

## SECTION THREE - GENERAL NAVIGATION RULES

Navigation on the tidal Thames is covered by the International Regulations for the Prevention of Collisions at Sea (ColRegs), PLA River Byelaws, PLA General Directions and Notice's to Mariners (Permanent and Temporary). All the PLA regulations are subject to regular review and whilst the current content and references are correct at the time of publication, they are subject to change. The latest versions of the various regulations are always available on the PLA website and the ColRegs.

### 3.1 Narrow Channels

The following rules apply in the tidal Thames. Relevant interpretation, guidance and advice follows each rule.

#### ColReg Rule 9 - Narrow Channels

9 (a) A vessel proceeding along the course of a narrow channel or fair way shall keep as near to the outer limit of the channel or fairway which lies on her starboard side as is safe and practicable."

On the tidal Thames the fairway is defined by the PLA and is represented by the dotted lines on the charts shown below and as published elsewhere from time to time. In this part of the Thames the fairway (Navigation Channel) limits are approximately the 1m sounding line (i.e. 1m depth when the tide is at chart datum). Please refer to the chart "Rowing on the Tideway" for the exact position of the navigable channel. Rowing boats should, preferably, and particularly at times of high motor vessel traffic, whenever it is safe to do so, navigate outside of the main channel or Navigation Channel.



#### ColReg Rule 9 - Narrow Channels

9 (b) A vessel of less than 20 meters in length or a sailing vessel shall not impede the passage of a vessel which can safely navigate only within a narrow channel or fairway."

When navigating in the Navigation Channel for whatever reason, all rowing boats and their accompanying coach boats must never impede the passage of a vessel which as a result of its draught or length can safely navigate only with the Navigation Channel. Rowing boats and accompanying coach boats shall take early and clear action to avoid and be seen to avoid such a vessel. The most usual vessel to which this would apply are the Class V passenger vessels which operate on the tideway.

#### ColReg Rule 9 - Narrow Channels

9 (d) A vessel shall not cross a narrow channel or fairway if such crossing impedes the passage of a vessel which can safely navigate only within such channel or fairway."

When crossing the River or turning, all rowing boats must ensure that they have a clear view of the Navigation Channel. They are not to cross if they can not clear the Navigation Channel with a safe distance between them and any oncoming vessels. If the crossing area is not clear, the crew must stop and wait for an appropriate moment to cross rather than continuing up the incorrect side of the River.

#### ColReg Rule 9 - Narrow Channels

9 (f) A vessel nearing a bend or an area of a narrow channel or fairway where other vessels may be obscured by an intervening obstruction shall navigate with particular alertness and caution and shall sound the appropriate signal prescribed in Rule 34(e). (One prolonged blast)

Rowing boats are not required to make sound signals but should be aware of their meanings as they should be made by relevant vessels approaching the same point. This particular sound signal will often be made by vessels approaching Kew Road Bridge.

### 3.2 Overtaking

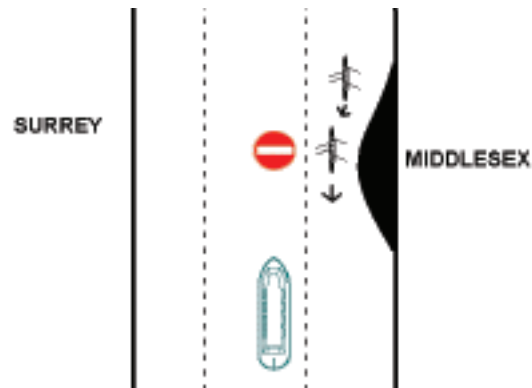
#### ColReg Rule 13 - Overtaking

13 (a) ...any vessel overtaking any other shall keep out of the way of the vessel being overtaken.

In summary:

- Overtaking should in general be on the outside, i.e. in the faster tidal stream.
- The overtaking crew has no right of way. (Contrary to popular myth!)
- The crew being overtaken should maintain course and speed (the reverse of what generally happens in a head race.) Variations of speed for training purposes during the overtaking manoeuvre does not constitute maintaining "course and speed". Baulking the passage of an overtaking vessel is not permitted.
- Overtaking shall not take place in any of the Restricted Zones.
- Overtaking shall not take place if it will put the overtaking boat into the path of oncoming traffic.

An example of when not to overtake



#### General Directions for Navigation in the Port of London (2006)

##### Direction 22 - Overtaking Manoeuvres

(1) Vessels shall only overtake if the manoeuvre can be completed so that the vessels involved do not prejudice their ability to navigate safely, particularly in areas of additional constraint such as river bends and bridges.

### 3.3 Proceeding Abreast

#### Port of London River Byelaws (1978)

##### Byelaw 15 - Modifications of the International Rules

- (c) a power-driven vessel shall not proceed abreast of another power-driven vessel except for the purposes of overtaking that other vessel;
- (d) a vessel in a fairway above Tilburyness shall not overtake a vessel which is herself overtaking another vessel.

A balance has to be struck between the strict adherence to the above regulations and the sport of rowing. This is a privilege and abuse of it will be treated most seriously by the TRRC and the PLA.

#### DONTs

- Boats must not row abreast if by doing so they will obstruct other traffic on the River.
- Boats rowing in the Inshore Zone must not row abreast other than when overtaking, and must ensure that they will not obstruct vessels proceeding in the opposite direction.
- The maximum number of boats allowed to proceed abreast in the channel at any one time is three, but only where a single boat is overtaking a pair of boats (such as an eight overtaking two scullers). Two boats abreast can never overtake two other boats rowing abreast, other than by switching to line astern and proceeding past in single file.

#### DOs

- Boats rowing abreast must maintain their correct station on the river and should avoid straying across the channel.
- Boats rowing abreast may only overtake another vessel if the river is completely clear and by doing so they will not obstruct any oncoming vessels or impede the passage of the vessel being overtaken. If this is not the case the boat must row behind the boat until it is safe to overtake, or overtake one at a time – as long as it is safe to do so.
- A single boat may only overtake two boats rowing abreast if the river is completely clear and by doing so it will not obstruct any oncoming vessels or impede the passage of the vessels being overtaken. If this is not the case the boat must row behind the two boats rowing abreast until it is safe to overtake.

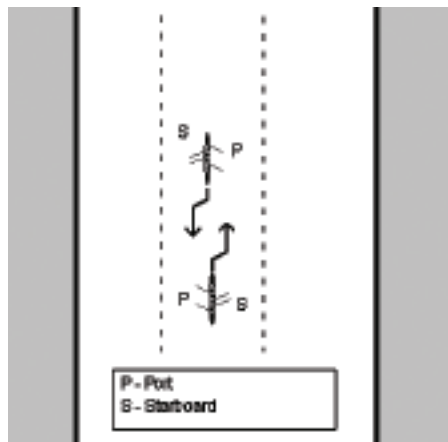
Notwithstanding the “DOs” and “DONTs” the onus for collision avoidance will always lie with the overtaking vessel(s).

In the event of an incident where rowing side by side is a contributory factor part or all of the enforcement action may be based on these regulations.

### 3.4 Emergency avoiding action to be taken in a head-on situation

#### ColReg Rule 14 - Head-on situation

14 (a) When two power driven vessels are meeting on reciprocal or nearly reciprocal courses so as to involve risk of collision each shall alter her course to starboard so that each shall pass on the port side of the other.



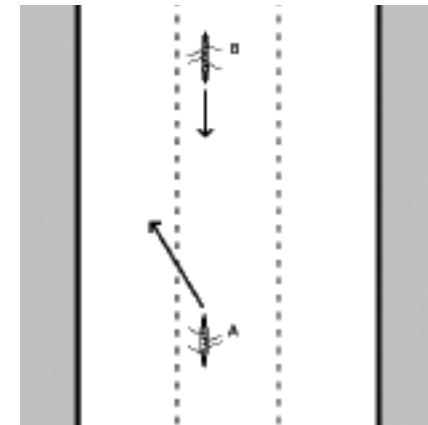
#### ColReg Rule 14 - Head-on situation

14 (c) When a vessel is in any doubt as to whether such a situation exists she shall assume that it does exist and act accordingly.

Alterations of course should be taken in ample time to avoid collision. However, when two rowing boats are on a head on course and a collision is unavoidable without immediate action, both boats should take the emergency avoiding action shown above. This rule also applies to all vessels navigating in the Navigation Channel at all times.

For the purposes of this regulation, when in the Navigation Channel rowing boats are to act as power-driven vessels.

**Note:** Steersperson should note that this rule applies if a collision is imminent and there is not time to get back to the Inshore Zone.



However in the situation illustrated above, Boat A (which has strayed out of the Inshore Zone) has time to steer back into the Inshore Zone before Boat B comes so close as to make collision imminent. In this case emergency avoiding action should not be taken, but rather a sufficiently quick return to the correct course inshore so that Boat B does not have to change its own course.

### 3.5 Vessels coming together on a collision course (crossing situations)

#### ColReg Rule 15 - Crossing Situation

When two power driven vessels are crossing so as to involve risk of collision, the vessel which has the other on her own starboard side shall keep out of the way and shall, if the circumstances of the case admit, avoid crossing ahead of the other vessel.

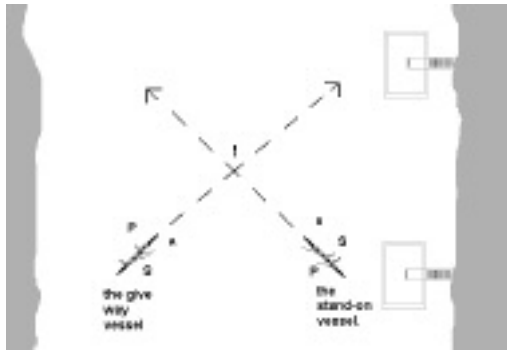
#### ColReg Rule 16 - Action by Give-way Vessel

Every vessel which is directed to keep out of the way of another vessel shall, so far as possible, take early and substantial action to keep well clear

#### ColReg Rule 17 - Action by Stand-on Vessel

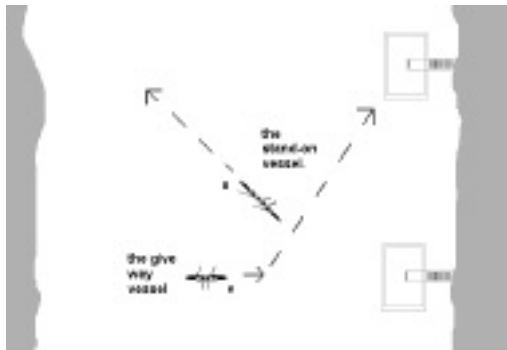
- 17 (a)
- (i) Where one of two vessels is to keep out of the way of the other shall keep her course and speed.
  - (ii) The latter vessel may however take action to avoid collision by her manoeuvre alone, as soon as it becomes apparent to her that the vessel required to keep out of the way is not taking appropriate action in accordance with these Rules.

For the purposes of these rules rowing boats are to act as power driven vessels.



The above diagram shows an example of a crossing situation with the potential for a collision. Boat A on the port hand side of the River is returning to shore whilst Boat B on the starboard hand side is boating. If both boats continue on their courses they will collide.

In such a situation the following action must be taken.



The “stand on vessel” (Boat B) has followed Rule 17(a(i)) and maintained her course and speed, whilst the “give way vessel” (Boat A) has followed Rule 15 and has taken action to pass behind the “stand on vessel” (Boat B). In many circumstances the “give way vessel” can simply decrease her speed without needing to make a course correction, however the decrease in speed must be significant enough that the “stand on vessel” does not feel the need to make her own course correction.

**ColReg Rule 17 - Action by Stand-on Vessel**

17 (d) This Rule does not relieve the give-way vessel of her obligation to keep out of the way.

If the “stand on” vessel considers a close quarters situation has developed to such an extent that a collision cannot be avoided by the actions of the “give way” vessel alone, the “stand on” vessel **MUST** take such action as will best aid the avoidance of a collision. Whilst a collision is often the fault of both parties involved, if the “give way” vessel has failed to take appropriate action then the majority of the liability is likely to fall on that vessel.

**For the purposes of these rules rowing boats must act as power driven vessels.**

**3.6 General Right of Way**

**ColReg Rule 18 - Responsibilities Between Vessels**

Except where rule 9, 10, and 13 otherwise require:

- 18 (a) A power driven vessel underway shall keep out of the way of:
  - (i) a vessel not under command;
  - (ii) a vessel restricted in her ability to manoeuvre;
  - (iii) a vessel engaged in fishing;
  - (iv) a sailing vessel.

Rule 18 means that oar or paddle powered boats must keep out of the way of all the types of vessel listed above.

**For the purposes of these rules rowing boats are to act as power driven vessels.**

**Port of London River Byelaws (1978)**

**Byelaw 19 - Vessels above Cherry Garden Pier (Cherry Garden Pier is downstream of Tower Bridge)**

- 19 (1) Above Cherry Garden Pier –
  - (a) a vessel of less than 40 metres in length, and
  - (b) a sailing vessel
 shall not impede the passage of –
  - (i) a vessel of 40 metres or more in length, or;
  - (ii) a vessel engaged in towing.
- (2) Above Westminster Bridge, and in addition to their obligations under paragraph (1) above –
  - (a) a vessel of less than 20 metres in length, and
  - (b) a sailing vessel
 shall not impede the passage of a vessel of 20 metres or more in length

This rule gives priority to vessels such as (but not limited to) Class V Passenger vessels, and large Dutch barges.

### 3.7 Navigation Buoys

These buoys are in place to mark the southern (Surrey) side of the Navigation Channel.

When proceeding against the tidal stream, rowing boats should navigate between the buoys and the Surrey bank.

When proceeding with the tidal stream, the buoys are an indication of the starboard (Surrey) limit of the Navigation Channel and crews should steer in accordance with the normal navigation rules e.g.:

1. When rowing on the **ebb** tide – leave the buoys as close to starboard as is safe and practicable; and
2. When rowing on the **flood** tide – rowing boats should be on the starboard side of the channel therefore leaving the buoys well to port.

In addition to this, the buoy opposite the University of London Boathouse (UL) is used to mark the furthest upstream point at which boats from the University Boat Club can enter the Inshore Zone when crossing from the Middlesex to the Surrey side of the river.

If there is not enough water to navigate inside the group of buoys upstream of UL, navigation outside of the Inshore Zone is not permitted.

### Positions of Port Hand Buoys from Putney Upstream



Port hand buoys are located:

- Off Queen Elizabeth Walk, 100 yds downstream of Mile Stone.
- Off Riverview Gardens, 100yds upstream of Headway Board.