

# River & Rowing Museum

Henley-on-Thames, UK 1989 – 1997

The earliest sketches for the museum at Henley-on-Thames were inspired by local river boathouses and the traditional wooden barns of Oxfordshire – a simple and clear architectural idea that makes natural associations with the surrounding area. The completed building is virtually a direct materialisation of these first sketches, achieved by means of long, parallel, oak-clad forms with steeply pitched lead-coated roofs. While clearly a modern building, it also resonates with a local architectural tradition.

Sitting in water meadows on the south bank of the Thames, close to Henley's town centre, the museum houses a significant collection of rowing boats. Its purpose is threefold: to document the history of the sport of rowing, the River Thames, and the town of Henley. The museum, which is elevated above the ground on concrete pillars due to the occasional flooding of the river, is conceived in two parts: a transparent and open entry floor space containing public areas and a sequence of first floor galleries, enclosed and lit by skylights. Each gabled boat hall has direct external access doors, allowing the hulls of eights and single-scul boats to be brought in directly. These upper spaces are clad in their entirety with untreated green oak timber – wood that hardens and weathers well with age, further aligning the building with a local vernacular. In this way, by negotiating the aesthetic sensibilities of rural England, the River & Rowing Museum merges figure and abstraction, appearing behind its screen of poplar trees to reveal both convention and invention.

Project start	1989
Completion / due	1997
Gross floor area	2,300 m <sup>2</sup>
Client	River & Rowing Foundation
Architect	David Chipperfield Architects
Landscape architect	Whitelaw Turkington
Structural engineer	Whitby, Bird & Partners
Services engineer	Furness Green & Partners
Photography	Dennis Gilbert & Richard Bryant



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