



The River Thames runs through Eton

Eton and its college capture the imagination

Britain's leading female marathon canoeist, Anna Hemmings, is inspired by the great school

I have always been fascinated by the historic sites along the banks of the River Thames – particularly the stretch between Henley and Runnymede.

I have particularly fond memories of Eton, as I remember visiting the town with my family and having fun scampering up and down the side streets and marvelling at the famous gothic Eton College founded by Henry VI in 1440-41. I recall studying the War of the Roses at school – at the time Eton College brought history to life and helped my understanding of the period. To this day I am still captivated by the college's history.

Henry VI had grand visions for the college, but when he was deposed in 1461 funding was stopped while the college was still under construction. Therefore the college chapel never reached its proposed cathedral-sized proportions, although a plaque outside marks where the nave was expected to reach. You can also still see magnificent fifteenth-century frescoes within the chapel and find a statue of Henry VI in the schoolyard, where a famous scene from *Chronicles of Fire* was filmed. The schoolyard for me is steeped in old English tradition and sits my

imagination. Eton's majestic grandeur has certainly inspired my learning.

Today, I wander around the town of Eton and the surrounding area with my fiancé, Neil. The area offers something for everyone, whether you walk or cycle. I would definitely recommend

floating down the river: it is so peaceful and serene. I began my career in flat water canoeing on the River Thames and find that it conjures up fond memories from my early years in the sport, which never fails to fuel my ambition. I'm in the area every week to train and nearby Dorney Lake is the site for the 2012 London Olympics rowing, kayaking and canoeing events. I love being out on the water with family and friends – it's a great way to unwind and offers a unique view of the sites along the bank. **HT**



Anna Hemmings is six times World Canoeing Champion and is now focusing on the 500m sprint discipline for the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing. Anna was voted BBC London Sports Personality of the Year in 2007.

