

This note is one of a series placed in the Almanac for the guidance of livery masters, wardens, and their clerks, especially new ones, seeking advice on a particular topic. They are not prescriptive, and how individual companies choose to conduct their affairs is, of course, entirely up to them. Most are written by a past chairman of the Livery Committee, of whom you may read more at the foot of the [Contact page](#). However, this one was written by the Master World Trader, and a craft-owning Freeman of the Company of Watermen & Lightermen.

## **Doggetts Coat & Badge Wager**

Doggett's Wager is the prize and name for the oldest rowing race in the world. Up to six apprentice watermen of the river Thames compete for this prestigious honour, which has been held every year since 1715. The 4 miles 5 furlongs (7,400 m) race is held on the Thames between London Bridge and Cadogan Pier Chelsea, the sites of the Old Swan Tavern and the Swan Inn Chelsea respectively, passing under a total of eleven bridges en route. Until 1873, it was raced every 1st August\*. Competitors rowed four-seater passenger wherries, the boats used by watermen to ferry passengers across the Thames, against the outgoing (ebb) tide. There are stories of the race taking over two hours to complete. Today it is raced on the incoming (flood) tide, in contemporary single sculling boats.

The founder of the race, the Irish actor and comedian Thomas Doggett, was born in Dublin and moved to London in 1690 to pursue his career. In 1715 Doggett, a keen Whig, founded the prize of Doggett's Coat and Badge in honour of the House of Hanover, in commemoration of King George I's accession to the Throne on 1st August 1714. Doggett himself organised and managed the race each year until his death in 1721. To keep the Race alive, the executors of Doggett's Will entered into a Deed with the Fishmongers' Company, which effectively passed the Trusteeship of the Race to the Fishmongers'. In 1722 the Fishmongers' Company organised the race for the first time and has faithfully complied with Doggett's Will ever since.

The winner's prize is a traditional waterman's red coat with a silver badge added, displaying the horse of the House of Hanover and the word "Liberty", in honour of the accession of George I to the throne. The time now taken to complete the course is between 25 to 30 minutes and in 1973 Bobby Prentice, Waterman & Lighterman, and now also Bargemaster to the Fishmongers' Company, set the fastest recorded time of 23 minute 22 seconds.

\*The annual date is now variable, usually a day between late July and early September, and dependent on tides. For more on the Doggetts Coat & Badge Wager also go to <http://www.fishhall.org.uk/history-heritage/the-doggett-s-wager/>

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