



**RIVER DEBEN
ASSOCIATION**

**Spring 2008
NEWSLETTER**

No: 36

RIVER DEBEN ASSOCIATION OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE

April 2008

- Chairman Ed Stanford, 21 Ipswich Road, Woodbridge IP12 4BS
01394 386362 maryedstanford@btinternet.com
- Vice Chairman Robert Simper, Plum Tree Hall, Ramsholt, Woodbridge IP12 3AD
and History 01394 411273 RNSimper@aol.com
- Treasurer Chris Brown, 4 June Avenue, Ipswich. IP1 4LT
01473 259674 cjlbrown@onetel.net
- Secretary Wendy Brown, 4 June Avenue, Ipswich. IP1 4LT
01473 259674 cjlbrown@onetel.net
- Press Secretary Rosemary Schlee, Deben Lodge, Melton Road, Woodbridge. IP12 1NH
01394 382740
- Newsletter Nick Wright 62 Victoria Road, Woodbridge, IP12 1EL
Editor 01394 610134 narwright50@tiscali.co.uk
- Felixstowe Leigh Belcham 45A Western Avenue, Felixstowe, IP11 9SL
Ferry 01394 285674 lbelcham1@aol.com
- Rowing Paul Lacey, 4 The Granary, Tidemill Way, Woodbridge IP12 1BY
01394 386481 lacey.paul@virgin.net
- Wildfowlers Adrian Judge, 29 Bredfield Street, Woodbridge IP12 4NH
01394 383350 adrianjudge@keme.co.uk
- Other members Denzil Cowdry, The Mews House, 105 New Street, Woodbridge. IP12 1DZ
01394 383625 faycowdry@hotmail.com
- Simon Read, Barge Jacoba, Robertson's Boat Yard, Lime Kiln Quay,
Woodbridge IP12 1BD
01394 384060 jacoba@simonread.demon.co.uk
- Anne Moore, 2 Grundisburgh Road, Woodbridge IP12 4HG
01394 383559

EDITORIAL

Such is the feast of articles to be set before you in this Spring newsletter that



a long editorial would be tiresome. We even have one genuine Letter to the Editor (on the subject of speed-limits on the River) and one letter which the editor managed to intercept on its way from Robert Simper to John Gummer, in the House of Commons, and copy to you all. Is this a hanging offence? Both of these latter gentlemen feel passionately about the loss of East Anglian farmland to the sea, and express themselves eloquently on the subject. Robert's letter may even presage an interesting conflict between two of our own, RDA, "constituencies": farming and wildlife. That bodes well – if nothing else - for future correspondence columns.

Jenny James, who might have been expected to take up the cudgels on behalf of her much-loved waterfowl, has briefly been distracted by the subject of our riverbank trees and their springtime foliage. A very welcome diversion - I think you'll agree - but I'm sure she hasn't taken an eye off the ball for long.

Stronger riverbanks may prove a threat to their marshland feeding-grounds. One might expect that the baby fish, found in our saltmarsh, and described here so succinctly by Bill Parker, would not be incommoded by some more flooding

... but I rather doubt that too. They must like their safe little creeks. I am still amazed at Bill's discoveries of such an abundance of small fish in this apparently barren Sutton saltmarsh.

Peter Uloth's description of a memorable passage into the Walton Backwaters, with a "healthy" young lady as his crew, which took place over forty years ago, may be revealed by its title (though nothing can quite prepare us for Peter's delightful and unique turn of phrase). Some of you may even guess what Robert Simper's "Bodies on the Beach" story may be about, and will be glad to hear more about it from our famous Deben historian. But I would challenge anybody without inside knowledge to guess what Mel Poole's "Incandescent with Love" is all about ...

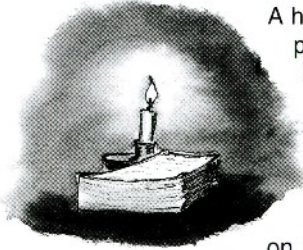
I hope you will all be as grateful as I am to these writers and will try your own hand for the next issue. Please don't forget the Annual General Meeting on 25th April, as announced on the back cover, where someone ... maybe ... and amidst other much more important business ... might like to volunteer for my job?

Nick Wright



WILFORD BRIDGE

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT



A highlight of the past six months was the speech by John Gummer M.P. at Walsingham on 26th October.

We had given him the topic of "The Politics of Coastal Change" and he ranged widely over the subject, calling on his experience as a former Secretary of State for the Environment. Did you know that he set up the Environment Agency as a body to give advice to government on all matters to do with the environment?

Mr Gummer made a number of key points. As we know, the government is only prepared to devote resources to coastal protection where significant businesses or centres of population are involved. Perhaps this is due to the fact that very few M.P.s have coastal constituencies where flooding is a problem, hence they have difficulty in making their voices heard. This is compounded by the fact that ministers increasingly rely on advisors, rather than senior civil servants. This means that, unless an advisor has a rural background, he/she is unlikely to be sympathetic to the cause of coastal erosion. When making any comment about erosion of farmland, we should bear in mind Mr Gummer's point that "the Good Lord isn't making any more of it".

In reviewing future plans for the Blyth, and also referring to Mr Boggis' difficulties at Easton Bavents, Mr Gummer stressed the importance of local protest. He made the

point that ministers and officials assume that for every letter they receive, there are another nine people who have the same point of view. For the RDA with its over 850 members, we can clearly be a very powerful force in relation to the Deben. We will need to be when you consider that the latest plan for the Blyth is ... to do nothing, regardless of the fact that the A12 periodically floods just north of Blythburgh.

I have to say that the outlook for the Deben is not good. An article in the Coastal Advertiser of 16th November made reference to the fact that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) has said that Bawdsey is unlikely to be protected and may therefore become an island. A spokesman for DEFRA is quoted as saying: "the government is committed to sustainable protection for people and property", but then went on to say that, on the Blyth, the cost of protection would outweigh the benefits. He further stated that "DEFRA does not decide where individual coast protection projects are carried out. These are put forward by local authorities for funding within a prioritised national programme." Adages like "he who pays the piper calls the tune" come to mind!!

To change the subject completely ... I hope that members of the RDA took the opportunity to visit our display-stand during "Maritime Woodbridge" in September. There were certainly large numbers of visitors from outside the area, and I myself spoke to visitors from Dorset, Bury St Edmunds and Norfolk. Our stand attracted some favourable comments and we are grateful to Chris Woods, of the barge Halcyon, for the photographs and the layout. A date for your diary: "Maritime

Woodbridge" in 2008 will be 13th-14th September.

Those members with an IP12 postal address will have received a letter from me asking for a volunteer to act as secretary of the RDA since Wendy has taken on other commitments. In the event, no-one came forward and so the committee agreed to pay Wendy a small honorarium as some compensation for the work she does. She has agreed to stay on for a further couple of years ... but no more. The problem of finding officers for clubs and societies is universal. The RDA is grateful for your financial support but we also need members to help carry the group forward, especially in view of the flood-protection issues which are becoming key ones for us.

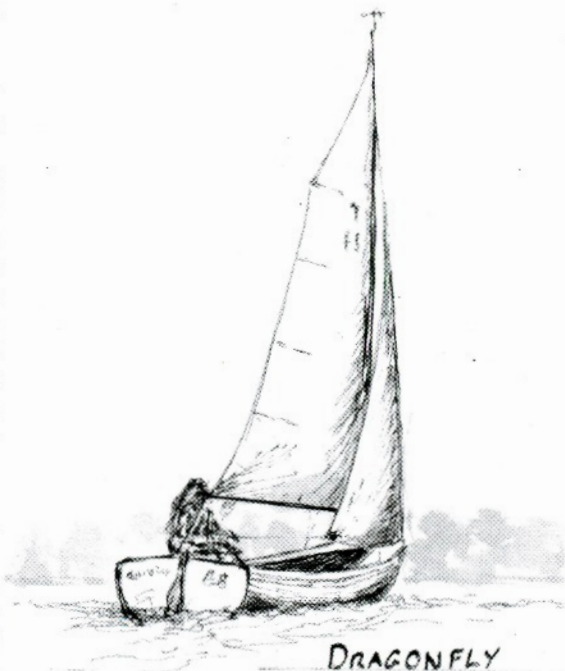
You will see from the outside back cover that our speaker at the AGM on 25th April will be Mr Steven Colclough, Senior Technical Officer (Fisheries) with the Environment Agency. You may remember that I referred to him in my last newsletter comments as being responsible for the study of the fish population on the Sutton shore salt marsh. I can't recall a previous presentation on the subject of fish on the Deben and I feel sure that Steve's address will be of great interest to all anglers as well as those, like me, who have difficulty telling a haddock from a herring!

May I end my comments with a personal plea to all dog-owners. Many of you are very careful to clean up after your dog and will use the bins provided by Suffolk Coastal District Council (SCDC). A number of owners, however,

appear to pick up excrement in a plastic bag only to fling the bag into the bushes: presumably on the "out of sight, out of mind" principle. Unfortunately, when the leaves fall or the bracken dies back, the plastic is exposed for all the world to see. Since excrement would rot faster than plastic, it would almost be better to scoop the deposit into the bushes than encase it in plastic. Please have a quiet word with anyone you see ignoring the bins.

Finally, 2007 was not a good year for sailors, especially yachtsmen. Let us hope that 2008 brings fair winds and that everyone can enjoy a wonderful year ... on, or beside, the river.

Ed Stanford



NEWS FROM THE HARD



The Deben Estuary was recognized in 1966 by the RAMSAR Convention as a Wetland of International Importance: especially as a waterfowl habitat. Exceptionally, Martlesham Creek added to the importance of the site because it was one of only fourteen sites in Britain supporting a population of the Endangered Red Data Book mollusc *VERTIGO AUGUSTIOR*. Where are they? What do they look like? Letters to the Editor will be welcome.

Those who have read the last contributions to the Newsletter will recall that we are proceeding downstream, taking a look at the hards or slipways of the River Deben, and commenting on their use. We have reached Kyson Point, where there is a spur of shingle and sand which continues to provide a landing place for the dinghies which are rowed or motored to their moorings on this corner of the river. Although the mud has increased at the river edges, this is also where Woodbridge School keep their racing dinghies, with quick access to Folly's Reach at most states of the tide. We have already seen how the marshes

are decaying with the larger number of higher tides, progressively drowning the reeds and washing away their footholds.

This is particularly the case in the area from the Deben Yacht Club down to Kyson Point.

Further down the river, at the limit of Kyson Fairway Committee's

mooring sites, leased from the Crown

Commissioners, there is a private quay and a small slipway for dinghies at Methersgate. Little more than a half-dozen sailors are permitted to keep their dinghies there, to access yachts, so difficult is the site to reach by land. Those deeper water moorings at Methersgate are much sought-after for the larger yachts.

Waldringfield has a short slipway suitable for small day-boats or dinghies. It was originally owned by the Church and then sold, in recent years, to Waldringfield Sailing Club. During summer weekends, if the tide is right, there will often be a car and small trailer there, negotiating a launch or a recovery. However, the slipway is breaking up and access is limited by the tide, so there is not so much use of this site for launching.

The Ramsholt Quay is only the same size as Methersgate, with a narrow dinghy ramp providing access to the river for dinghies. However, with so many yachts on moorings at Ramsholt, with George in his Harbour Master's Office (a shelter on a broken yacht) or aboard his own sailing

boat, there is generally some action at Ramshot in the summer months, subject to weather. As many as fifty dinghies crowd the hard-standing, though many of these are owned by yachtsmen from far away, using the slip for launching.

The three hards at Felixstowe will have to wait until the next issue but it is sad to record that there were two deaths as the result of a boating accident there during November. Two fishermen from the Midlands, neither apparently wearing a life-jacket, were lost when their dinghy over-turned as they returned to their yacht, following a lunch ashore. The lethal combination of a swift tide, and cold water, somehow overwhelmed them both. The river gives a great deal of pleasure to many types of boating people, provides a challenging place for children to learn about boats and sailing, and gives the opportunity for splendid racing. It has to be remembered, however, that the fast flowing tide, and the muddy banks, are potentially dangerous places. Those who use the river need to take care.

There were some excellent lectures this year from Deben Yacht Club members who had recently ventured afar. Two Woodbridge speakers told of family voyages: one from Baltimore to the Bay of Fundy, down to the Caribbean, and back to Baltimore; the other from Mahon to northern Sardinia and then a circumnavigation of Corsica. Other speakers are to tell of adventure in Normandy and along our local coast. Two boats from Waldringfield, at least, are worthy of reports. One has found its way up to Croatia for the winter and the other remains in Sardinia, with plans to go further south this year. The East Anglian recently held a piece about some good

seamanship when an Ipswich sailing boat had rescued the occupants of a ditched seaplane. Such widespread reports are evidence of good seamanship, with happy and successful outcomes. They go some way to compensate for the two sad deaths on our river. All take care.

Denzil Cowdry

FISHY SECRETS OF THE DEBEN'S SALTMARSH

In Suffolk there are over 950 hectares of saltmarsh along the edge of river estuaries. The plants that live in this hostile environment are specially adapted to the extreme conditions – they can survive being submerged in seawater twice a day. Saltmarsh is well known as an important location for water birds to feed, loaf and breed, but what is less well known is how important it is for young fish. To find out more, I joined Simon Read (River Deben Association), Steve Colclough (Environment Agency) and Janina Gray from Kings College, for a visit to Sutton Marsh on the River Deben to investigate.

We placed nets at both ends of one of the larger creeks and, with an ebbing tide, a seine net was dragged from one end of the creek to the other. The fish caught in this fine net were captured, identified and released. A few were retained (alive) to confirm identification. Amazingly, in this small area 77 fish were caught, including 27 bass, 37 common goby, 11 grey mullet, a three-spined stickleback and a flounder. The bass had either hatched in 2006 or 2007; the others were all from this year [2007].



Commenting

on the catch, Steve said: "Given the relatively small area of saltmarsh we fished, there is no doubt that Sutton Marsh must be making a vital contribution to fish fry production in the upper Deben estuary."

Saltmarsh is under threat as sea levels rise (approx 4mm p.a. in South East England). It is estimated that 2% of English saltmarsh is lost each year as it is "squeezed" against the man-made sea defences around our rivers. In addition, there is continual pressure to reclaim saltmarsh for development and one of the unexpected consequences of this loss is the impact on already fragile fish stocks.

Innovative work to create new saltmarsh can be seen on the River Orwell at the Trimley realignment scheme (between Looptit Lake and the Suffolk Wildlife Trust Trimley reserve). But with 40% of Suffolk saltmarsh in the Deben, it is essential that conservation work focuses on retaining the precious resources in this estuary, while work continues elsewhere to create more of this vital habitat.

Bill Parker

(First published, under different title, in "Suffolk Coast and Heaths Newsletter".

Winter 2007-2008)

INCANDESCENT WITH LOVE

When David and I embarked on our honeymoon from Ramsholt in *Try Again* on 1 August 1981, there were those who noted the boat's name and assumed we were both on our second time around. A sweet idea, but not so. *Try Again* has sailed under that name since 1861, and so for her we are just another chapter. And nearly, the finale.

Wedding anniversary 2007, and I underestimated the volatility of methylated spirit while lighting our Taylors stove. Blazing meths was on the cabin sole, then in the oily and inaccessible bilges, lighting a fire under the engine.

Dave successfully zapped the initial blaze with a small powder extinguisher. I'd dealt with my flaming arm, and plunged my hand in the dog's water bowl. But alas, it became apparent after a minute or so that the roiling mist in the cabin was not just creamy coloured powder, it was also black smoke. It was thick and unpleasant, and we couldn't see or feel our way to a second extinguisher,

We were anchored in the Pyefleet, quite close to *Jacoba*, the barge belonging to Simon Read - and his many and large fire extinguishers. David despatched me in our inflatable to enlist his assistance (and

to offload the dog). For once, the outboard started for me first time.

By the time we got back with the big guns - three 5kg extinguishers, of powder, CO2 and water - the fire was well alight. Simon and Dave let it have the lot and succeeded in putting it out – following with endless buckets of sea to cool it all down.

At this point, a rescue helicopter and inshore lifeboat appeared. The possibility of a Big Bang or some other disaster had occurred to me, and I'd asked a passing yachtsman (former naval officer, what luck!) to call the emergency services. In the event, we'd dealt with the emergency element, but their presence and advice, and that of the yachtsman who stayed with us throughout, was very reassuring.

Try Again was uninhabitable, a mini moonscape covered in dust. We decamped to *Jacoba*, and there we stayed for the next few days. Ros soothed and fed us, and the sun shone. Reeking of smoke and powder, we started clearing the mess with Simon's help and his magic pot of degreaser.

We assessed the obvious damage: the engine, its box, and every bit of wiring and plastic hose within two metres of the seat of the fire. We rang the insurers –
– Yachtmasters, at Ferry Quay - the day after the fire. They made supportive noises and agreed the wisdom of a tow. Although our rig and steering were undamaged, we had no engine, electrics,

pumps or radio, and at that stage, were not sure of the extent of any hull damage under the engine. So, one fine morn, Tam Grundy popped down from the *Deben* for us. You can't beat a good tow up the *Wallet* - no engine noise or sails to tend, and Tam's speakers giving out a fine selection of music some fifty feet ahead of us.

Back at Ferry Quay, an insurance assessor was summoned. The engine did not look well. A contemporary document described a previous *Try Again* engine, after a sinking in the Channel Islands in 1933... as 'a heap of rust', and now we had another heap, this time oily black where once it had been painted bright blue. Weird twisted wires hung off it into a shiny slick beneath, and plastic shells on electronic gadgetry drooped limply at the edges.

The extinguisher powder had rapidly corroded the surface of any metal it touched, and despite thorough cleaning, little caches of it still existed. The echo sounder and radio had melted, as well as sundry items under the cockpit sole, where the fire's exhaust gases had been



concentrated. The fuel tanks were intact – just – but plastic scrubbing brushes had not withstood the heat well at all, and had frizzled into odd shapes, whilst coils of synthetic rope had toasted in parts, and hardened.

It took a month or two to put together the insurance claim. No-one wanted to hazard a guess as to whether the old engine could be resuscitated, so we factored in a new one. By the time the replacements, repairs and restorations had been costed at commercial rates, the claim exceeded the value of the boat. The insurers offered a lump sum considerably less than this, but fair, we felt, and more than enough to cover the essential expenditures: a new Nanni engine and complete rewiring, to be installed (bliss!) by local professionals. We shall economise by doing what we can ourselves – no change there then.

I've spared you the tedious details of how everything went so much more wrong than usual, and what precautions we will take in future. A number of people have approached us with their own concerns and questions on paraffin stoves and fire afloat. I won't say we're happy to share our experience, but you know what I mean. Do contact us if you want to know more. Is it preferable to have a gas explosion and a quick end, or a slow messy fire? This question continues to fuel debate. Meanwhile we shall persevere with the paraffin stove. Suffice it to say that the *Try Again* diet will probably feature salads and cold drinks for the 2008 season.

Melanie Poole

THE BODIES ON THE BEACH.

During World War II the Suffolk coast, for much of the time, was in the front line. It was mostly aerial battles fought overhead, but there were often sea fights as well. At some point, probably in around 1943, burnt bodies of men wearing German uniforms were washed up on Shingle Street beach. No one knew where they came from, but at the time it was not thought to be unusual.

After the War, Hammond Innes wrote a novel about Germans landing at Shingle Street and this seems to have started the ball rolling for a legend started that there had been a full-scale invasion on the Suffolk coast. Over the decades the myth was fuelled by a television programme, two books and countless letters to the *East Anglian Daily Times*, with "first-hand" accounts from people who thought they might have heard or seen something.

The most adamant campaigner was an Aldeburgh man who had been in the Home Guard and, at some point in September 1940, had heard a rumour that the Germans had landed in the Shingle Street-Bawdsey area. In the era of total censorship on news, many incidents, firefights and "bodies on the beach," were never explained. Over the years, imaginations ran wild and rolled minor incidents over into one major event.

At a Bawdsey Haven Yacht Club talk at Bawdsey Manor, given by John Warwicker MBE, he explained the background to the legend about Germans landing at Shingle Street in 1940. This incredible story had its origins in the misinformation put out by the British

Government at the beginning of the War. One ploy, in a desperate attempt to deter an invasion by the German troops massed at Calais, had been to try and persuade the Germans that the British army could "set fire" to the sea.

Later, in 1942, pouring oil on the water and setting fire to it was experimented with, but it was not done on the East Coast and didn't work anyway. The Germans had already experimented with this idea in the Baltic with a total lack of success. It is doubtful that the Germans took much notice of these carefully-planned rumours. They were much more concerned that they had failed to get control of the sky in the Battle of Britain. If they had wanted to make a landing on British soil they would have tried Kent, Sussex or even some open part of the Suffolk coast. They certainly would not have picked a difficult place such as Shingle Street, which would have meant coming inshore between the off-shore sandbanks and exposing themselves to attack from the air and from coastal ships at Harwich.

In 1940, the Government organized Cromwell Day as a full-scale rehearsal for repelling an invasion. This brought out the weakness in Britain's anti-invasion plans, but it was a rather poorly organized exercise and not everyone realized it was a rehearsal. At King's Lynn they got the wrong end of the stick and started blowing up the dock area. All this was not really helped by colourful stories being put out to kid the Germans that we could do them terrible harm if they tried to land on British soil. After the war the Government let it be known that some "news items" had in fact been propaganda hoaxes. At once many people jumped to the conclusion that this was a "cover-up" to hide even darker secrets.

Most people living in the Hollesley area during the war, or who had family in the area, remained firmly convinced that Shingle Street had been remarkably peaceful. People were moved out because the shingle beach was mined, and at some stage the army took it over and an experimental bomb was dropped in 1943 on the empty hamlet. The German invasion myth claims that a ship-refuelling pipeline was built off Shingle Street and oil had been pumped into the sea and set alight. As a boy of about ten, I went on Shingle Street beach, just after the mines were cleared, and there was no sign that there had ever been an oil jetty there. Nor does anyone in the district remember such a structure.

After the war, people who had moved into the area loved the story of a "German Invasion" and the rumour refused to die. However when John Gummer MP got the official Government papers released it was found there was virtually nothing there about Shingle Street. In 2004, BBC Radio did a major research project and came to the final conclusion that nothing of importance had happened at Shingle Street during World War II. The real mystery about Shingle Street is why there was ever a mystery in the first place.

Robert Simper

VOYAGE TO THE BACKWATERS IN A SOLO DINGHY, AUGUST 1965

The Solo dinghy is an interesting design by Jack Holt. They are still being built and raced to this day, though they had an unfortunate confrontation with the Dutch designed "OK", which was cheaper and much nastier, but captured the fleet

market for many years. Both have about 12 feet length, both have low freeboard, but the "OK" has an uncomfortably low boom. The "OK" has a very small cockpit.

The Solo design is strangely suited to passage making. She has ample room for two crew in addition to the helmsman; is self-bailing; has built-in buoyancy and is easily-rightable in a capsized. Stowage is limited to what can be fitted into the 8-inch diameter screw door on the forward buoyancy tank.

Sail efficiency is restricted in a boat without a jib, but this is compensated by the Solo mainsail having numerous full-length battens. These battens in fact extend outside the trailing edge of the sail, and each pocket is fitted with a lanyard with which the battens can be put into compression so that the sail has an airfoil curve. On going about, the battens flip over so that the opposite curve is developed.

A further feature of the Solo sail arrangements is unique for a small dinghy, the boom may be rolled around its forward pin, and this can be done single-handed while under sail by using a pulley and line integral with the boom at the forward end. If the lower batten is to be removed this is of course a more difficult manoeuvre.

In the summer of '64 I had been sailing with a friend at least as heavy as myself - say 12 stone, on the North East coast in a stiff off-shore wind. We were frequently planing as we reached northwards from Tynemouth past Cullercoats to St Mary's



lighthouse, and again on the return leg. A most invigorating experience. My friend had no opportunity to feel seasick then, as he had previously, with less wind, inside Tynemouth entrance. On that occasion he had implored me to land him on the end of one of the piers. As he jumped from the Solo onto some frequently immersing stone steps, I heard a man with a uniform cap tell him from the top of the steps: "You can't

land here" !

In the summer of 1965, during a period of excellent weather forecasts I was in Woodbridge with the Solo looking for a crew to share the experience of a trip to the Walton Backwaters. I met a pleasant woman in "Loaves and Fishes" Woodbridge, with a healthy looking daughter of about 17 years waiting to go to University, and somehow the conversation extended from the weather to the possibility of a sailing trip. The woman explained that her daughter had never sailed, but would like to learn. Thus the crew arrived.

We towed the dinghy behind my Beetle to a lane I had noticed on the OS map, just downstream of Pin Mill. I had reconnoitred and found that parking and launching would be no problem. The launch took place at mid-tide on the ebb. Forecast was good and the headwind into the Backwaters had a fail-safe element.

We found the Pye End buoy and were making good progress up the entrance buoys, even passing yachts tacking with us into the Backwaters. The wind was

warm and quite fresh. I remember passing buoy number 4, from which Felixstowe docks look quite distant, when there was a (to me) ominous "crack", and she would not steer.

I naturally said nothing to spoil my crew's obvious enjoyment, but, on examination over my shoulder, I observed that the rudder cheeks had opened up. The rudder was virtually useless.

Quietly I asked my crew to please pass me the paddle. I explained that we should have to modify our plan. Removing the rudder and steering with the paddle, we soon reached a shore that resembled the surface of the moon. There was, however, just enough sand to enable us to walk up the beach and seek shelter amongst the hillocks. I removed our food which was packed in a large water-tight tin. We ate it all and finished our thermos of coffee.

I then explained how we should proceed,

and miraculously all went according to this revised plan. I removed all battens, rolled the sail right down so that we had a triangle barely 5ft high. Thus rigged we ran back into the Orwell and right up to our starting point; traileder up and returned homeward in the Beetle. My crew said that she never knew sailing was such an exciting sport, and I think she was telling the truth.

Later, when trying to impress on my father what a near disaster we had escaped, I showed him on the lawn how the relatively thin paddle shaft had been bending as I steered. As I demonstrated, the paddle finally broke. He scarfed it up for me, painted our name on it and I am using it to this day.

Peter Uloth

THE OAK BEFORE THE ASH

*If the oak before the ash,
Then we'll only have a splash.*

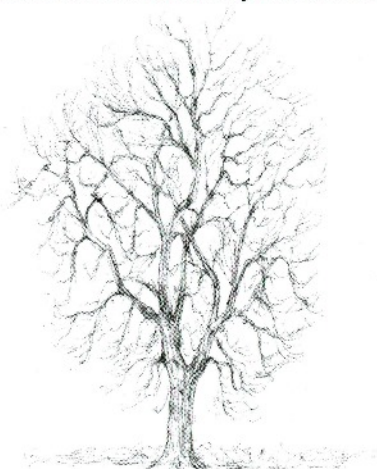
*If the ash before the oak,
Then we'll surely have a soak.*

These lines are among a wealth of country rhymes which have been used by our forbears to predict the summer weather. A more personal version might be:

*Ash before oak, the lady wears a cloak.
Oak before ash, the lady wears a sash.*



POLLARD OAK



COMMON ASH

We are left with the unmistakable impression that if we have had a warm dry spring with oak trees coming into leaf early then the rest of the summer will surely be warm and dry also. Last spring, the warmth of the weather in March and April and the consequent early appearance of leaves on the oaks, coupled with the sight of the bare skeletal branches of the ash trees well into the month of May, made us optimistic that a sizzling summer was ahead. How wistfully we thought of those dreams as we waded through the puddles or shivered on the beach in July and August!

We should have taken note of another piece of folklore which allowed our ancestors to have it both ways:

*If the oak comes out before the ash,
'Twill be a year of mix and splash
If the ash comes out before the oak,
'Twill be a year of fire and smoke (ie:
drought).*

So, what are the facts here? Does the ash ever come into leaf before the oak? What environmental factors are affecting the timing of leaf break in the two species? Is global warming having an effect? One thing is certain, folklore is contradictory and weather prediction needs a more scientific approach.

Scientists at the Centre for Hydrology and Ecology, at Monks Wood in Cambridgeshire, have records going back to the eighteenth century. Then, the race between the oak and ash was a far more equal one, with the ash winning 40% of the time. But, climate change with warmer, drier springs has made that a very unequal competition and oak now wins 90% of the time. In fact, it is worse than that, the gap between them has been

increasing over the past 50 years. In the 1950's the average gap was only a few days, more recently it has increased to nearly twenty days, with oak being over 30 days earlier in particularly warm springs.

One of the factors could be that ash trees have extensive but shallower roots than the oaks and therefore need damper conditions. We can observe for ourselves that even in the dry, sandy soils of the Suffolk Sandlings we have large areas of oak-wood such as Staverton Thicks, but we have to go to the wetter, cooler, steep-sided limestone valleys of the Peak District and the Yorkshire Dales to find significant stands of ash woodland. The ash trees in Suffolk tend to be in mixed woodland where their silvery, bare branches stand out against the fresh, rich, green of the other trees already in leaf. The late appearance of the ash leaves has been with us for a long time. Dorothy Wordsworth observed in her Grasmere Journal on May 18th 1800, "The mountains from this window look much greener and I think the valley is more green than ever. The corn begins to show itself. The ashes are still bare."

It appears that oak is the species that is changing, coming into leaf earlier responding to the changing climate, whereas the ash is trapped in the springtime of years ago. The headline, "Oak and Ash Trees in Darwinian Struggle for Supremacy", tells the story, not only of last summer but of one of the fundamental rules of nature, "adapt or perish – the survival of the fittest".

By responding to temperature changes and tolerating lack of rainfall, the early emergence of the young leaves in oak trees makes the most of the warmth of an

early spring. It is a southern tree, extending well into southern Europe and Britain is near to the northern edge of its range. It is, therefore, also flexible and this pattern can ensure that the leaves do not emerge too early in a cold, late spring. But it can be caught out, as can many other species such as magnolia and wisteria, when soft, early leaves and flowers are damaged by a late frost.

The ash on the other hand, is a northern species and it is not lured by false hopes of warmth. It sticks to its biological seasonal clock and that is determined by day length. Its richly coloured purple and green, wind-pollinated flowers appear before the leaves and the bursting of its dull, black leaf buds can be delayed even further by dry conditions. In the high northern valleys, late frosts are common and the ash has survived in these habitats through caution. It is usually the last tree to come into leaf in the spring and among the first to lose leaves in the autumn. Indeed landscape-designers in the eighteenth century warned against planting ash trees too near to the grand house as the bare branches created such a bleak impression in spring and autumn when other trees had such a variety of colourful foliage.

What will be the long term consequences of these environmental changes? Will we lose the elegant pale-trunked, feather-foliaged ash trees from our mixed Suffolk woodlands? The Woodland Trust's view is that ash woodland and ash trees in open country will continue to flourish. However, in mixed woodland, the early arrival of leaves on oaks, will quickly produce a thick canopy and deprive the ash trees of light and also the oak-roots will take up more of the available water. This will hamper the growth of the trees

themselves but also of the community of insects, mosses and lichens which depend on the ash leaves, bark and wood for their survival. The ash only supports 68 species compared with the oak's 400, but these members of the ash ecosystem may be forced to move north to find suitable habitats.

The future of not just the ash trees, but of many species in our Suffolk woodlands, is uncertain. We are perhaps more vulnerable to climate change than more westerly areas of Britain. Many of our trees are water-stressed in dry summers, particularly on the light soils of the Sandlings. The Woodland Trust is co-ordinating data collection and needs concerned people like ourselves to observe natural events in woods, gardens and parks.

You can find out about the first sightings of seasonal events such as the first oak leaves or frogspawn from The Woodland Trust's Springwatch Survey on www.naturescalendar.org.uk where you can also add your own observations.

If we can understand the effects of climate change on our own local environment in detail - on how it will change the natural world to which we are accustomed and how it will affect the seasonal changes which we expect from year to year - then perhaps we will be more likely to respond to calls for changes in our lifestyles which could ameliorate these effects. Perhaps one day in the future, the ash will again be before the oak.

Jenny James

OPEN LETTER from Robert Simper to John Gummer MP. 24 Nov 07.

Dear Mr Gummer,

As I live on the East Coast of England, I spent most of November 8-9 wondering if the tidal surge passing down the North Sea might flood my home and property and totally disrupt, or even end, my life. Luckily this did not happen, but I am concerned that central Government, tucked away in the warm corridors of power in central London, will continue to think that their policy of not keeping up the sea defences is justified. We absolutely must have more, and better, defences if eastern England is to stay on the map. Future generations will think we were a weak lot to ever have indulged with muddled thinking with curious titles such as "managed re-alignment".

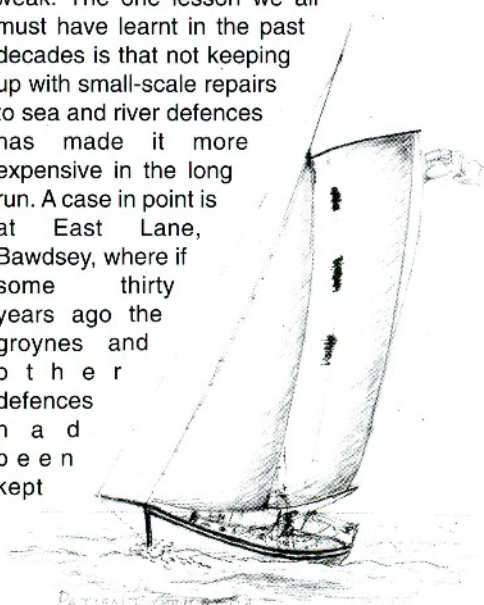
I am completely appalled at recent reports that Wallasea Island in Essex is to be flooded as a bird reserve. This appears to be a total waste of an important national food-producing area without any sound reason. All evidence suggests that with all the natural estuaries on the East Coast, and numerous nature reserves along the Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex coasts, the actual bird habitat areas are probably larger than they have been for the past five hundred years.

The world shortage of wheat last year, due to North America turning to bio-fuels and a prolonged drought in Australia, has highlighted how extremely vulnerable the United Kingdom is to relying on imported food. The loss of 4000 tons of wheat, which would have been produced on Wallasea Island, is very serious. Think of the number of people that this would have fed and instead, expensive wheat has to be bought from overseas. When the United Kingdom purchases food on the

world market it deprives some Third World country of much-needed food.

Defending towns and farmland against erosion from the sea is just as important as defending bird reserves and wild life, but it is just possible that some conservation groups are actually indulging in empire-building under the pretence of the "need for wet land". There does not seem to be any shortage of wetland bird habitat at present.

One policy that central Government can put in place, at no cost, is to end the wasteful practice of making reports which are of no practical use to anyone. In the past decade a series of pointless reports have been completed to back up central Government's non-action policy. The money, although comparatively small, that has been wasted on reports should have been spent on funding small-scale coastal or river defences. All future reports MUST be positive, drawing up possible solutions to local problems where defences are weak. The one lesson we all must have learnt in the past decades is that not keeping up with small-scale repairs to sea and river defences has made it more expensive in the long run. A case in point is at East Lane, Bawdsey, where if some thirty years ago the groynes and other defences had been kept



up, the sea would not have broken in that is now threatening a whole section of the coast: Bawdsey, Shingle Street, Hollesley and Alderton. Several million pounds worth of property is now under threat.

It would be impossible to stop all erosion, but in the twentieth century numerous successful coastal defence schemes have shown that the sea can, even with rising sea levels, be held back. There is no shortage of sea, we are surrounded by it, but there is an enormous shortage of land where people can live, work and relax. With a rapidly rising population we (people and wildlife) need all the space we can get. There are no magic lines where the sea would ever stop; it will never stop attacking us. If the sea is allowed to take the seventeen towns and villages along the Suffolk coast - which appears to be Government thinking with its policy towards the River Blyth - then the coast will simply move inland and take the next seventeen villages. The population would move inland and add to an already overcrowded situation. It is a national responsibility, whatever colour of Government is in power, to defend the land we all live in.

Yours sincerely,
Robert Simper

The editor is grateful to Robert, our Vice Chairman, for allowing his letter to be reproduced here

Dear Sir,

Regarding your "Infrastructure of the UK" article, you quite rightly assume it to include the boating and other activities on the River Deben. Well done! Why then, is it not the concern of the River Deben

Association as to the behaviour of the growing number of river users who persistently exceed the speed limit?

Other river "authorities", such as Brightlingsea, Walton Backwaters and the River Orwell, to name but three, are concerned enough to support the imposition of speed limits and, what's more, to even lower the maximum speeds to below the eight knots which applies to parts of the River Deben and, I might add, are totally ignored.

The so-called Green environmental lobby which is so vociferous about all things these days, which I'm sure your River Deben Association subscribes to, seems to totally ignore this growing menace. Do I need to point out the danger to riverbanks, wildlife, plus the pollution, CO2 emissions and most of all to other river users, especially those in small dinghies?

I am aware that you are not an "authority" but is it not time you got your priorities right?

Yours faithfully,

Derek Downer

Editor's Note: It is a rare pleasure to receive a letter addressed to the Editor, especially on such an important issue, and I am grateful to Mr Downer for it. It is true that the RDA is not an "authority" on this issue. In fairness, however, to the work of the Committee, I would draw Mr Downer's attention to Chairman's Notes of the Spring 2007 edition to demonstrate that we share his concern. If he has any suggestion on the enforcement of a speed limit which has not already been tried, we would be very interested to hear it.

RIVER DEBEN ASSOCIATION

ANNUAL ACCOUNTS 2007

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE

	2007			2006	
Income	£	£	£	£	£
Subscriptions inc Arrears	2,975			2,723	
Donations	385			400	
Sutton Shore Project				250	
Bank interest	394			288	
Refreshments	73				
PABA Consolidation	174			150	
		4,001			3,811
Expenditure					
Postage	471			269	
Secretary's Honorarium	100				
Offices services/stationary	221			99	
Newsletters	802			780	
Other Printing	164			9	
Hire of hall/meeting room	115			55	
Meeting costs	30			220	
Insurance	190			-	
Civic Trust	184			175	
Other	200			5	
Refund Overpaid Subs	24				
Maritime Woodbridge	256				
Woodbridge Regatta				250	
Support for Ramsholt Access				294	
Bank Charges				15	
Web Page	178			150	
		2,934			2,321
Excess of income over expenditure		£ 1,067			<u>£ 1,490</u>
BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2007					
Assets					
Bank	13638			12,572	
Cash	86			73	12,645
		13724			
Less Liabilities					
Creditors					
Advance Subscriptions	38			68	
General Creditors	216			174	
		254			242
Net Assets		£ 13,470			<u>£ 12,403</u>
Representing					
Balance brought forward	12403			10,913	
Excess of Income	1067			1,490	
Balance carried forward		£ 13,470			<u>£ 12,403</u>

C J L Brown

21 Feb 08.

C J L Brown (Hon Treasurer)

I have examined the papers and vouchers of the association for the year ended 31 December 2005 and confirm that the above income and expenditure account and the balance sheet are in accordance therewith.

T. J. Moorby

21 Feb '08

T J Moorby, Chartered Accountant (Hon Independent Examiner)
Spinney Hill, Fitzgerald Road, Woodbridge

Notes to the accounts:

1. Subscriptions: The subscription income in 2007 was £2975. This was an increase on last year. About 15% of members are still not paying the increased subscriptions approved for 2004. A proportion of the income paid was arrears.
2. The subscription income that the membership represents was £3052. The Association is grateful for the generous donations paid by some supporters.
3. Statements will again be sent to members this year in April. These will show how the last subscription was paid so that any action to ensure the correct payment this year should be clear.
4. Please remember that subscriptions are due each year at the **beginning of April**. Would those paying by Bankers Order please check and if necessary change the date on which it is paid as well as the amount paid if that is not correct. **The Association is not able to change standing orders of members.**
The subscription rates due in 2008 are: Single Member £4, Couple £6 and Association £15.

THE RIVER DEBEN ASSOCIATION

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

To be held at

Woodbridge Community Hall

On

Friday 25th April 2008 at 7.30pm

The AGM will be followed by
a talk given by

Mr. Steven Colclough

*Senior Technical Officer (Fisheries)
with the Environment Agency*

entitled

The Deben's Fish