Conservators from time to time as they shall deem necessary for the convenience of the public, to erect at any convenient places, piers or landing-places of such form and construction, as they shall deem the most advantageous to the public, and causing the least obstruction to the navigation of the river, and also from time to time to alter and vary the form and construction of such piers and landing-places, and also from time to time to shut up or take away and remove any such piers or landing-places without being obliged to erect or provide any other pier or landing-place in lieu of any so shut up, removed or taken away.”
than its true destination. The Thames Conservancy Bill also allowed the Conservancy to provide safe approaches to the piers and maintain the structures. The Conservancy could also lease the piers, police the piers, and maintain tollhouses near or on the piers, which helped pay for their costs.

The Bill also granted the Conservators the power to care for the river by removing obstructions, laying down navigation aids such as buoys, provide mooring chains, cut banks, and repair wharves. The Conservators could dredge, clean, and scour the Thames, as well as widen or deepen the river, and shorten its bends. The Thames Conservancy Bill resolved and regulated many issues that those who worked on the river encountered. 91

Despite its greater jurisdiction of the river, the Thames Conservancy did not completely solve the managerial problems. First, the Thames Conservancy budget was limited. Second, the jealousies of its constituents (the aldermen, Trinity House, the Admiralty) complicated its operations. While the Members of the City of London dominated the meetings, other partners retained the right to review projects. For example, the Trinity House retained the right to approve or disapprove harbor-masters. Finally, another complication arose in its rivalry with the MBW. The Thames Conservancy was designed to be an opponent of the MBW, to govern the river and to take some power away from the Metropolitan Board of Works.

Parliament and the government of the City did not want the MBW to gain too much

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91 Owen, p. 66.
power for fear it would take over their powers. A major point of contention between
the Thames Conservancy and the MBW occurred in January 1868 when the
Conservancy complained that deposits from the MBW's sewer outfalls at Crossness
and Barking Creek interfered with navigation. They claimed that the removal of these
deposits was the MBWs responsibility. The MBW argued that the deposits were not
its responsibility and the matter went into arbitration. During arbitration, the MBW
argued that the outfalls were located with the permission of Parliament. The
conclusion of arbitration was that sewage was not the cause of the rising banks and
thus not the responsibility of the MBW. Thus the Thames Conservancy supported the
Thames Navigation Act of 1870 that had two clauses requiring the MBW to keep the
river free from banks or obstructions to navigation resulting from the flow of sewage.
In 1878 the Thames Conservancy wanted the MBW to dredge the Thames, citing the
Thames Navigation Act of 1870, to clear away the shoals or banks caused by the
discharge of sewage. The MBW denied the impediment. In 1881 the problem still
 lingered and the Bramwell Commission was set up to investigate the problem at the
insistence of the Thames Conservancy. It finally reported in 1884 that a serious
nuisance existed and that the daily discharge of sewage was immense. The MBW, in
response to the report, chose a policy of non-cooperation, claiming it was unprepared
to propose any scheme to treat the sewage. At the end of 1885, the MBW accepted
part of the Bramwell Commission report and constructed plans to get rid of the
sewage and carry the sledge to sea.\footnote{Owen. p. 66.}
The Thames Conservancy and the MBW had a rocky relationship. Partly, it was because the MBW was not represented in the Thames Conservancy. It was also because both felt at odds with the other. They felt threatened by each other’s powers and as seen above, shared similar and often overlapping duties and responsibilities.

A further entanglement with the jurisdiction of the river came from the Trinity House and the Admiralty. Trinity House was associated with the ancient order of mariners. It had the power to regulate moorings, pilings and various nuisances on the river, although it could not dredge mud or gravel shoals. Trinity House’s main concern was piloting seagoing vessels through the port of London. In order to do this, it established the Trinity Standard high-water mark that guided the placement of wharves and the design of proposed embankments. It helped maintain easy and clear navigation through the river. The conflict between the Thames Conservancy and Trinity House was apparent, both having power over the same things and neither wanting to give up its position. The same was true with the Admiralty. The Admirality, traditionally concerned with the navigational quality of the Thames, reviewed plans for embankments, wharves, and other riverside facilities attached to Parliamentary bills. It also only had the right to make suggestions about private plans, and could not interfere with public construction projects. The Admirality, however, did infringe on the City’s and the Thames Conservancy’s claim to jurisdiction.93

Because of the unmanageable and chaotic nature of London’s government, the River Thames was a difficult highway to regulate. Prior to the Thames Conservancy,

93 See 1836 – Report from the Select Committee on the Port of London. (557) xiv 1 for discussion on the Trinity House’s and Admiralty’s concerns over the Thames.
the river was difficult to regulate because no one knew who had what jurisdiction and where. After the Thames Conservancy was instituted, it clarified the jurisdiction of the River Thames.

The River Thames was a contested area. Many competing interests tried to regulate and control the Thames but could not. The Lord Mayor and Parliament both did not know who had what exact jurisdiction over the Thames. The MBW had trouble assuming control over the river because of how it was organized and because many distrusted the MBW. Then the Thames Conservancy was started and given control over the river but it had inherent conflicting jurisdiction with the MBW. Steamboats often got swept up in this contested area by different bodies trying to control and regulate them. However, the steamboats used this contested space to their advantage by maintaining freedom from regulation, especially by the Waterman’s Company, who also tried to take advantage of the confusion over jurisdiction. The River Thames was a contested space that many tried to take advantage of.

V. THE FIGHT FOR JURISDICTION OF STEAMBOATS

Another aspect of a cultural history of steamboat passenger ferries is their jurisdiction and regulation. Many bodies and groups had an interest in regulating steamboats. Examining these groups and their differing interests aid in understanding the Victorians. They show the Victorians’ changing attitudes towards government.

Guildhall possesses records relevant to the steamboat trade on the Thames and also records from the Watermen’s Company. They were a company of small craft ferrymen who rowed people across the river and feared to lose business to steamboats.
They eventually started their own steamboat ferry service and tried to regulate the steamboat traffic. Copies of some of the Watermen Company’s petitions to Parliament and the Lord Mayor of London, which asked to prohibit steamboats on the Thames or regulate their speed, are stored at Guildhall. Lists of steamboat accidents during 1835 are located here, as are the Watermen Company’s registers of steamboats that list ship owners, numbers of permitted passengers, and masters’ names.

Like the river, part of the problem surrounding the regulation of steamboats on the Thames in London was that London did not have a unified, local government. This led those who ruled to be unsure of their power concerning steamboats. It also left room open for other organizations, like the established guild the Watermen’s Company, to believe it had control over steamboats. The watermen were a licensed body of workers on the river. Usually, they carried passengers across the Thames, to and from boats moored in the middle of the river, as well as up and down the river. Since the Watermen Company’s foundation in 1555, their image among those who lived along the Thames, those who used the Thames, the Admiralty, and members of Parliament, was that they were sober, hardworking, and decent men. This can be seen in an article concerning the watermen in *The Times* on 19 April 1826:

> On one occasion, 500 of them had entered the naval service, and he (Sir I. Coffin) believed not one of that number had ever deserted. They made the bravest seamen that ever entered a man of war...Mr. M.A. Taylor said, that as he resided in Whitehall-yard he was in the habit of seeing many of those individuals, and they appeared to him to be a body of very sober, civil, industrious persons. They were much esteemed by the inhabitants, and he had never heard a single complaint against them.  

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95 *The Times*. 19 April 1826. p. 2 col. a.
However, among the middle class population, who generally did not use or live next to the river, the watermen were viewed as rough, coarse, and conniving. In order to gain public confidence and encourage greater use of the watermen, in 1828, the Watermen Company’s officers instituted new regulations and a new fare system. However, the enlisted watermen disliked the new regulations, which required them to post their fares as well as carry a list of fares, and take on passengers in an orderly fashion. They disregarded the regulations and continued to charge what they wanted and did not have order when picking up passengers. When the watermen picked up passengers at boats moored in the middle of the river, or at the stairs on the banks of the river, chaos ruled. They shoved and pushed each other to be the first to pick up passengers at the boats, usually sailing vessels, on shore. Often while picking up passengers at the sailboats, the watermen would not wait until the boats stopped to picked up the passengers to take to shore and this created dangerous situations. The contest for fares and passengers continued and new calls to regulate the watermen emerged. The general public, such as middle class businessmen, women, and the aristocracy, who did not have regular contact with the watermen, began to send letters to the editors of the Times complaining about them. They wanted to eradicate the

96 "The Watermen’s business, like every other, is overstocked, and the most furious contests took place for fares, in which contests the young and desperate prevailed, and the old and the most respectable, who were the weakest, went to the wall. The public suffered in these contests, and in the cases of the steam-boat passengers life was constantly endangered. To remedy this evil, it is provided by the new by-laws, that the Watermen at each stairs shall ply in turn. No boats are allowed to lie before the stairs, but as fares arrive they are to be embarked, one boat at a time. Though only one man at a time is allowed to ply, the public may, if they think proper, reject him, and select any other whom they may see at the stairs, in whom they may have greater confidence. Other regulations are to be enforced to secure order and good behaviour, and the Watermen’s Company have determined to employ inspectors to visit the stairs and see the laws enforced. It is hoped that a better distribution of the labour will be effected, and that the habit of the public to resort to this mode of conveyance will be increased by enforcing such
watermen’s rude nature and correct the dangerous situation that occurred around the boats and shore. “It is certainly a matter of great convenience, that the watermen should be placed under such regulations as to bring them under the control of those by whom they are employed, so far at least as regards the proper amount of fares, and the good conduct of the men.” The middle class, and women especially, typically did not use the watermen to travel around London because of this undisciplined nature of the watermen’s trade and because the watermen were seen to be rude, dangerous, and extortionists. “This practice (wrangle and extort) and others rendered the watermen almost as great blackguards as the cads to the short stages, and it is well known prevented a large portion of the public females especially, from resorting to that mode of conveyance.” Watermen typically charged more than they were allowed. They would often attempt to get as much out of their passengers as possible. Even though they had to carry a list of fares, usually they could never produce the list on demand. Because they did not carry their price lists, they could inflate their prices and extort money out of their passengers.

Very few Londoners, outside of those who dealt with the watermen daily, wanted to use them and their craft as part of their transport around London. Until steamboats arrived, they sought alternate routes to travel in London. Once the public could embark and land on the steamboats directly from shore, the river became an accepted transport system.

order and behaviour as the interests of the Watermen ought to have taught them to maintain.” The Times. 23 July 1828. p.3 col. b.
97 The Times. 19 Oct 1830. p. 3 col. f.
98 The Times. 23 July 1828. p. 3 col. b.
Steamboat companies not only had to contend with the Watermen's Company continually seeking safety regulations, they had to deal with the public calling for safety regulations too. As we have seen, steamboats, when first introduced on the Thames in the early 1800s, were unregulated. Anyone who traveled or worked on the River Thames viewed steamboats as dangerous because they caused many accidents that resulted in death and loss of goods.

The vestries along the river did not exercise enough power to control the steamboats either. The Watermen's Company had already tried to control and regulate steamboats and discovered they could not. Before the 1850s there was no single municipal government that could regulate and enforce the rules for steamboats. This led the people of London to petition Parliament to govern steamboats.

Many Londoners who used and lived by the river turned to Parliament to improve the Thames and solve their disputes with steamboat companies. Another power struggle is seen, especially in *Times* articles like the one from 14 August 1827. The pleasure-seeking individual was fighting against the steamboats, which they saw as taking away safety and enjoyment from their pleasure time on the river. Steamboats disrupted the "normal" procession on the river. The menace to the pleasure-seeker is also seen in many cartoons.\(^{99}\)

Parliament has always taken an active interest in the navigation of the River Thames as it is tied to the safety and economic interests of the country. For instance, early in the nineteenth century, Parliament reviewed many proposals on how to

\(^{99}\) See Appendix C.
rebuild the London Bridge and improve the Thames – specifically the Port of London. In 1801, Parliament believed that the Port of London needed to be improved so it could “permit a free passage, at all times of the tide, for ships of such a tonnage at least as the Depth of the River would admit at present between London Bridge and Blackfriars Bridge.”\(^{100}\) They asked many well-known engineers, mathematicians, and qualified others to submit proposals and their thoughts on measures to rebuilding the London Bridge to aid regulation and travel along the River Thames. The Parliamentary Committee outlined questions, such as “Supposing the Bridge executed in the best Manner, what horizontal Force will it require, when applied to any particular Part, to overturn it or press it out of the vertical Position?”\(^{101}\) They then sent the questions to persons who they believed were best able to answer them and submitted their answers in the report to the House for consideration.\(^{102}\)

Parliament, in the 1813-1814 session, appointed a Committee to examine standing orders, which were a series of bills that needed to be addressed, relating to improvements of rivers, reservoirs, aqueducts, and canal navigation. They considered in their standing orders a system of notices that alerted the parishes and townships affected by the improvements, the number of times the notices were to be published in the papers, the proclamation that a map must be provided for the intended

\(^{100}\) Report from the Select Committee upon the Improvement of the Port of London, 1801 (102) iii 263, p. 3
\(^{101}\) Ibid., p. 5.
\(^{102}\) Ibid.
improvements, and estimates of the expenses; among many other steps.\textsuperscript{103} This bill demonstrates the importance improving navigation had in the British Isles.

While investigating the problems related to steamboats, the Select Committee found themselves in the middle of a power struggle between the steamboat companies and the smaller wherries vying for a better living. For instance, when the two parties involved in a collision between a steamboat and a wherrie, or a skiff (shallow, rowing boats, most often the men rowing were watermen), were questioned about the accident, both blamed the other as the cause of the accident. The steamboat captain claimed that smaller boat intentionally ran into the steamboat or stayed in the steamboat’s path, while the smaller boat’s captain inevitably asserted that the steamboat refused to pay heed to their hailing and wanted to run over the wherrie. An example of this dispute is seen between Captain Kennett Beauchamp Martin, commander of the City of London steam packet, and Mr. Thomas Lacy, lighterman at Cock’s Quay. Martin stated that the steamboat was not moving at the time of the accident and that the wheeryman pulled out into the tide and that the wherry ran into the steamboat.\textsuperscript{104} Lacy concurred with the statement that the steamboat was not moving and that his boat ran into the steamboat, but argued that it was the steamboat’s responsibility to get out of the way of his smaller boat.\textsuperscript{105} Neither side wanted to be held responsible for the accident for insurance, economic

\textsuperscript{103} Report from Committee on Standing Orders relative to Navigation Bills, &c. 1813-1814. (245) iv. p. 369.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid. p. 16.
\textsuperscript{105} See pages 21-23 of Mr. Thomas Lacy’s interview in the 1831 report where it makes it clear that he believes that all steamboats can prevent accidents with smaller boats and choose not to prevent the accidents, and that it is never the smaller boat’s fault for any accidents with a steamboat.
and reputation reasons. However, both sides represent the dispute over the use of the river and who controlled it. While Martin represented the new technology of steamboats and their quick ascendency in river transport, Lacy represented the older way trying to survive and compete with a new and possibly better opponent.

As the political struggle ensued over the jurisdiction of the river, the Watermen’s Company fought the steamboat companies for the power to regulate the steamboats and the river. The Watermen’s Company and the steamboat companies began to petition Parliament, both the House of Lords and Commons, for control of regulating the steamboat. The Watermen’s Company believed it had the power to regulate the speed of steamboats because of the Watermen’s Act. Thus, the Watermen’s Company fined steamboat captains when they were going too fast or had too many people. The Watermen’s Company claimed to the Select Committee that they, under the Watermen’s Act of the 7th and 8th of George IV, had the right to regulate traffic on the Thames, and fine as necessary. The officials of the steamboat companies believed that steamboats did not fall under the intent and content of the Acts. The steamboat companies, however, believed the Watermen’s Company had no authority to regulate steamboats because of major technological differences between their steamboats and the skiffs watermen used, which they argued was not taken into consideration in the Watermen’s Act. Thus the steamboat companies refused to pay the Watermen’s Company’s fines and obey the Watermen’s Company’s rules.

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106 See Petitions sent to Parliament.
107 See “Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords appointed to inquire into the present state of laws which regulate the carriage of passengers for hire upon the River Thames, and to consider
steamboat companies also argued that the Watermen’s Company did not license engineers, an important position on steamboats, as another reason why the Watermen’s Company could not regulate them. Parliament investigated the situation on the Thames and after examining many witnesses from both the Watermen’s Company and steamboat companies and probing the Act, concluded that it appeared “to be necessary and proper that some alteration of the law should take place, by which the power or prohibition now claimed by the Watermen’s Company shall be taken away, and the right of establishing steamboats on the river shall be opened to all who shall be enabled to embark in such an undertaking.” However, Parliament also realized that the public demand was for the steamboat because of its relative cost, speed, and safety.

During the 1830s to 1840s, petitions and calls for regulating speed, number of passengers, times of operation, and places of operation began to appear in the Times and Parliament. The House of Commons and the House of Lords formed special committees to investigate the problems associated with steamboat travel and find a way to resolve the dangerous situation.

On 15 December 1831, Parliament considered a bill to regulate steamboat travel in the Port of London. Following the presentation of the bill, petitions from steamboat companies and from the Watermen’s Company protesting the bill and concerned citizens arguing for stricter regulations arrived in Parliament. Finally,
Parliament held committees and sessions and recorded the minutes. Of particular interest are the petitions. One of the earliest petitions found was from Thomas Browne, who wanted steamboats restricted from going higher than Blackwall and also wanted railways constructed to link Blackwall and London. The Watermen and Lighterman of the River Thames, and common petitioners to Parliament were concerned with the high speed of steamboats because they had lost property and lives from being swamped by the wake created by the steamboats’ high speed. They also complained of losing their employment because the steamboats took their passengers and alarmed the public who used their smaller boats because of the threat of being swamped by steamboats. Petitions with ideas of how to improve safety aboard the steamboats, such as one from Cadogan Williams in 1837 who suggested separating the steam engine from the rest of the boat by means of strong bulkheads to reduce the effects of the steam engine exploding, were presented. Petitions from steamboat companies often were against proposed bills to regulate the steamboat trade in any way. One petition from the General Steam Navigation Company argued that the steamboats provided a “safe, easy, and expeditious mode of conveyance.” They also maintained that if the regulations proposed in the bill were passed then “they would be constantly open to the attacks and misrepresentations of common informers, without being able successfully to oppose them, even when no actual infraction of the regulations imposed might have taken place.” These petitions represent the different points of view about steamboats on the Thames in London in the nineteenth century.

108 Reports from the Select Committee of the House of Lords appointed to inquire into the present state of laws which regulate the carriage of passengers for hire upon the River Thames, and to consider and
Since the 1831 bill did not fix the problems most Londoners experienced when they traveled by river, in 1837 the House of Lords Select Committee examined the current laws that regulated the carriage of passengers for hire on the River Thames. Their minutes provide evidence such as the number of passengers who took the steamboats along the Thames in London, the social classes that used the boats, the time it took to travel on the steamboat compared to a horse and carriage, and how the wages of those who worked on the river had increased and become more stable than before the advent of steamboats. Mr. Squire Knight, the oldest steamboat agent, asserted that people from all the social classes, especially the merchants and traders, used the steamboat to travel around London. He estimated that in the late 1830s “at least 5,000 go every week to Greenwich, and 2,000 or 3,000 to Woolwich.” Mr. Knight also claimed that before steamboats that not nearly as many people traveled through London by way of the River for many reasons. For example, it took too long to travel by wherry and the watermen’s wherries could not hold as many people.

Another steamboat company representative, Mr. William Nokes, solicitor of the Woolwich Steam-packet Company, presented statistics from his company on the number of passengers on steamboats: “I can give the Committee an account of the number of persons, taken commencing from December 1835 up to the present period. From December 1835 to June 1836, about 89,000; from June 1836 to December 1836, 144,000; from December 1836 to June 1847, about 109,000.” Mr. Nokes also added that employees of government departments used the steamboats between

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109 Ibid., p. 11-12.
Woolwich and London, and that the majority of Woolwich dwellers used steamboats to go to London on business. A greater number of people used the steamboats to travel between London suburbs, and these included members of all social classes.

The Parliamentary regulations were instigated when Victorian society became concerned with social issues and when Parliament began to implement public regulations. For example, in a 1837-1838 Sessional Paper, Parliament investigated the problems of steamboats and became preoccupied with regulations. This Parliamentary paper also demonstrates the problem of regulating steamboats because of the differing viewpoints concerning steamboats. However, during the 1840s, Parliament did not receive any petitions calling it to inquire into the use of steamboats on the Thames, probably because the railways were surpassing steamboats as a popular mode of transport and steamboats were starting to decline.

In 1856, influenced by the fight over control of the River Thames and the fight over who controlled steamboats, Parliament decided to set up an agency that had control over the river and those who used the river. That agency was the Thames Conservancy Board. The Thames Conservancy Board had the power of care, control, and regulation of the river and those on the river, including steamboats because of the many battles over the River Thames. The harbor-master, appointed by the Thames Conservancy and responsible for controlling the boats on the river and at dock, could regulate the time and manner that vessels entered, left, or lay in the river, and how goods and ballast were loaded and unloaded upon the River. The Conservancy

\(^{110}\) Ibid. p. 13.
allowed the harbor-master to fine any boats that did not comply with his directions that were to protect the River Thames. The Thames Conservancy Bill stipulated that the owner of the boat was accountable for any damage done to the River by his boat, and that he could make his subordinates reimburse him for the fines incurred. The Conservators could punish anyone who willfully destroyed any structure under their control.  

But the upper class, and at times the middle class, rejected steamboat ferry travel. The fashionable society, which was the upper class, were hungry for a high social status and were willing to do anything to achieve and keep it. When a member of the fashionable society chose a style, he, or she, made a statement about himself. It was just so when he chose a method of travel. During the pre-Victorian first quarter of the nineteenth century, members of this class rejected the steamboats and instead chose extravagant and elegant horse carriages. They were eager to project the “proper” image of themselves to society; and in this society, the person who projected the right image would win the acclaim of the rest. Steamboats, in their eyes, were a lower form of travel because they embraced a new technology and put them in contact with ordinary people.

Steamboat companies transformed the social environment of river transport. Initially, the social environment consisted of the watermen, sailing vessels, and overseas travelers. With the advent of steamboats, the use of the river as part of local transport became more accepted. Steamboats became more prevalent, sailing vessels

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See section IV for more information on the Thames Conservancy.
less. Watermen and pleasure craft began to diminish. The bank of the river became built up with wharves, piers, and places to land the passengers. More people began to use the river as a highway. More women were seen along the river, as well as more men who did not depend on the river for their livelihood.

Many railway companies and travel companies began making maps and directories showing different routes to get around London. One that survives is the London Omnibus Guide from 1877.¹¹³ This map and guide was intended to show the system of omnibuses, tramcars, steamboats, and railways and how they could be used to travel around greater London. It provides the piers and steamboat stations along the river as well as providing an index of routes. This map shows how steamboats fit in the transport system of London.

VI. ACCIDENTS AND THE RESPONSES TO THEM

Steamboat accidents and Londoners' responses to the accidents provide a cultural understanding of Victorian Londoners. Looking into the accidents and the responses show class differences and attitudes, and Victorian views on technology.

A. Faulty Machinery

By 1820, it was evident that design problems existed in steamboat machinery. Fire was a problem resulting from poor boat design and machinery. A main cause of fire was "the proximity of her deck beams to the funnel with no lead casing between

¹¹² See William Makepeace Thackery's Vanity Fair (1847-1848) for a good description of the fashionable society.
¹¹³ See Appendix 2.
them."¹¹⁴ Boiler explosions were another problem resulting from flaws in machinery. Boiler explosions were caused by weaknesses in materials used in their manufacturing or the overloading of safety valves by men in charge. In 1817, a Select Committee began to investigate the problem, and in 1819 introduced the Steamboat Act of 1819 that made it compulsory for all passenger-carrying steamboats to be registered and inspected by a competent engineer and officers of the Board of Trade.

Many Londoners were concerned about the safety of steamboats. River steamboats had a reputation of being unsafe because they did not carry lifeboats and they did not take care of their machinery. Many of the causes of steamboat accidents on the Thames were aired in the *Times*. On 13 November 1826, a *Times* article reported a boiler explosion that occurred because of the retention of a steam boiler after it was declared insecure.¹¹⁵ This caused concerned citizens to request regulations governing boiler investigators and the boilers themselves. Ultimately the public got the regulations and even new technology to aid in preventing boiler explosions. In 1827, a letter to the editor assured the population of London and Great Britain that boiler explosions would not happen in the future with the adoption of Mr. Gurney’s safety boiler. Mr. John Ross, Captain R.N. of Bond Street attempted to assuage the public’s fear of travel by steamboat and the owner’s fear of increasing

¹¹⁴ Dix. p. 53.
¹¹⁵ "The recent fatal accident on board the Graham steam-vessel ought not to be let pass without a rigorous examination into the circumstances under which so deplorable a loss of life has been sustained, especially as there is enough in the testimony of the several engineers who have been already sworn, to prove that the most culpable negligence existed somewhere, from the retention of a boiler many months after it had been pronounced insecure by the professional person whom one of the owners had consulted. It is not the first that the most sordid inhumanity may be traced in the management of those steam-boat concerns not less dreadful than that of which we are speaking." *The Times*. 13 November 1826. p. 2 col. c.
costs to operate steamboats with the new technology. Mr. Ross states: “In the adoption of Mr. Gurney’s safety-boiler, the public will henceforth be assured that no explosion can possibly take place to endanger either the vessel or the lives of the passengers and crew, whilst the proprietors of steam vessels will obtain the advantage of diminution of expense of every description, with considerable saving of room and tonnage, hitherto occupied by the ponderous machinery.”

Goldsworthy Gurney, a Cornish inventor, learned that barrel boilers were very heavy when filled with water. Moreover, as they heated unevenly they developed “hotspots” that were likely to burst. Gurney developed a lightweight boiler made of slender tubes that generated more steam with less water and, if burst, only leaked rather than exploded. It was subsequently adopted by the Royal Navy for its steamships.

Mr. Gurney’s boiler worked because the complaints to the editor of the Times, to Parliament, and to the Lord Mayor about boiler explosions stopped after its introduction.

B. Racing

However, with greater machinery comes the greater desire to push the machinery to the limits. In the case of steamboats, the captains and crews of the various companies wanted to see which boat was the fastest, for pride and for fun. Often the captains and crews raced each other up and down the Thames, with passengers, to see which boat reached the destination first in order to determine the fastest boat. This racing often led to boiler explosions. As “N.B.”, Commander, R.N. mentions in his letter to the editor of the Times on the 23rd September 1828:

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116 The Times. 30 July 1827. p. 3 col. e.
If, in your great anxiety to out-steam each other, you would but reflect that the lives of some hundreds of His Majesty’s Thames-navigating subjects are daily in your care and keeping, the public safety would be all the surer from the benefit of that reflection. What possible consequence can it be to your passengers which of your craft reaches its place of destination a few minutes sooner than its opponent, although to obtain this empty honour, you urge the powers of your engines and boilers to the utmost extent of their capacity?\textsuperscript{118}

Racing was a continuous problem with steamboats throughout their use on the Thames. They often continued their high rate of speed throughout their entire journey, even if they were not racing. Competition made the steamboat's crew feel that they must reach the next stop faster.

The Lord Mayor was the first person approached to regulate the steamboats’ speed to protect the lives of passengers and the smaller craft often swamped by the wakes created.

Of late, he [the Town Clerk] said, many heavy complaints had been made to the Lord Mayor against those who had the superintendence of steam vessels, for having endangered the lives of the public by making an impetuous progress through the river... The river was, like the public street, His Majesty’s highway, and the same caution ought to be used in it which was required of persons passing in the public streets.\textsuperscript{119}

Many Londoners agreed that the river was a highway and should be subjected to the same types of regulations as the omnibuses on the streets. Steamboats, they argued, should be safe and comfortable.

In 1827, towards the beginning of steamboat ascendancy, the \textit{Times} began expressing the idea that steamboats should be regulated, especially after a waterman in a skiff was nearly run down by two racing steamboats.

\textsuperscript{118} \textit{The Times}. 23 September 1828. p. 2 col. d.
On Friday evening last, within a few minutes of nine o’clock (nearly one hour and a half after sunset), it being quite dark, two steam-vessels in full speed passed between Rotherhithe and London, without any light at the mast-head, and it was impossible to discern them until within a few yards: a gentleman in a skiff was put into imminent danger, and nothing but the presence of mind and superior skill of the Watermen at the moment averted a watery grave.\textsuperscript{120}

The racing of steamboats and their high speed caused great swells of water that often swamped the smaller skiffs. The \textit{Times} recommended that the steamboat speeds should be restricted within four miles of London. It also acknowledged that once the regulations were enacted, the regulation board was short-staffed and unable to constantly enforce the regulations.

By 1835, however, the speed of steamboats was still not regulated and concern about the loss of life from steamboats grew. The next step to regulate the steamboats’ speed was to petition Parliament. The Lord Mayor had proven to be ineffective in enforcing steamboat speed because he lacked the necessary power.

The steamboats continued to race after dark when they were more dangerous because they carried no lights on board to show where they were in relation to other boats on the river. Sometimes this carelessness led to accidents and collisions with other boats that also did not carry lights. Asserts W. Hamilton of Hampstead in his letter to the editor on 24 August 1839:

\begin{quote}
I allude to the small steam-boats which ply above-bridge, not only in the day-time but after dark, even till 10 o’clock. During the daylight they maybe a public convenience, but only in the day-time but after dark, from a convenience they become a nuisance of the most dangerous description. At night may be seen six or seven lights (the boats themselves hidden by darkness) rushing about the river at the rate of eight or nine miles an hour, bearing certain destruction to everything in their course; their steerer cannot
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{119} \textit{The Times}. 16 June 1831. p. 3 col. c.
\textsuperscript{120} \textit{The Times}. 14 August 1827. p. 2 col. f.
see a boat, and with the strength at which the tide runs at this part of the river escape is next to impossible for avoiding one, in a moment another is upon you.\textsuperscript{121}

It is ironic that Londoners, especially those who worked on the river, would call to regulate steamboat speed and make them carry a light while not making the same sacrifice of carrying a light themselves.

The main concern with the steamboat racing was that smaller craft were put in danger. These smaller boats often were unable, as they claimed, to avoid the steamboats. Thus, they collided and the smaller craft overturned, dumping their passengers into the Thames. Another consequence was that often the smaller craft were drawn into the paddle boxes, which held the paddle wheels, by the boat’s current. This never had a happy conclusion because the men in the smaller craft often died.

A third consequence to smaller boats was that the great wake produced by the steamboats often swamped the smaller boats. The recreational boater found that he could not enjoy a peaceful row on the River Thames because of the steamboat wake.\textsuperscript{122} “It appeared that in many instances that progress was not diminished, even when the river was crowded with small craft, and that boats had been upset by the swell caused by the velocity of such large bodies.”\textsuperscript{123}

\textsuperscript{121} The Times. 24 August 1839. p. 7 col. f.
\textsuperscript{122} Refer to Appendix 3 for visual description of the turbulent wake.
\textsuperscript{123} Ibid.
C. Overcrowding of Steamboats

Overcrowding on steamboats was another common occurrence. Many citizens of London were concerned with the overcrowding of steamboats, and they wrote to the editor of the *Times* to express their concern. However, these concerns did little to force the owners of the steamboat companies to control the number of passengers, as seen in a letter to the editor: “Sir, Attention has been drawn to the hazardous system of overcrowding the small steam boats on the river on holy day occasions, but, unfortunately, with little effect in inducing the proprietors to prefer the safety of the public to the interests of their exchequer…”\(^{124}\) Although overcrowding was a common occurrence, it was abused during holy days to such a point that the Lord Mayor stationed policemen at London-bridge wharf, Old Shades-pier, and other piers along Thames-street with orders to stop the overcrowding and prevent the confusion of competition between steamboat companies. According to the *Times* article “Steam-Boats on the Thames” from 27 May 1844:

> Whereas numerous accidents, attended in many instances with loss of life, have recently occurred on the river Thames, from the practice of carrying in the boats plying upon the river more than a proper number of passenger, the Lord Mayor deems it necessary to caution all captains of steamboats, watermen, and others, that any future infringement of the by-laws of the Court of Aldermen, or any other misbehaviour on the part of those navigating on the river Thames, tending to endanger the lives of the public, will be punished with utmost severity, the police having received orders to prevent any infraction of the law.\(^{125}\)

Despite these precautions, the steamboat captains still overcrowded their boats with the thought of greater profits on their minds.

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\(^{124}\) *The Times*. 16 May 1844. p. 8 col. e.
A report of a hearing in June 1844 shows that while this may have been the case, many people willingly boarded the boat in order to reach their destination. It shows not only the great demand for the steamboats but also concern many Londoners felt about steamboats.

The Lord Mayor granted a summons calling upon the commander of one of the steam-boats which ply between London-bridge and Blackwall, to answer the serious complaint of having overcrowded the vessel on Sunday, to the imminent danger of the lives of passengers, several hundred of whom were on board.

The complaintant, in answer to questions from his Lordship, said that when several gentlemen not only expostulated against the crowding of the boat but actually quitted it from apprehension of the consequences which they considered likely to result, those in authority on board wholly disregarded the appeal, and for 50 who abandoned the vessel at one of the places at which she stopped on her passage, 100 stuffed themselves into her.

His Lordship intimated that he, as conservator of river, would attend all complaints against the commanders of steam-vessels for any acts by which lives of the public were endangered and if any catastrophe should occur, there should be no imputation against the magistracy of London at all events.  

However, despite many laws the Lord Mayor and Court of Aldermen passed to prohibit and deter overcrowding of steamboats, it was not stopped. Part of the problem was that the Lord Mayor and Court of Aldermen did not provide enough regulators to enforce the laws. They did not hire policemen or any others to ensure that the laws were enforced and fines collected if they were broken. Even in some instances, the Aldermen themselves took part in the overcrowding of steamboats as seen in a Times report of a Court of Aldermen meeting in July 1847: “Alderman Humphery said, the overcrowding was not at all to be wondered at when the magistrates themselves were personally instrumental to that very fact. He had seen

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125 The Times. 27 May 1844. p. 7 col. d.
126 The Times. 18 June 1844. p. 8 col. b.
some of the same gentlemen who considered that steamers were in so much danger of going to the bottom, actually forcing their way on board.”¹²⁷ The problem of overcrowding steamboats was still evident in 1851 because the owners and workers of steamboat companies did not pay attention to the regulations, and because they feared no consequences from negligible enforcement. The Lord Mayor, it was reported in the Times on 17 July 1851, felt it was time to enforce the regulations, stop overcrowding, and thus he and the aldermen reached a conclusion that those in Parliament would do everything they could to present the danger of overcrowded steamboats so Parliament would enact an act that would stop it. After this soliciting of Parliament to aid in preventing steamboat overcrowding, a result is finally seen in 1853.

At the commencement of the summer season of the present year, the practice of overcrowding appeared to be unabated, but convictions were obtained in six cases and heavy penalties inflicted on the offenders, which has had the effect of completely checking the evil so much complained of. We observe that the captains and crews of steam-boats now exert themselves to prevent persons from crowding on board; and extra boats are provided by the companies on occasions where there is a probability of the ordinary boats being overcrowded.¹²⁸

Overcrowding of steamboats was one of the few problems surrounding steamboats that were attempted to solve. It was also one of the most noticed by the public. While it is difficult to tell how old and decrepit the boiler or engine was, it was easy to see if the steamboats were overcrowded. The people could see the large number aboard the boats and also, if they ventured on the boats themselves, could feel the closeness of their surroundings. The citizens of London also made their concerns

¹²⁷ The Times. 14 July 1847. p. 6 col. f.
known to the editor of the *Times*, and thus to the greater population, but also to the Lord Mayor and Court of Aldermen. They wrote letters of concern and fear. The problem of overcrowding of steamboats is also interesting because it shows the lack of government control over the river. The Lord Mayor and Court of Aldermen enacted laws to prohibit overcrowding but could not enforce them, thus overcrowding continued. The MBW or the Thames Conservancy had not yet been created and the vestries and districts could not control the whole river or even their own small part of it for that matter.

**D. Other Concerns about Steamboat Travel**

Passengers of steamboats unwillingly encountered several nuisances. Passengers were apt to be hit by flying objects like cannon balls, bomb shells, and stones. First, steamboats and their passengers had to consider the possibility of cannon balls or shells flying past them.\(^{129}\) By 1840, when steamboats had gained their ascendancy, boys on the bridges and shore would throw rocks at the passing steamboats. "A parcel of young blackguards are in the habit of amusing themselves

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\(^{128}\) *The Times*. 27 July 1853. p. 7 col. c.

\(^{129}\) To the editor of the Times: Sir, - May I beg the favor of your giving the following paragraph insertion in your journal, the effect of which I hope will be to influence any party who may have the power of so doing, to prevent the dangerous consequences likely to result from the recurrence of the circumstances herein stated? In passing Woolwich yesterday, on my way to town, on board the City of London steam-boat, after having heard the report of several pieces of ordnance, the last explosion was followed by a cannon-shot or bomb-shell passing immediately over the heads of the passengers, and grounding about 30 yards from the vessel. From the whizzing sound in its passage, and hissing and raising the water on its descent, I am inclined to think it must have been a shell. Our excellent commander, Captain Corbyn, after strongly deprecating the circumstance, stated that he had hesitated about taking the very line on which this shell fell, in which case it would have fallen directly into the vessel; and the City of Canterbury steamer, with at least 300 passengers on board, passed over the very spot not five minutes before. That perfection in the art of projectiles cannot be attained without practice is well known, but surely some arrangement ought to be made to secure the public from such
on the Middlesex shore by throwing stones at the steamboats. Whilst passing in a steamboat Saturday last, about 11 o’clock, from Chelsea to Vauxhall, in the company with my daughter, a child about eight years of age, a stone thrown from the Middlesex shore struck her across the eye, and inflicted a serious injury. The stone issue was not resolved by 1845, because another gentlemen received a blow to the head.

I was a passenger on one of the wooden steam-boats from Hungerford to London-bridge this afternoon, and on passing through Waterloo-bridge was not a little surprised at receiving a violent blow on the crown of my hat, which I found had been caused by a piece of granite thrown from the bridge. The man in command of the steam-boat informed me that stones are continually being thrown from the bridge in this manner.

The throwing of stones at steamboats caused many concerns to many passengers, especially those who had been hit. But after these incidents were reported, no more reports of stones thrown at steamboats appears so it must be imagined that this issue was resolved after 1845.

Pick pocketing, a common occurrence in London, happened on the steamboats. Overcrowded steamboats became a lucrative spot for pickpockets. The victim never figured out that his wallet or purse had been stolen until it was too late. All they would have felt would have been dismissed as the regular bumping of passengers during the trip because of the rocking boats. Smoking, another common occurrence, was a problem on steamboats. A call for a smoking section on board steamboats to help protect women from the nuisance arrived.
To the Editor of the Times: Sir, - Will you permit me, through the medium of your journal to call the attention of the two river steam boat companies to the necessity of prohibiting smoking on board their vessels, or at least setting apart one place where those who indulge may have it all to themselves, and to be no nuisance to others who are not slaves to that filthy habit? It is most intolerable and offensive that ladies and others who dislike the effluvia from tobacco, and especially from the steam boat cigars, should be obliged to receive in the face the “puffs” of the “gents” who think their consequence increased by the exhibition of a penny Havannah stuck between their lips. A remedy for this is much desired.

You obedient servant, BETA.  

A last problem experienced in steamboat travel was that steamboats would rarely completely stop to pick up passengers from the watermen, before wharves where common. Often in the steamboats’ attempt to make the best time to their destinations, they barely stopped to pick up or land passengers from the watermen. Many people disliked this because it was difficult for passengers to get aboard the steamboat, and often the smaller craft holding onto the steamboat, dropping off or picking up passengers, would inadvertently get run over by the steamboat. “Another piece of advise I beg to offer to you – namely, when taking up passengers during your progress down or up the river, pray do not be such niggards of your time, as not to stop your vessels while the passengers are trying to scramble on board out of the wherries alongside, which I have frequently seen ran bows under, while the waterman was endeavouring to hold on.”

London steamboats did not adopt new technology, according to Commander James D. Curtis. The London steamboats of the 1890s reminded him of the old

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133 The Times. 1 Sept. 1847. p. 5. col. e
134 The Times. 23 September 1828. p. 2 col. d.
ferryboats of his youth with very few improvements. Even when screw steamers were proven better steamboats, London’s captains objected to them. They claimed they could not get them alongside the piers and that they were not adapted to navigate the upper reaches of the river. Discussions, such as these, hindered development.

The means of communication on steamboats had not advanced either. While the United States, and other countries, began to use the telegraph system to communicate with the engineers as late as 1880, London’s steamboats still used a call-boy. The captains preferred the call-boy hand signals that were used to relay messages to the engineer, arguing that their system worked as well as the telegraph system.

E. Responses to Problems

1. Regulation

The population of London, when confronted with the problems of steamboats, often implored the Lord Mayor to find some way to regulate the steamboats and alleviate the problem. The Lord Mayor, however, only had jurisdiction of the river that was within the Corporation of the City of London, not the whole river. “That, although the Lord Mayor is conservator of the river Thames, no proceedings for offences can be carried out by the city authorities unless the person offending is

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135 Ibid. p. 147.
136 Carson. p. 150.
served with a summons or process within the city.”

Thus he could make regulations but beyond his small area of control, he could not enforce the regulations.

In 1831, the House of Commons appointed a Select Committee to examine the causes and best ways to prevent steamboat accidents. Some of the problems Parliament wanted to solve were: the high rate of speed that the steamboats traveled that caused a greater wake, the pack steamboats unintentionally created amongst themselves during racing also caused greater wakes, the swamping of smaller boats from the wake of the steamboats, and lack of lights to distinguish steamboats at night. Through their series of interrogations with steamboat captains, lightermen, harbor-masters, and others in river-related jobs, the Select Committee proposed the following measures to amend the problems concerned with steamboat travel: investigate ways to regulate, limit the steamboat’s speed, and license passenger steamboats with the Customs House where an officer surveys and examines the steamboat for seaworthiness, require that the license be renewed every year, and after every accident the boat must be surveyed. They also concluded that for river navigation the number of passengers per ton be limited to three, that steamboats must show two lights horizontally, eight feet apart, and twelve feet above the deck at night. Another requirement Parliament instituted was that steamboats carrying passengers on rivers must have one lifeboat and that the name of the captain, the number of engineers and

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137 The Times. 13 June 1853. p. 7 col. b.
crew on board, the number of passengers the boat was licensed to carry, and the boat’s registration number must be displayed in a visible place on the boat.\textsuperscript{138}

The Select Committee also recommended the use of feathered paddles would harm fewer small boats traveling near steamboats, that a platform with a steering wheel in the fore part of the boat would aid in river navigation, and that when two steamboats were close to one another, each one to head starboard, unless there was a reason to prevent it.

The Select Committee believed that these regulations would be advantageous because they would inspire increased confidence in steamboat travel. Parliament and the Lord Mayor found the advantages of steamboats to be greater than their disadvantages to allow them to simply disappear during their late 1830s investigation. Steamboats provided faster and cheaper transportation around the city. Thus, Parliament and the Lord Mayor decided to enact regulations that would aid the steamboats’ image in London. They hoped that with these regulations, more Londoners would view steamboats as a safer and quicker, and more cost effective mode of transport, and thus use the steamboats.

Many people, by the 1840s, saw steamboats as dangerous. Despite the large numbers of Londoners who traveled by steamboats, others wanted to omit steamboat use on the river. They saw that the problems associated with steamboats did not outweigh their advantages. They wrote letters to the \textit{Times}, they petitioned Parliament and the Lord Mayor to investigate and regulate steamboats. Parliament

\textsuperscript{138} Report from the Select Committee on Steam Navigation, together with the minutes of evidence and an appendix and index. 1831. (335) p. viii.
and the Lord Mayor investigated and tried to find ways to limit the speed steamboats traveled and required them to carry lights on the mast, among other regulations. Most of the people who petitioned to restrict steamboats often found steamboats an inconvenience and a threat to their way of life and wanted to eradicate the role of steamboats on the Thames.

In the 1840s, regulations were finally seen. In 1844, the Navigation Committee and the Watermen’s Company presented a copy of the laws and rules for navigation of steamboats on the River Thames, at a meeting of the Court of Aldermen. The rules and laws set out that no boat could travel beyond a set rate of speed, although it was acknowledged that regulating speed was difficult. Two reasons for the difficulty were to find the right speed for safety and to determine if a steamboat exceeded the speed limit. A drawback to regulating the speed was that the worst steamboat was equal to the best and hence the motives for improving steamboats and their machinery were taken away. In the late 1840s, Parliament became more concerned with regulating steamboats because of the numerous petitions they received and the calls in the papers. They investigated the conditions in sessional committees and finally passed laws to regulate steamboats, such as the 11th and 12th Victoria, cap 81 and 9 and 10 Victoria, cap 100. Yet, in 1847 the Lord Mayor defended his position to the public of London by claiming that beyond warning the steamboat companies of the consequences of breaking the rules, there was little else that he could do.139

139 "It was the practice of the chief magistrate, at this time of year, to caution those who superintended steam vessels against the violation of that particular bye-law which was meant to secure the public from
In 1850, the Times outlined the main benefit of regulating steamboats, which was to provide security and protect the public. “A special meeting of our Town Council was held this afternoon for the purpose of forming a code of by-laws for the government of our river steamers, with a view, as far as practicable, of preventing a recurrence of such a fearful accident as recently occurred here by the fatal explosion of the boiler of the Red Rover.” Many people proposed limiting the size of boats or the number of passengers they carried to increase safety. Others believed that limiting the speed the steamboat traveled would correct the situation. Inspecting and certifying the boat to make sure of their safety was another proposition to aid the security and protection of the public from machinery explosion. All of these, at one time or another, were enacted in Acts of Parliament throughout the steamboats’ existence as a mode of commuter transport. They proved to be ineffectual. Mostly the rules could not be easily enforced for the ratio of enforcers to steamboats was small and that no one knew for sure at this point who had jurisdiction over the steamboats.

The Lord Mayor, after receiving letters from Londoners holding him responsible for any mishaps with steamboats said in 1851:

As chief magistrate of this city, I consider myself bound to relieve myself from the serious responsibility which I am told by my correspondents attaches to me by virtue of my office as conservator the river Thames. There are rules and regulations which have been made with the view of preventing the occurrence of disasters such as seen to be at present dreaded...the Warden of the...

allowing too many persons to crowd into the boats, and whenever any case was proved conviction was sure to follow. Beyond the exercise of that power the authority of the Lord Mayor did not extend, and it was ridiculous to attribute to him the possible consequences of the cupidty of the steam boat proprietors.” The Times. 14 July 1487. p. 7 col. e.

140 The Times. 11 September 1850. p. 3 col. f.
Watermen and Lightermen’s Company said, the steamers had been watched by the servants of the company and the attention of the owners had been called to the rules and regulations.\textsuperscript{141}

Even when regulations were made, the steamboats paid no attention to them, as there were few means to enforce the regulations.

Regulation of steamboats caused problems at the end of the nineteenth century as well. In 1891, Parliament passed an act to regulate the speed of steamboats on the Thames. “In the Thames, Clyde, and other navigable rivers the speed of steamers is restricted.”\textsuperscript{142} Nevertheless, in 1893, concern about racing still existed, especially on the lower reaches of the Thames. According to a letter to the editor on 19 July 1893: “To impress upon you the importance attached to the race by the crew of the boat on which I was a passenger, I should state we were requested to stand amidships on the starboard (right) side in order to “trim” the boat.”\textsuperscript{143} This was not resolved sufficiently a year later, when in another letter to the editor the writer requested the Thames Conservancy to limit the speed and employ inspectors to control traffic in certain areas. He related the river to the street, as well, and declared that a river policeman was needed to control and check the speed of steamboats.\textsuperscript{144}

\textsuperscript{141} The Times. 17 July 1851. p. 6 col. d.
\textsuperscript{142} The Times. 12 October 1891. p. 3 col. f.
\textsuperscript{143} The Times. 10 July 1893. p. 6 col. f.
\textsuperscript{144} To the Editor of the Times. Sir, - The two fatal accidents on the Thames caused by steamer near Teddington which you have recently reported have drawn public attention to the subject. The thing is clear that the time has come for the Thames Conservancy to limit the size of the steamers which navigate the Upper Thames. Some of them are now so large as to be dangerous on or near locks of cuttings by their very size, and are so much out of place on the Thames as a football team on a tennis lawn. It is clear that steam launches cannot be altogether prohibited; so many persons who live on the Thames use them that the oarsman must be content to have these dangerous vessels placed under stricter regulations, and not endeavour to put an end to them. A fixed limit of speed should also be made a rule by the Conservancy, who should employ inspectors for certain fixed districts to control the traffic. Practically a steamer may now rush about the river at a dangerous speed without any control from a person in authority. In truth, a river policeman is now as necessary on the river as is a
As much as the Lord Mayor and Parliament tried to regulate steamboats, they were not very effective. Most of these attempts were to ease public fears. Even when the Thames Conservancy gained control, it had a difficult time regulating steamboats. It could not obtain enough policemen necessary to enforce the regulations. Thus, even though the Thames Conservancy attempted to regulate and control steamboats, it experienced a hard time. Its attempts were put in place mostly to calm fears and help maintain the image of steamboats among the public.

2. Design

Once an accident occurred causing loss of life, however, the public was outraged that safety considerations were put after comfort. Designers and engineers, in reply, then studied ways to provide greater safety. They concluded that effective bulkhead divisions, overhanging sponsons, and maintaining control were the best means of safety. These safety considerations then led to a discussion about steering wheel placement and communication systems among the crew. These safety considerations differed too among the above bridge and below bridge steamboats.  

Engineers were also concerned with steam ferries and ways to make them safer. Many discussions dealt with recent types of steam ferries, their design, and comparisons of the different ferry boat designs, ferry wharves, and piers. In 1846, the policeman in the streets to prevent furious driving. Most persons acquainted with the Thames can also have no doubt that if mile posts or two-mile posts were placed on the towing-path, they would be some check to the improper speed of steam launches, since it would then be easier to ascertain the pace at which the were being navigated. Your obedient servant, E.S.B.”  

See Carson’s paper “The Passenger Steamers of the Thames, the Mersey, and the Clyde” in the ICE’s minutes for a discussion.
President of the ICE, in his address, provided a history of steamboats and steam engines. He reviewed the design changes, the companies, and the improvements made to steamboats since they were invented at the turn of the nineteenth century.

The above bridge steamboats, as Mr. Symes, a member of the Institute of Civil Engineers, pointed out in 1880, were not conducive to the division of bulkheads.¹⁴⁶ There was little room for bulkheads below deck because the above bridge steamboats required a shallow draft. Above bridge steamboat builders and designers also had to consider the narrow and shallow bridges steamboats passed under. As Mr. Bramwell, also a member of the ICE, discussed, above bridge steamboats could not use the wide sponson supports because of the limited width between bridge arches.¹⁴⁷ Consequently, they did not adopt any outer defense system for above-bridge steamboats.

Below bridge steamboat designers and builders had different safety considerations to address due to their boats’ greater danger of collision. Mr. E.W. DeRussett, a member of the ICE, argued in 1880 that if sponsons were to be adopted, they should not be part of the hull so they could be knocked off without harming the structure of the boat in case of an accident.¹⁴⁸ Other ICE members had differing ideas about the security of the boats. Mr. Andrews represented the “concerned citizen” constantly worried that the steamboats had no precautions to avoid sinking in the event of collision. He feared that in a collision, the holds, the division of bulkheads that created a storing area in the bottom of the boat, would fill with water and thus

¹⁴⁶ Carson. p. 103.
¹⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 112.
sink the boat. Below bridge steamboat designers and builders developed their own solutions to sinking. One example was given by Mr. Andrews in 1880: “Now to obviate the effects of collision; and to prevent this tendency to capsize, and to secure a positive reserve of shoulder and of buoyancy, these River Steamers might be constructed with air-chamber belts along the sides; which air-chamber belts might be divided into any number of smaller compartments by diaphragms, and not interfere in any way with the internal arrangements of the hull of the vessel.”

Commander Curtis, representing the maritime/Navy offices, believed that the boats did not ultimately fail, but those in command did. Because the captains on the Thames were among the best steamboat captains in the world, because they were courteous, composed in perilous times, and handled their boats superbly, it was assumed that the boats did not need to keep pace with street and suburban traffic improvements and they therefore experienced few modern amenities, in his opinion.

Commander Curtis, like the group he represented, believed that very few changes to the boat would actually make the boats stronger and safer for the public. He proposed different designs for steamboats that utilized the strengths of the captains and crews, such as rub rails, rails on the outside of the boat at its widest point where it tends to hit things first, instead of sponsons. He also argued for shorter, more

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buoyant, and stronger boats that could pivot on the center and move broadside, or sideways.

A third party, mostly composed of steamboat owners, in the discussion over the design of steamboats was concerned with the financial aspect. They often argued that any changes to the steamboat would be costly and would not improve the condition drastically. They argued that the steamboat company would actually lose money on the improvements made to the fleet. Mr. Bramwell best represents this group. On page 114 of the 1880 ICE minutes, he showed that the percentage of loss of life due to accidents was small. He then argued that to decrease the percentage of casualties would entail installing an expensive structure that would cause the fares to skyrocket. This would then make it more difficult for steamboats to compete with the railways. This group argued that any solution to the problem that was not cost effective to the trade did more harm than good. Mr. Ravenhill, a like-minded member of the ICE, lived and worked by the river for over forty years. He argued to support the contention that the boats did not need to be and should not be improved. No accident or collision had been serious enough to warrant drastic changes in his eyes.\textsuperscript{152}

During the 1879 session of the ICE, William Carson submitted the paper, "The Passenger Steamers of the Thames, the Mersey, and the Clyde", where he described the river services located around the major rivers in Great Britain. He provided the advantages and disadvantages of the river service companies and

\textsuperscript{152} \textit{Ibid.} p. 117.
compared the services on the three rivers. Carson concluded that the boat builders constructed the boats to the owners’ requirements, that the owners were aware of their duty to the public, and that the public must not expect immunity from risks aboard steamboats. After his presentation, a discussion among the ICE members ensued that concerned nearly every aspect of steamboats.

Other ICE papers offer additional information. Frederic Eliot Duckham, in 1880, presented a paper titled *The Thames Steam Ferry between Wapping and Rotherhithe*. This paper described the plan for the accepted ferry service across the river and provided the dimensions of the boats. Duckham also gave an account of how the ferry service functioned. A paper titled *Recent Types of Ferry-Steamers* was presented by Andrew Brown in 1894. Brown compared three types of steamboats: the passenger only, the passenger and vehicles, and railway traffic. He provided a description of the boats and the services. Also in 1894, Charles Jones submitted the paper *The Birkenhead Ferry-Boats ‘Wirral’ and ‘Mersey’* that dealt with ferry services on the Mersey, not the Thames, but it did provide information relevant to the Thames steamboat ferry services such as competition, design, and construction. The discussion following the two papers explores how the tide of the Thames affected the design of steamboats and piers and also provides the cost of boats and piers.

Steamboats declined during the last half of the nineteenth century. One of the main reasons for the decline is the advent of railways. The steamboats could not compete with the railways that were able to travel faster and had more access than the steamboats. Steamboats also did not keep pace with the changing technology. As
technology improved, steamboats remained stagnant for many reasons such as the companies could not afford to improve the steamboats and that those involved in steamboats, like the crew, designers, and builders, were stubborn in their conception of steamboats and refused to see the need to improve steamboats. By the end of the nineteenth century, steamboats became a novelty used for holiday excursions and slowly died out as a popular mode of transportation.

VII. CONCLUSION

My thesis examines steamboat passenger ferries in nineteenth century London. I have shown that sources exist for a cultural history of London steamboats. Further, there are good models for cultural studies of technology, and existing bodies of research on Victorian social and cultural divisions, prejudices and practices.

Bijker and Bijsterveld’s article is a good model for cultural studies of technology. They research public housing architecture and a very specific influence on it – the VACs who allied housewives together. They examine this technology through the gender and power relationships involved. They ultimately placed the public housing in the Netherlands in a social, gender, and cultural context.

Jager’s article is another model of cultural studies of technology to follow. He studies a piece of technology, the double-bitted axe, to study a national and industry’s attitude, a society, and a culture. By examining the double-bitted axe, he found that the double-bitted axe succeeded in the United Stated, but not in Europe, because of the United State’s commitment to innovation, its entrepreneurial spirit, and its pride
in tools. This article demonstrates the potential of investigating an ordinary piece of technology using a cultural approach.

Chiarappa is a third excellent model to emulate. He sees that New Jersey’s regional crafts provides historical and cultural representation. He ponders what cultural historians call “the other”, someone or something that traditional historians have neglected that can tell significant amounts about a region, or a nation’s, attitudes and beliefs. Through his examination, Chiarappa gains a greater cultural understanding of New Jersey, the anti-modern movement, and the United States. He uses regionalism to help inform, shape, and interpret the craft. He looks at the artisans and the crafts potential for historical interpretation.

Porter is a fine paragon to follow for cultural study of technology. Porter studies the Embankment in its social situation. He argues that the Thames Embankment is an icon of mid-Victorian practice. It is clearly an idea of their technology, society and environment. He discovers that interest groups influenced the development of the Thames Embankment meaning and intended use. Porter perceives the Thames Embankment as a technology answer to problems faced frequently in mid-Victorian urban life. He places the Thames Embankment in its social and cultural context.

These sources provide good models for a cultural study of steamboats. A cultural history of Thames steamboats would have to include more information on social class prejudices, more exact accounts of which classes used the steamboats in different periods, deeper analysis of gender preferences and a broader analysis of how...
steamboat travel interacted with other forms of metropolitan transport during its periods of growth, popularity and demise.

In this examination, I discovered that between the steamboats and the railways a competition for passengers ensued. As railways expanded and improved, they usurped the steamboat commuter traffic. Initially, steamboats helped change the commuter traffic patterns and influenced Londoners view of technology. Also, steamboats changed the views concerning travel and technology, which can be better studied in a longer examination of the steamboats. The issues of class and gender that arise in a cultural context of steamboats can best be done in a longer examination as well. I, however, introduce these areas as fields to explore and show that it is feasible. Finally, one of the main themes that arises in a study of steamboats is how the River Thames and the vessels on it encompasses a contested space. Many parties believed they had jurisdiction over the river and its boats. Most of the jurisdiction over the river and steamboats, however, overlapped or it was not covered in some areas at all, leaving many people confused about who had legal control over the river and its boats. This resulted in many contested spaces. A cultural approach to steamboats includes all these areas.

I encountered many difficulties while working on my thesis. One of the first difficulties I reached was locating class-related sources in the time allotted. I also had to dig through the sources that I could obtain, like the Parliamentary bills, the ICE discussions, and nineteenth century novels, to get an idea of the surrounding class issue. This is an excellent course of analysis for further study.
I also discovered that the gender dimension I initially intended to include was difficult to discover. It requires analysis beyond what the sources I currently have allow and requires more time than allowed to locate the necessary sources. The gender dimension, as well, is an important area for continued study.

I did, however, fulfill my goals to analyze the sources currently available. I showed that sources are readily available to make a cultural history of the steamboat passenger ferries in London feasible and pointed out how they can contribute to the narrative. A preliminary sketch of steamboats in London was introduced where I demonstrated how society went through changes because of the steamboats. I showed how society’s views towards technology changed, as well as its travel habits. I connected, as well, developments in the steamboat business with developments in the metropolitan government, as well as the central government. Finally, I described the relevant contexts surrounding steamboats. I outlined a history of steamboats, described how steamboats affected jurisdiction of the river and vessels on the river too, and described some problems with steamboats and their response.
Appendix A
Letter confirming there are sources on steamboats, 1999

Director of Libraries and Guildhall Art Gallery

Ms J. Wohlberg
421 Stanwood Ave 3,
Kalamazoo,
MI 49006,
USA.

Ms Wohlberg,
421 Stanwood Ave 3,
Kalamazoo,
MI 49006,
USA.

Dear Ms Wohlberg,

In reply to your recent letter, you will be welcome to use the Library for your research, and I enclose access information together with a guide to marine sources. You should note that the Library will be closed from December 24-28 inclusive and on December 31.

I regret that it will not be practicable to provide you with a list of potential sources on passenger steamboats on the Thames; you should note that sources in the Lloyd’s Marine Collection and other sources listed in the enclosed leaflet are not very likely to be relevant to this topic. However, a search on the appropriate number in the London Classification (L48.23) found approximately 90 items, not all relating to the 19th century. Most were printed books, but some illustrations and manuscripts were also included. Other possible areas of interest would be directories (for example Robinson’s London directory, 1840, has on pp.1051-1054 a section on the Steam Vessel Trade, although most of the sailings are to foreign and coastal ports, several Thames destinations are included) and the Noble Collection of uncatalogued ephemera in the Prints and Maps Section.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

RM Harvey,
For Principal Reference Librarian.
Appendix B

"The London Omnibus Guide", 1877

Will show, by an entirely new method, the whole system of omnibus, tram-car, steam-boat and railway communication between different parts of the metropolis and the suburbs, and thus enable all those traveling from one part to another, to select without difficulty, their proper route and conveyance.

On the map the routes or journeys of all the omnibuses and tram-cars are shown by red lines, with a separate and distinctive number for each route placed at each end and in several intermediate points in the routes; the numbers at the ends of the routes being framed with a red line, to distinguish them from the others, and in the Index of Routes will be found under each of these numbers all information as to the description of the conveyance, the times, places of starting and stopping, and the principal streets and places passed on the journey. In some of the streets, as for instance Oxford Street or Westminster Bridge Road, where many omnibuses and cars run along the same road together though bound for different destinations, the numbers applying to all the routes passing along the street are shown consecutively on one red line.

The map also gives all the piers or steam-boat stations on the River Thames, with the routes of all the steamers plying on the River shown in dotted black lines and marked with numbers, as with the omnibuses and tram-cars: - full particulars of each being given in the Index. The railway stations and railways are also given shown in full black lines.
INDEX OF Routes.

No. 1.—Red Omnibus, marked on panel "Victoria Station Association." Between Victoria Station and the "Cock" at Kilburn. Passing Grosvenor Place, Hyde Park Corner, Park Lane, Marble Arch, Edgware Road, and Maida Vale. Every 10 minutes.

No. 2.—Red Omnibus, marked on panel "Victoria Station Association." Between Victoria Station and the "Cornwall Hotel, Ledbury Road, Notting Hill. Passing along same route as No. 1. to Edgware Road, and then by Praed Street, Eastbourne Terrace, and Bishop's Road. Every 10 minutes alternately with No. 1.

No. 3.—Dark Blue Omnibus marked on panel "Royal Blue." Between Victoria Station and Regent Circus. Passing Grosvenor Place, Hyde Park Corner, Piccadilly, Old and New Bond Street, and part of Oxford Street. Every 10 minutes.

No. 4.—Green Omnibus, marked on panel "Favourite." Between Victoria Station and Holloway. Passing Victoria Street, Westminster, Whitehall, Charing Cross, Strand, Chancery Lane, Grays Inn Lane, Cold Bath Fields, St. John's Street, Clerkenwell, High Street and Upper Street, Islington, and Holloway Road. Every 10 minutes.

No. 5.—Green Omnibus, marked on panel "Favourite." Between Victoria Station and "Weaver's Arms," Stoke Newington. Passing along same route as No. 4 up to High Street, Islington, and then along Essex Road and Balls Pond Road. Every 10 minutes alternately with No. 4.

No. 6.—Yellow Omnibus, marked on panel "Bull and Gate." Between Victoria Station and the "Bull and Gate," Highgate. Passing Victoria Street, Westminster, Whitehall, Charing Cross, St. Martin's Lane, Tottenham Court Road, and Hampstead Road. Every 10 minutes.
No. 7.—Yellow Omnibus, marked on panel "Carlton."
Between Victoria Station and Carlton Tavern, Kentish Town. Passing along same route as No. 6, and then to the "Carlton," Kentish Town. Every 10 minutes alternately with No. 6.

No. 8.—Yellow Omnibus, marked on panel "Adelaide."
Between Victoria Station and the "Adelaide" Tavern, Chalk Farm. Passing along same route as Nos. 6 and 7 to the "Britannia," Camden Town, and then along Chalk Farm Road. Every 10 minutes alternately with Nos. 6 and 7.

No. 9.—Yellow Omnibus, marked on panel "Mother Shipton."
Between Victoria Station and the "Mother Shipton" Tavern, Kentish Town. Passing same route as Nos. 6, 7, and 8 up to the "Britannia," and then along Prince of Wales’ Road to the "Mother Shipton." Every 10 minutes alternately with Nos. 6, 7, and 8.

No. 10.—Dark Brown Omnibus, marked on panel "Westminster."
Between the Monster Tavern, Pimlico and the Bank. Passing along Warwick Street, Tabibook Street, and Moreton Street, Pimlico, Great Smith Street, Westminster, Whitehall, Charing Cross, Strand, Fleet Street, Ludgate Hill, St. Paul’s and Cheapside. Every 20 minutes.

No. 11.—Dark Brown Omnibus, marked on panel "Westminster."
Between the "Monster" Tavern, Pimlico and the Bank. Passing along Winchester Street, Lupus Street, and Moreton Street, Pimlico, and then along same route as No. 10. Every 20 minutes alternately with No. 10.

No. 12.—Tram Car. Between the "Windsor Castle" Tavern, Victoria Street, Westminster, and the South of London. Passing along Vauxhall Bridge Road and over Vauxhall Bridge, and then connecting with the Southern Routes. Every 5 minutes.

No. 13.—Steamboat. London Bridge to Chelsea, stopping at all Piers. Every 10 minutes during the day.

No. 14.—Steamboat. Chelsea Bridge to Kew, stopping at all Piers. Every hour from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.

No. 15.—Steamboat. Westminster Bridge to Woolwich, stopping at all Piers. Every half-hour during the day.
Appendix C

"Turbulence on Chelsea Reach", 1834

"It's most infamous to let these here steamers out on a Sunday. If this is Chelsea Reach, I am afraid it will make me very sick"; two men in a rowing boat are tossed about in the wake of a paddle steamer on Chelsea Reach.
Appendix D

Map of London
Parliamentary Papers

1801 – Report from Select Committee appointed to consider of such further measures as may be necessary for rendering more commodious, and better regulation of the Port of London. (102) iii 265

1813-14 – Report from Select Committee appointed to take into consideration the standing order of the House for making navigable canals, reservoirs, or aqueducts, or for improving the navigation of rivers. (245) iv 369

1817 – Report from Select Committee on prevention of mischiefs from the explosions of steamboilers used in boats and vessels. (422) vi 223

1831 – Report from Select Committee on Steam Navigation. (335) viii 1

Transport and Communication vol. 2 1817-1831 (has accident select reports)

1836 – Report from the Select Committee on the Port of London. (557) xiv 1

1837-1838 – Report by Lords’ Select Committee appointed to inquire into the present state of laws which regulate the carriage of passengers for hire upon the River Thames. (563) xxiii. 329

1842 – Report and Minutes of the Proceedings of the Select Committee on the Lagan Navigation Bill. (537) xiv 417

1847 – Select Committee Reports on Navigation Laws. (232) x 1

1847 – Select Committee Reports on Navigation Laws. (246) x 179

1847 – Select Committee Reports on Navigation Laws. (392) x 205

1847 – Select Committee Reports on Navigation Laws. (556) x 371

1847 – Select Committee Reports on Navigation Laws. (678) x 577

1847 – Report from Select Committee on Thames Conservancy Re-committed Bill. (504) vii 151

1847 – Report from the Select Committee on the Thames Conservancy (Re-Committed) Bill, Together with the Resolutions, Minutes of Proceedings, and the Bill (as amended). (623) xii 143

1847-48 – Select Committee on Navigation Laws. (7) xx Part I 1
1847-48 – Lords' Select Committee on Navigation Laws. (340) xx Part II 1
1847-48 – Lords' Select Committee on Navigation Laws. (431) xx Part II 371
1847-48 – Lords' Select Committee on Navigation Laws. (754) xx Part II 693
1903 – Thames River Steamboat Service Bill. (Session 1903)
1904 – Thames River Steamboat Service. (4 Edward VII – Session 1904)

Parliamentary Bills

1817 – For securing safety of passengers in Steam Vessels. (483) ii. 345
1831 – Bill to regulate navigation of steam vessels on parts of the Thames. (164) iii. 421, 1831-2 (43) (305) (520) (601) iv. 493, 505, 517, 527
1833 – To extend Act I Will. 4 to owners of steam and other vessels. (478) iv. 411
1834 – To extend protection of stage coach proprietors &c to owners of steam and other vessels. (418) i. 459
1835 – For Regulation of Pilotage of Steam Vessels. (347) (509) iv. 517, 521
1835 – Bill to regulate navigation of steam vessels on parts of the Thames. (458) iv. 509
1836 – Regulation of navigation of steam vessels on parts of the Thames. (141) vi. 85
1837-38 – For better regulating steam vessels worked for hire on River Thames between New Windsor and Yantlet Creek. (409) vi. 405
1846 – For Regulation of Steam navigation and for requiring sea-going vessels to carry boats. (367) (533) (588) iv. 345, 357, 369
1851 – To consolidate and amend laws relating to regulation of steam navigation and to boats and lights... (134) (567) vi. 121, 141

Parliamentary Petitions

Petition of directors and proprietors of Old Margate and Gravesend Steam Packet Company and directors and proprietors of General Steam Navigation Company requesting Steam Vessels Bill not be passed into law. 1 February 1832. (LXXXVII.63) No. 98.
Petition against Steam Vessel Bill, asking not to go into law by George Crichton, Shipping Agent in Leith and managing owner of steam vessels in coastal trade. 4 June 1832. (LXXXVII.374).

Petition by Thomas Browne, of Fenchurch-street in London, asking for bill preventing steam vessels from going higher than Blackwall on River Thames and for making a railway between Blackwall and London, constructing a pier at Blackwall for landing and embarking to/from steam vessels. 21 April 1834. (LXXXIX.201) No. 2611.

Petition of Watermen and Lightermen alarmed by the speed of steam vessels on River Thames. 29 June 1835. (XC.394) No.2637.

Complaint by Directors of Gravesend Star Steam Packet Company. 2 September 1835. (XC.628)

Watermen petition that no steam vessel be allowed to proceed higher up the River Thames than Greenwich unless they are towing ships to their respective destination. 12 February 1836. (XCl.28) No. 105.

Petition from the Freeholders and inhabitants of parish of St. Mary, Rotherhithe to pass an Act for better regulating the speed of Steam Vessels in port of London or limit them to no higher than Blackwall, Greenwich, or Deptford. 16 February 1836. (XCl.41) No. 106.

Petition from the Watermen of Blackfriars Bridge praying House to pass an Act for better regulating the speed of Steam Vessels in port of London or limit them to no higher than Blackwall, Greenwich, or Deptford. 17 February 1836. (XCl.46) No. 107.

Lightermen petition House to pass law prohibiting all steam vessels above Greenwich. 25 February 1836. (XCl.209) No. 793.

Wharfingers petition House to pass law prohibiting all steam vessels above Greenwich. 25 February 1836. (XCl.209) No. 794.

Company of Free Fishers and Dredgers of Whitstable petition to adopt regulations to prevent steam vessels from running between London and Gravesend during night. 13 April 1836. (XCl.250) No. 1097.

Watermen of Port of London asked that steam vessels not to be allowed above Greenwich unless towing ships to their respective destinations. 4 May 1836. (XCl.323) No. 2551.

Petition by Directors of Gravesend Diamond Steam Packet Company asked that Steam Vessels Bill not pass into law. 14 June 1836. (XCl.475) No. 1425.
Petition by Directors of Gravesend Star Steam Packet Company asked that Steam Vessels Bill not pass into law. 27 June 1836. (XCI.557).

Cadogan Williams (Lord Ashley) petition that House direct Admiralty to inquire into best position of steam engine aboard steamboats. 23 July 1837. No. 9254.

Petition of Company of Watermen and Lightermen on Thames request that Steam Vessels Bill not pass into law as it stands. 28 May 1838. (XCIII.559) No. 8134.

Petition of Company of Watermen and Lightermen on Thames request that Steam Vessels Bill not pass into law as it stands. 1 June 1838. (XCIII.574) No. 8137.

Petition of Watermen and Lightermen on Thames and Free Watermen and Lightermen on Thames request Steam Vessels Bill not pass into law. 8 June 1838. (XCIII.590)

Petition of Watermen and Lightermen of Gravesend ask Steam Vessels Bill not pass into law. 22 June 1838. (XCIII.644).

Petition from Provost, Magistrates, and Councillors of the royal burgh of Cupar request regulations be passed to inspect and regulate steam vessels. 1839. No. 8641.

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