

RIVER DEBEN  
*Association*

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RDA complacency?  
Editor warns of  
new battles ahead

Muddle of the mud...

Return of the barges

History man outlines  
Deben past

Stirring tales of  
lifeboat heroism

Melton path impass

AUTUMN 2003

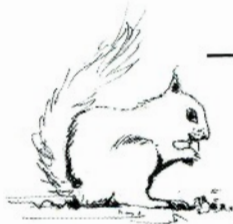
RIVER DEBEN ASSOCIATION OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE June 2003

<b>Chairman</b>	Denzil Cowdry, The Mews House, 105 New Street, Woodbridge. IP12 1DZ	01394 383625	fay.den@talk21.com
<b>Treasurer</b>	Christopher Brown, 4 June Avenue, Ipswich. IP1 4LT	01473 259674	cbrown3323@aol.com
<b>Secretary</b>	Wendy Brown, 4 June Avenue, Ipswich. IP1 4LT	01473 259674	cbrown3323@aol.com
<b>Press Secretary</b>	Rosemary Schlee, Deben Lodge, Melton Road, Woodbridge. IP12 1NH	01394 382740	
<b>Newsletter Editor</b>	Michael Burr, Grove Farm House, Little Bealings, Woodbridge IP13 6LT	01473 626549	m@ghouseparty.co.uk
<b>Felixstowe Ferry</b>	David White, 6 Coniston Close, Felixstowe. IP11 9SW	01394 283972	
<b>History</b>	Robert Simper, Plum Tree Hall, Ramsholt, Woodbridge IP12 3AD	01394 411273	simper@ramsholt.freeserve.co.uk
<b>Rowing</b>	Paul Lacey, 4 The Granary, Tidemill Way, Woodbridge IP12 1BY	01394 386481	lacey.paul@virgin.net
<b>Litter</b>	Joanne Masters, Hillhouse, Sutton Road, Bromeswell. IP12 1QU	01394 383825	
<b>Wildfowlers</b>	Adrian Judge, 29 Breadfield Street, Woodbridge IP12 4NH	01394 383350	adrian.judge@virgin.net
<b>SCDC Liaison</b>	Anni Healey, Jesters, 7A Burkitt Road, Woodbridge IP12 4JU	01394 382291	
<b>Water Ski</b>	Wayne Johnson, 10 Hunters Ride, Martlesham Heath IP5 3SQ	01473 410341	wayne@eswsc.co.uk
	Anthony Mason, 1 Hemley Hall Cottages, Hemley, Woodbridge IP12 4QF	01473 736740	anthonymason_uk@yahoo.co.uk
	Simon Read, Barge Jacoba, Robertson's Boat Yard, Lime Kiln Quay, Woodbridge IP12 1BD	01394 384060	simon3@imap.mdx.ac.uk
	Anne Moore, 2 Grundisburgh Road, Woodbridge IP12 4HG	01394 383559	
	Edward Stanford, 21 Ipswich Road, Woodbridge IP12 4BS	01394 386362	

RIVER DEBEN  
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NEWSLETTER  
AUTUMN 2003

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**Editorial**

Dear member, what follows is not a comfortable view, for editors of such newsletters as this are there to confront

and, by encouragement, to convene a better way. The RDA, after a notable success on land, has failed in its duty to the river in a number of regards and I believe we need to address this as a

serious matter or the RDA will become just another comfortable club that does little of value - Terry Davey's letter covers abuses that have been with us some time. The RDA was assembled as a *pressure group*, originally to prevent private privilege bearing on the rights of all on the Deben - it was not formed to get into bed with government in whatever form it might appear; indeed precisely the reverse for we need to be presenting our view of the river not rehashed views of theirs. Most certainly it should never be turning its back on abuses on the river for the craven attitude of addressing such being 'too difficult' - being a pressure group is no cosy position - Edmund Burke's attributed view "that it only needs good men to stand by for evil to prosper" should be our watchword.

Government agencies have enormous power but bear no responsibility for what they do - who will solve the mess at Waldringfield if the grand plan above the village does not do what the powers imagine and the beach becomes covered with mud? As I write yet more studies are being proposed, an Environment Agency one and two from within Local Government. We are proposing one ourselves and while its aims are local and could indeed be of value *if locally created from local knowledge* we should never let such things make us comfortable and take our aim off the ball - doing studies and holding people to account are wholly different activities, one is comfortable the other requires toughness and clear vision.

Those who live on, have their living from, and enjoy and commit to the river

on a daily basis are those who both have the knowledge and should control how it is handled. Depredations, like random dredging or large pontoons, that may profit one small sector but damage the river as a whole should not be allowed by our Association to occur - yet they have been. In the matter of the dredging below the Tide Mill too many things were allowed to play a significant part in the solution chosen (dragging the mud into the middle of the river), while the proper answer (squirting the mud behind a proper bund on the Sutton shore to rebuild the salt-marsh there - a fraction more expensive) was not used, at which the various 'agencies' connived. If we treat our river like this we deserve to swamp in mud - the swans are up to their knees in it.

All the government agencies have fractured remits and private agendas, and they vie with each other - a unified policy for dredging? The main agency has no remit for dredging yet when one points out to them that every act performed on a living art like a river affects every other they shrug their shoulders and say "not our problem" - 'asked them at the 'show' at Woodbridg and that was the answer I got. Dear member if we are to keep control of our river and how it works for us all then we have to take responsibility for what happens to it. Sitting cosily while 'studies' are done and government agencies plan our fate is not an option, we must be seen to stand resolutely and make what happens directly relevant to what we know and how we live.

It is sad indeed that, for whatever

reason, the truths of the Tide Mill operation were not aired in time - is this because we have gone soft and people don't believe in us any more? - or that the RDA knew and ducked the issue? It may be that the expertise that is necessary to spot horrors of this sort does not reside with us - if that is so it needs to. There are plenty of people on the river who know how it works to seemble a group of knowledge and will to keep the river as we know and understand it. The RDA needs to bring them together to advise it, and they need to know that the RDA will act when so advised for it will fail in similar circumstances unless we strengthen it. If our own study achieves this alone it will have been valuable. We did not need more studies to know that the Tide Mill solution was wrong nor accept the right answer, which was quoted for in its entirety at the time, and if we are to prevent such in the future we, the river users, need to unite in force to see that they do not - excuses are not adequate when we desecrate our river.

Particularly has the speeding problem, now at obscene proportions all the time, been known of and proper solutions been proposed, and ducked. Let us have the courage to address the real issues that sit before us now. Were I living in Waldringfield I would be drafting a legal injunction to enforce full reparation on the Environment Agency should anything at all go wrong with their plans, should they undertake them.

On a much more cheerful subject I have been talking to barge owners who would like to use Woodbridge as a

base, as life at Ipswich is less happy than it used to be. Not all the answers yet but more than a straw in the wind. Barges make the Maldon waterfront a magnificent sight and bring revenue and activity to the town. Many of them are child orientated so the chances of shore-side activity is high - from barges trading in ancient commodities 100 years ago to barges trading in giving children a better view of the world seems to me no bad thing - but there is a long way to go and much public will is needed to bring such ideas to fruit.

The Entrance is fine this year, excellently marked by Trinity House, wide and across the prevailing wind. The shelf is not too fierce but there is only modest draft at LWS. Deben Week seems to have been less well supported this year, I wonder why? Weed on the river, actually long pink hairy monsters, clothes boats bottoms this year to excess - a warmer summer and a cleaner river?

On Bank Holiday morning I was taking our historic yacht-tender out at Waldringfield. Apart from the crush of happy dinghy sailors launching from the yacht-club park, 6 high-powered RIBS appeared behind large SUVs; I mentioned the speed limit to all of them but I fear I was wasting my breath. 30 years ago such 'toys' did not exist while



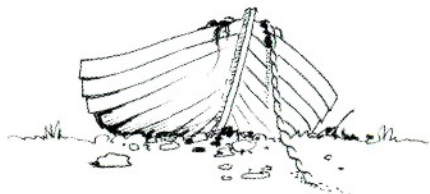
manners in the use of fast craft did - the arrival of one and the lack of the other is not good for so confined a space as The Deben.

In an effort to raise the wildlife profile I have tried to get someone from Suffolk Wildlife to provide us a piece each issue - no-one would - is anyone out there to put the wildlife case?

"Local Council bows to money" could be the headline when we see what has taken place at the Old Mill behind the SCDC offices. Planning guidelines? Rural harmony? Suitability for site and environs? The Deben has been trashed again by the very people who are supposed to be its guardians. These buildings should have been in scale with the site yet money has clearly spoken while incompetence within the Council is known to have played a part - corruption is a strong word but that is what breaking a trust with those you lead and serve is.

**The splendid Jo Masters will conduct the Litter Pick on Sunday morning 19th October - give her a ring to book your spot.**

**Please do not forget to come to the October Public Meeting as advertised on the rear cover. Your support and views are what make the Association valid.**



## Chairman's Notes

Having been on light duties for about half of the six-month period under review I feel slightly fraudulent in making this report: however, long-serving Anthony Mason kept the show on the road, for which I was grateful. A heart attack does spoil your day and certainly the need for a fresh Chairman is reinforced.

Significantly, a well argued letter from Simon Read to the Environment Agency concerning the two alternative proposals for flooding a further area behind the sea-wall at Waldringfield (planned retreat) contributed to the delaying of a decision on the project and to the Agency offering a third, less dramatic solution. With existing breaches of the sea-wall above and below Waldringfield behind which there has been no attempt to sustain intertidal marsh, the case for habitat replacement, eschewed by English Nature, does not stand up. Others may have intervened, particularly walkers who had no wish to see the old sea-wall deliberately breached. On this issue the Environment Agency deserve credit for foresight (the wall is quite weak above Waldringfield) for listening and for doing their best with limited resources.

Less fruitfully, as yet, Rosemary Schlee has collected sufficient evidence of use for a public enquiry, should it be necessary, to have the path directly to the bridge at Melton adopted. It is a pity that the compromise solution of a path just inside the sea-wall for the last 30 yards before Wilford Bridge was never seriously considered by the County and

District Council officers involved or fairly aired in the Press. The compromise gave safer access to the road and reduced the risk of children falling off the old dilapidated wharf, now cleared of undergrowth and thereby posing a new risk. The confusion over the lease, use of the wharf, failure to register the path and unwillingness to compromise is a disgrace. Equally discreditable is a failure to either legalise cycling or to prevent it by building stiles. We approached SCDC about legalising cycling with pedestrian priority (i.e. cyclists dismount as necessary) on the Melton-Woodbridge footpath and other paths, several years ago.

The fine weather has brought water-jet skiers and motor-boats into the river in greater numbers, with more launching at Waldringfield since car park charges at Felixstowe make that venue less attractive. Waldringfield Fairway Committee are taking a lead over installing a part-time, even occasional, water-bailiff harbour-master for the river as a whole, empowered to apprehend those who break speed limits. This will have the support of your Association as when mooted a few years ago by Kyson Fairway Committee. The bailiff could work under the flag of the RDA. A small levy on mooring fees, marina berths and parking fees for shore-bound craft could provide the bulk of the funding. The Whisstocks site remains derelict though the owner has applied for a renewal of an earlier planning permission for a boatyard, offices, restaurant and chandlery. It is not known whether he intends to proceed. The SCDC Woodbridge Waterfront Development Plan is still in limbo. The

Association have written to support the comprehensive Woodbridge Society submission and to request reference by the Council back to the Woodbridge Waterfront Group submission, virtually our contribution, at the time of the Whisstocks enquiry. I have an appointment to see the newly appointed Woodbridge Town Co-ordinator to make sure that waterfront issues have been fully explained to her.

The rising mud levels at Woodbridge remain a contentious issue and properly licensed attempts to move relatively small quantities of it from Bass Dock, Town Quay, the Cruising Club Jetty and DYC Launch Ramp have caused interest and some adverse comment. Members with long memories will recall the Association's Millennium initiative to pump surplus mud onto the decaying reed-bed behind the Station to create a public place with river views. This was stymied by pollution problems and by nature lovers who continue to let the reed bed deteriorate and to be encroached upon. Equally logical for the disposal of mud is the current suggestion to pump it across the river to the slowly eroding marsh opposite.

Your Association may incorporate a feasibility study on such a project into a wider critique of overall environmental management for the Deben, subject to a suitable grant being obtained to cover overheads. Incidentally, feasibility is not about pumping methods or equipment, the latter being readily available. The problem is to obtain approval from the Environmental Agency, English Nature, RSPB, the Crown Commissioners and

landowners.

The Editor, and others, take issue with the Town Quay Trust for adopting the conventional course of dragging mud from the quay out to the river centre. From inception the Town Quay project will have taken about two years. With structural contracts let long delays were unthinkable. Personally, I give the Trust praise for repairing a wharf that has been largely untouched for 150 years. There has been no major improvement to the waterfront since an American benefactor paid to have the Tide-mill repaired in the 70's. However, we do need to establish the will and the method to recharge existing marsh with surplus mud. Inevitably, rising water levels and breached sea walls over decaying marsh will continue to cause light material to deposit where it is not wanted.

I obviously keep in touch with the Alde and Ore Association with whom we have many common causes. Their response to the problems created by silting and sea-wall breaching is to establish a formal relationship with the agencies which they call the Estuary Planning Partnership, to meet monthly. They have a strong Committee and many members who want to be involved. If their formal approach proves to be more successful than our informal contacts made for specific purposes we can do the same. Volunteers for our own Committee who are interested in river management are always welcome.

I have had an unusual summer with little sailing. However, I have been

fishing. Since I am not seen as a fisherman I have been largely unrecognised even when hailing friends. Two scenes are well recalled - Simon Read thumping down river with the tide at the helm of his barge "Jacoba", with a lively crew, en-route for Maldon and the annual clean-up in dry dock and, on another sunny day, Mike Burn, apparently alone, at the helm of his lovely canoe yawl "Sheila"pullir hard in a stiff breeze, an obviously happy man. I hope you enjoyed equally pleasurable occasions.

(We are happy to see Denzil in such fine state. Ed)

## Treasurer's Note

Yet another note from your Treasurer. The last newsletter contained a promise that I would not make the "note from your treasurer" a regular feature. This

is still my intention but I am left with no alternative this time. You may recall that a resolution was to be put to the membership at the annual meeting concerning subscriptions. Well this was done and passed in April.

**Will members who pay by bankers order therefore inform their Bank of the new subscriptions these are: Single members £4, couples who are members £6, and associations £15. These new amounts are applicable to any subscriptions paid after the 31st December 2003. Members**





**paying by cheque or cash please note the new amounts.**

It would be uneconomic to send each member a reminder, as it would cost a substantial part of the annual subscription to do it. Thank you in advance for responding to this request and for your support. It will greatly assist with the administration of the association.

Chris Brown

## **Committee Meeting Minutes**

Wendy Brown

### **20th March 2003**

**Present:** Denzil Cowdry (chairman), Chris Brown, Rosemary Schlee, Anni Healey, Mike Burn, Simon Read, Robert Simper, Anne Moore, and Wendy Brown.

**Apologies:** David White, Anthony Mason and Paul Lacey.

**Minutes of the 30/01/03 meeting:** Were accepted as an accurate record.

**Matters Arising:** Denzil reported that a Planning Brief was being prepared for the Whisstocks site which, after publication, will be followed by public consultation. Denzil said that drag dredging at the Woodbridge Town Quay would take place during April. Rosemary asked committee members to protest about the blocking of the footpath at Wilford Bridge.

**Planning:** the following were reported on:

- (a) The Wilford Bridge enclosure
- (b) The removal of wrecks from the River Deben

(c) The new fencing at Melton Boatyard which stops immediate access to the river

(d) The encroachment on the designated wildlife and pond site at the Deben Mill housing development

(e) The outstanding debt of £70,000 for the Millennium Green at Felixstowe Ferry

**Treasurer's Report:** Chris circulated the audited accounts. He said that he had made enquiries about direct debit payment and that it was too expensive to be appropriate for RDA.

**Simon Read's project and funding:** Simon said he would like to expand on his proposal for a project concerned with managed retreat of the River Deben and offered to set out his ideas in a draft plan for the next committee meeting.

**AOB:** Anni suggested that RDA should apply for money from the Market Town's Initiative for the work needed on the wildlife/reed area adjacent to the river or for the removal of wrecks.

### **19th June 2003**

**Present:** Anthony Mason (acting chairman), Chris Brown, Simon Read, Robert Simper, Anne Moore, Paul Lacey, Adrian Judge and Wendy Brown. Ed Stanford was welcomed as a prospective committee member.

**Apologies:** Anni Healey and Denzil Cowdry.

**Minutes of the 20/03/03 meeting:** Anne proposed and Robert seconded that the minutes were accepted as an

accurate record and it was agreed unanimously.

**Matters Arising:** Anni asked that Greg Pritchard, who had volunteered to investigate conservation work on the waterfront reed bed, be told that money might be available for this project through the Market Towns' Initiative. Denzil to be asked to get an update on the Whisstocks' site from SCDC. Anthony read out letters from Denzil and SCDC concerned with the Wilford Bridge footpath controversy. The feeling of the meeting was that the original path should be reinstated.

**Newsletter:** The autumn edition of the newsletter was discussed and a time schedule was agreed. It was decided that the final cost, including postage and packaging, must not exceed £600.



**Simon Read's project to explore the flood prevention strategy for the River Deben:** Committee members had been circulated with Simon's ideas before the meeting. It was considered to be a very positive assignment for the RDA to undertake and the members of the committee were in favour of its going ahead. Anthony suggested a steering group should be formed. Adrian and Robert volunteered to assist Simon get the idea off the ground. Ed suggested that the research carried out

in Essex might be valuable information to build on and that the internet could also be a source of information on saltmarsh.

**AOB:** Anne said that she was not officially a member of the committee as she was not elected at the AGM. The secretary apologised for the mistake. Members unanimously co-opted Anne and Ed on to the committee. Anthon said that the recently formed Felixstowe Ferry Forum was overseeing local issues at the Ferry. As Felixstowe Ferry is also covered by the RDA Anthony and the FFF secretary, Leigh Belcham agreed to exchange information which would be of mutual interest. Committee members thought that the two societies would benefit from having shared representation so that the RDA didn't become too Woodbridge orientated. Anthony said he would contact David White who is an associate member of the FFF.

### **A proposal for a study of the Suffolk Estuarine Strategy as it applies to the River Deben.**

**Intention:** The intention is to be able to reflect upon the proposed changes to the river defences with and on behalf of the local community, to explore what is a very complex subject with the intention of placing the debate more clearly in the public arena.

The River Deben Association has been identified by the Environment Agency as a major consultee representing the views of the local and river-using community. The need to be able to contribute to the debate in an informed

manner and with a standpoint initially prompted this proposal. We should bear in mind that although it does not make sense to gainsay the findings of the research that has already been carried out, it is in the matter of how it is interpreted and acted upon that we have a vital role.

The intended outcome would be a document easily available through public outlets. This would take the form of a pamphlet setting out the basic proposals and the considerations of habitat creation. It would be unwise at this point to express an opinion, however I feel there should be a more searching report where the input into the debate is much more dynamic. The obviously form for this is a website with the proviso that in due course it would be publishable.

My impression is that events are likely to move swiftly and we do not want to become so bogged down in a study as to miss the initiative, we need to make sure that it has built into it both topicality and the ability to be able to respond to matters as they arise. There a great deal at stake and it is important that we be qualified to contribute and moreover be proactive.

**Procedure:** I have responded to the suggestion to keep it simple in the first instance with the provision that we would hope to apply for further funding for a practical outcome on the successful completion of the main study. The difficulty is to identify a form which allows sufficient scope to cover everything and not become unwieldy; our starting point could be three basic sections:

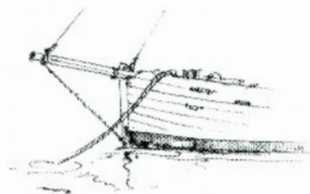
1. What is happening to the river at present and how it is changing.
2. How it has changed historically.
3. How it is likely to look in the future.

The predominant issues of loss of saltmarsh habitat, silting of the upper reaches, erosion and dredging activities should be put into context by this breakdown as would the overarching theme of global warming and the need to upgrade the flood defences.

**Future:** Hopefully we would continue this project by applying our findings to something with a more tangible outcome. I suggest here taking the initiative in the revival of the ferry hard at Woodbridge and the restoration of the ferry causeway as it fringes the upstream edge of the saltmarsh on the Sutton side of the river. This would be an excellent opportunity to explore the potential for using dredging spoil as recharge material for saltmarsh areas currently under threat of erosion. However this should be borne in mind as an ideal development. This would probably be the basis for an application for further funding where there is already strong potential for new partnerships to be developed.

Simon Read is an artist who has lived on the River Deben for the last 23 years he owns a Dutch motorbarge in which he has, with his family, extensively explored the Suffolk and Essex estuarine landscape. This familiarity with the river and it's moods has hugely influenced the projects he has become involved in, which include an 80 metre profile of the River Thames incised into the concrete wall beside the Thames Flood Barrier in 1996 and in 2001 he worked on a commission for the new flood defence wall for Poole Quay, Dorset. In addition to his private practice he

works in Higher Education mainly at Middlesex University and Chelsea College of Art.



## Yacht Landing 'Utility'

The Lottery money for the new Tide Mill Quay is prescribed for its use as a quay only for visiting yachtsmen and staying only two tides - seemingly precluding its use for Thames Barges which were its historic users. The new quay unarguably looks smarter than it has done for a very long time for which those responsible should be cheered - but working utility (backs on the benches?) is a more complex affair while its apparent restriction of use could set back other sorts of progress. As it stands its proposed use is less than likely for:

1 It is very tidal so continuous tending of lines will be required during any sort of stay - few modern yachtsmen know how to set springs.

2 At anything less than high water most boats will be too far below the dockside to permit access, most certainly to those of less than olympic ability. The modern yachtsman has forgotten how to climb a harbour wall even with a ladder.

3 Should ladders be instituted they must be inset into the wall, as they were traditionally, otherwise you can

not moor alongside because of the projections - which you have to moor between so making it impossible to get at them to climb.

4 At low water boats will fall outwards (or require lines to masts, to where?) to stop falling over, certainly if the mud is not soft.

5 No 'rafting-up' will be possible because of the above so limiting its use to one boat alongside only.

6 The modern yachtsman is used to walk ashore arrangements and services on tap and remaining constantly afloat - which he can have for a small sum in the marina. Scratching up and down harbour walls is not his scene. Granted that the marina is only accessible near high water but the new facility won't have much greater tidal range and the modern yachtsman does not travel on the Deben at much less than high water.

Will any channel to it be properly marked? What happens in these litigious days, about claims by yachtsmen for any damage to their shiny boats - this latter I abhor but it is a fact of today.

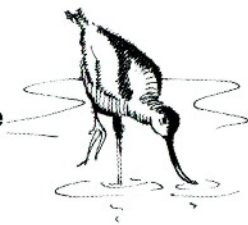
The Maldon waterfront is a model here for the barges lie alongside the harbour wall in rafts while the Town has provided a fine rising pontoon, with ladders fixed up the wall to which the pontoon is moored, for the visiting yachtsman. The pontoon is the essential item.

Let us hope that people of goodwill and expertise may be brought together to resolve these difficulties and create something of extended utility to the town from what is a good start.

## Letters

### Abuses on the Jeben

5th July, 2003



Sir,

Readers may be interested in my experience of having a letter published by the East Anglian Daily Times group of newspapers: Shortly before last Christmas, I wrote to the editor in response to a news article. The news was of a substantial amount of public money being given to Woodbridge Tide Mill Trustees. A sum approaching £10,000 was to be spent on 'dredging'. Enquiries revealed the 'dredging' was in reality, the dragging around of two thousand cubic metres of mud by a motor tug until it was 'lost'. Given that the River Deben Association was too busy fighting town planning issues to investigate, I thought I would try to air my view in the excellent E.A.D.T. I was startled to find the letter was not only published within days, but also given centre page, complete with a photograph of the Mill.

The fallout over this was considerable and included an investigation by English Nature and the grant money being frozen by English Heritage, pending investigation and close monitoring of the dredging procedure. Being sorry to have caused so much

trouble to the good and well intentioned Trustees of the Tide Mill, I spent considerable effort on helping, as I thought, to improve the plan by researching alternative dredging procedures. It turned out that an experienced commercial dredging company could have pumped the mud away for 'beneficial placement' on the adjacent and seriously eroded salt marshes of Sutton. Not only would this would have cost only £3,000 more, the work would have taken the sediment out of the estuarial system effectively permanently. Furthermore, while the dredger was in position, the cost to remove all the silt burden of the Town waterfront, would have been surprisingly low.

I am sorry to report that the news paper publicity and all my efforts were ultimately a waste of time. After some delay, the inefficient mud dragging is proceeding. Given the futility of my efforts and the hostility I have endured for speaking out in a newspaper, this account may be my last letter for a long time. However, should anyone else be willing to speak up for the preservation of the Woodbridge River against commercial interests and the welfare of the estuaries and coast of East Suffolk in general, here are a few prime subjects:

1. The apparent absence of any planning control over ugly floating structures spreading along the Woodbridge waterfront.
2. The rapid and obvious silting of the Woodbridge banks by the restrictions to current flow caused by unplanned development: There is evidence the

tidal stream bed is moving towards the Sutton bank. The implications here should be obvious: the Woodbridge foreshore is becoming an ever widening, muddy ooze.

3. Increasingly high density moorings linked fore and aft through Woodbridge town: These prevent small craft manoeuvring or crossing the river, restrict rights of navigation to many and spoil the once pleasant aspect of the Deben from the promenade. To see the results of this trend, visit the once beautiful Hamble river, now a boat park for plastic pods with clanking masts.

4. The apparent inability of S.C.D.C. to evict a large house boat whose occupants are blocking a very popular footpath: this barge is resting on river bed leased to the people of Suffolk for the very purpose of the prevention of occupation by house boats.

5. There is serious erosion of salt marsh at Methersgate and on the islands of Waldringfield and Loders. A likely reason is the significant increase in river usage by fast cruisers with high energy wakes. The obvious solution to the spoiling of the Deben river, is to have a Warden or Harbour Master. This has been demonstrated to be economic and very effective on the Essex rivers and in the small harbour of Southwold so; why not on the Deben? (I proposed a fully costed solution for this 18 months ago but the RDA turned it down. Ed) This could be effective from Felixstowe Ferry where Jet Skis make Sundays a misery for the inhabitants of Harbour Villas, speeding control generally, oily bilge pumping control (vessels pump bilges in Woodbridge

before entering the Tide Mill) and, the reporting of illegal dredging and development. With the cooperation of the various Fairways Committees, this could be partly funded by a £10 levy on every mooring plot lease.

6. For the more ambitious: investigate why the government is selling licences to take the sand off the tops of the ancient offshore banks that protect our coast from big North Sea swells. (A vast quantity of this sand was recently seen as a golden mountain on the new Felixstowe container berth under construction. At least it was, up to the night of the last Sunday Bank holiday, when it began to move! To the great glee of some, this mountain of sand cascaded into the harbour carrying all before it, including the recent piling work. A catastrophe of epic proportions for the unfortunate contractors and apparently not reported in the media.)

7. Lastly, the rapid and serious erosion of the Orwell 'Sea Reach' and Shotley Spit caused by deep dredging at Felixstowe. This has become so serious that the rate of observable change is now daily and not 'geological' in scale.

Good luck, Terry Davey



## **Thames Sailing Barges - berthing and facilities at Woodbridge**

20th July 2003

Dear Michael

It was good to meet up with you on 8 July, when we brought our barge SB Repertor up to Woodbridge, and to hear your views on recent developments on the waterfront and in the River Deben. The RDA Spring 2003 Newsletter makes interesting reading on this subject too. I was also interested to see evidence of work being carried out on the quayside by the Tide Mill - it was a pity that the scaffolding meant we could not berth there overnight on that trip! But perhaps later this year - or next?

As I said when we met, I wanted to speak to you as a result of your contact earlier this year with the Sailing Barge Association (SBA). I was following this up as part of a joint SBA / Association of Bargemen (AOB) exercise which is researching the current availability of facilities and opportunities for Thames Sailing Barges all around the East Coast and the Thames Estuary.

As you may imagine, such facilities were once widespread, offering a range and choice of opportunities both for visiting barges and for more permanent arrangements. Now, probably inevitably, they are much reduced in scope and location. So, any new or improved facilities, such as easily accessible overnight or longer-stay berths alongside, in attractive locations

such as Woodbridge, are greatly to be welcomed. And, once made known to the sailing barge community, I expect they would be well used.

I would be grateful if you would keep me informed of any further developments, so that the sailing barge community can be made aware of renewed opportunities at Woodbridge and I look forward to hearing from you.

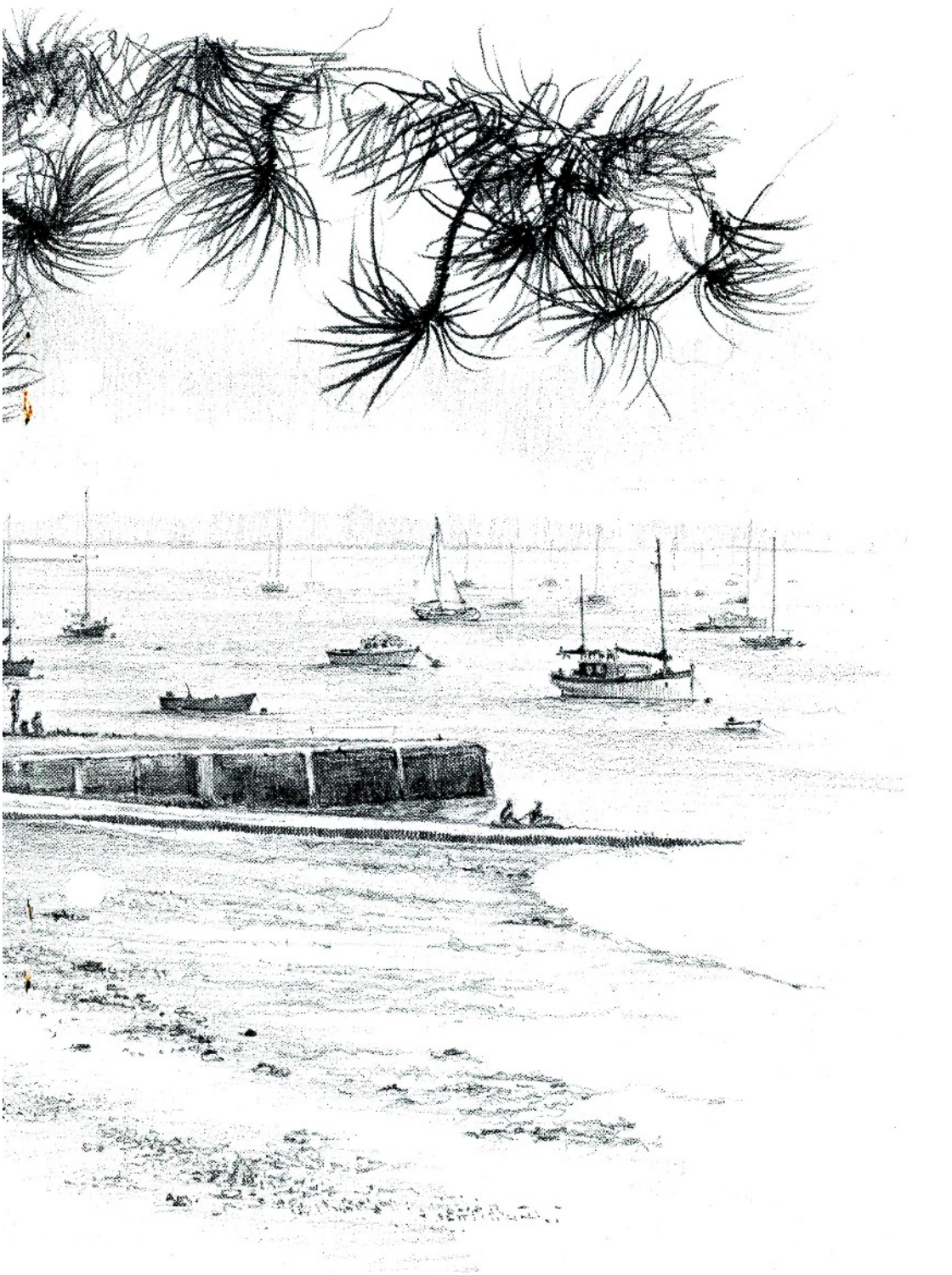
We run SB Repertor as a working charter barge business, both under sail and for static functions alongside. We currently live in Faversham, which is also the barge's home port, but we operate for charter work from wherever the business comes - coming and going during the season from Maldon, Brightlingsea, Mistley, Pin Mill, Ipswich, London, Strood and Whitstable as well as from Faversham itself. Obviously, all this activity generates some local business too.

In Faversham we have good facilities, at present, including a quayside berth only two minutes walk from our house. But, similarly to the Whisstocks saga, Standard Quay is under threat of inappropriate change, or even development. Faversham Creek is also very constrained by depth and tidal range, and is steadily silting up, with no likely prospect of dredging. Together, these factors may quite soon well compel us to move the barge's base and our home.

So, we are seriously considering alternative locations which have appropriate facilities. Ideally, in addition to an accessible berth alongside,







convenient for passengers, these would include facilities, preferably close by, such as drydocking, blocks or slipways, cranes, storage and open quayside areas on which we could overhaul and dress sails, repair spars, rigging and leeboards etc, also with boatyard, shipwrighting and welding resources to hand.

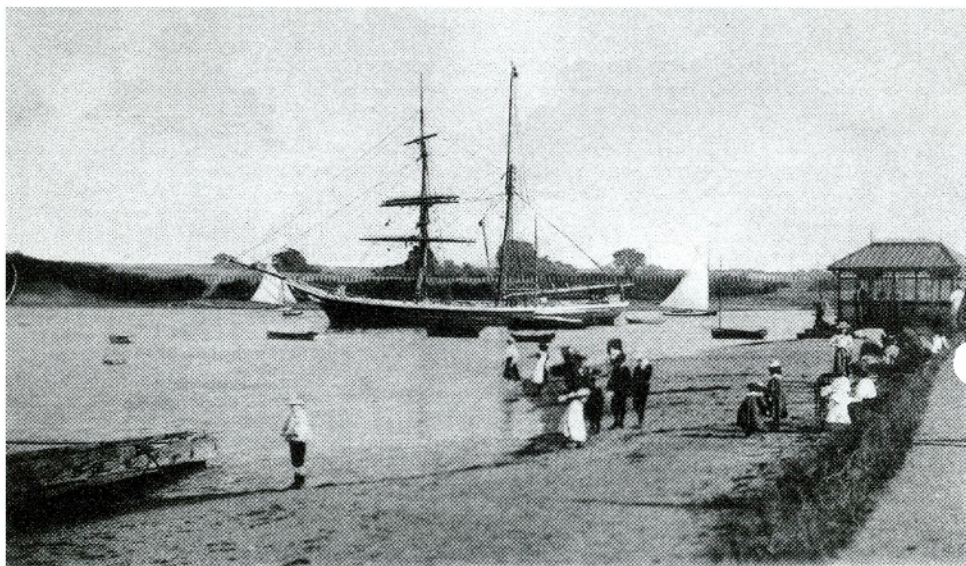
I was most interested, therefore, that at least some such facilities do appear to be available in Woodbridge. We would need to research these more closely but, on the face of it, Woodbridge does now appear to rank high on our list of alternatives. So we look forward to hearing how the refurbishment of the Tide Mill quay progresses and of the

uses to which the quay is proposed to be put, as well as what may next be proposed for the Whisstocks site.

I would be grateful if you would keep me informed of any further developments so that, if appropriate, we can put ourselves and SB Repertor forward as specifically interested parties. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely, David Pollock

(Repertor won 5 out of the 6 Barge Matches this year with a 2nd place in the 6th ! Ed )



Beach and First Shelter, Woodbridge

(This picture must have been taken at the turn of the century or slightly earlier - ladies, note the clothes! It appears by no means high water yet a substantial trading brig is afloat; there is a Una boat behind her which was much a fashion of the day inherited from the U.S.A. A postcard by A. Fairweather of Woodbridge, when a postcard cost ½d to send - it was printed in Germany! Michael Weaver's collection.)

## Articles

### WEAVER'S WOODBRIDGE

(This will be a continuing series which I have commissioned from Michael to encompass the Deben valley. Ed)

No.1

The River Deben, 'An Old World Fairway'.

Who will come a-sailing,  
Who will come with me,  
Down the sunny Deben  
To the distant sea?"

Well, it's not John Masefield but it is one of many poetic tributes to our river, the River Deben, whose history is complex and fascinating and whose role in our lives today is a subject of much eager debate and no little controversy. The River Deben holds the key to the story of our area; today it is the preserve of perhaps a select group of interested parties and users; in the past it was central to the prosperity of almost all who lived along its banks and not least the people of Woodbridge.

The River Deben? Well, there are two rivers and they lead quite separate lives. Somewhere beyond Debenham, Aspall maybe, a humble brook or maybe two make a small but significant start; a river is born. Brandeston and Kettleburgh enjoy the most gentle flowing water, picture-book-stuff, in fact. How many golf-balls have I popped into that lovely stream at Cretingham? Then man really starts interfering, damming the water for mills at Easton and Letheringham and, of course at Wickham Market. On she runs to more work at Ufford and thence to Wilford

Bridge. Somewhere between that bridge and the railway line, however, the innocence is lost and the second River Deben is found -The Deben Estuary with its salty marshes and hidden creeks and forgotten industries and half-hidden wrecks which stretch away to Felixstowe. I can show you guide books which identify the River Deben simply as running from Woodbridge to the sea

Two rivers; many dimensions; many sharp contrasts. We have already seen one - the rural river with its hard-working mills serving local communities; the estuary river looking outwards to the sea and beyond, always ready to take its chance in a new adventure or economic opportunity. Contrast the serenity of leisure use, possibly an activity of the last century and a half, with the burdensome labour of the cement works or the coprolite trade or ship-building that have in the past appeared and disappeared on the river banks. Let's be political and a little controversial; the river has been a hard task-master to the labouring poor and a genial companion, indeed servant, to the middle classes. There have been tenacious struggles for possession of the banks. Edward FitzGerald wrote in the mid Victorian period,

"Now we have a set of squires who, whether to entrench in their land for crops or for their damned game - are sticking up placards of prosecution to all who travel along the river walls, which many want to do, in going from Woodbridge to the ferry at the river's mouth. We have one great squire -

TOMLINE - who keeps buying up acre after acre between the rivers Deben and Orwell to make a game preserve of it. So now, any poor man is collared by gamekeeper after gamekeeper - even if the poor fellow has no gun in his hand".

On a more positive and contrasting note, the River Deben has inspired more glorious writing, all right some indifferent poetry, than any river of its size that I can think of. Its glory days in literary terms came after the arrival of the railway in Woodbridge when people began to look at the river less as an economic artery and more as an object of beauty and tranquillity. This coincided with a golden age of descriptive writing, where authors did not panic about getting out of sentences too early! All that is now sadly derided in the utilitarian age, but look at these names and add your own to a catalogue of writers who recorded our river so elegantly; E.R.Cooper, W.G.Arnott and Alker Tripp, are pre-eminent. Robert Simper has explored in writing so many aspects of the Deben and the ships who have sailed her and the men who have worked her. Tom Ellaway always writes with lucidity and with heart. Ah remember the old 'Riverside Notes' in the sadly departed 'Woodbridge Reporter'? These last two, writers of our time, also speak with huge authority and expertise.

Regard the History of the River Deben and you will find more ironies and paradoxes than are consistent with such an honest-looking river. The River Deben was central to the birth of England itself; the Saxon invaders used the Deben as a doorway to conquest.

Germans became English and in 625 the King of England himself, King Redwald, was buried in great pomp on the river banks. Time passed and later, at Bawdsey Haven, scientists developed Radar, which, without any doubt, was crucially important in keeping yet another wave of German tribesmen from our shores. Strange but true, as they say.

History oozes from the Deben mud, 2000 years of it. Saxon invasions; mediaeval counter-invasions - attacks on France; a tilt at the Armada; ship-building for Crown and Commonwealth; trading and smuggling, the haven for sailing champions and round-the-world sailors. Remarkably the river has not changed its essential character and 'look'. Here's Alker Tripp, writing in the 1930s :

"Up the river Deben, from the windswept shingle banks and tidal flats, the mariner searches his way by a winding channel, and the fields and woods close about him and replace the long sea-horizons. Landing at Woodbridge at high water he has approached by the same fairway as the adventurers and traders of the middle ages, ... an old-world fairway, that is now as then it was. This is a spot that is very England".

"That is now as then it was?" I wonder if we could still make that claim 70 years on. Stand at Waldringfield and look across the water on a full tide. Has much changed in a century or so? I am sure if it has, someone will tell me but I would like to think that there is a strong visual continuity with our past at many

spots along the river.

This IS a ramble so let's settle, in conclusion, at just one point on the river, a building which is pure estuary - my old friend, Woodbridge Tide Mill. It is said to be a landmark for sailors; it's the symbol of the town in so many ways and its story illustrates the concept of contrast which I have tried to identify above. The mill, well, a mill has stood on this place for more than a half of Woodbridge's recorded history, being built in 1170 or thereabouts. Operated in the interests of the inmates of

Woodbridge Priory for a few centuries it was finally claimed by Henry VIII in 1536 and later owned by Elizabeth I.

The present building dates from 1793 and is a triumph of the early Industrial Revolution. The mill ground corn from local farmers and corn brought by barge from the London Docks. It survived the advent of railway and motor car and those smart roller mills in Ipswich.....until 1957 when the main shaft broke. Magically, in the years that followed, a new and contrasting role for Woodbridge Tide Mill emerged as part



(Alas there is no provenance on this postcard but Michael thinks it taken about the same time as the first one. When was the two arched stone bridge replaced by the present single brick span? Michael Weaver's collection)

of the educational and leisure and tourist age which we have learned to accept.

Now the riverside outhouse, where once the millstones were dressed and re-dressed, offers seats for visitors whose aim is quietly to admire the River Deben in its muddy or watery aspects. Rest and repose have replaced energy and effort! The Tide Mill Quay where barges once discharged cargoes of corn or coal, has been refurbished as mooring for the leisure sailors

What of the future? Woodbridge Town Council have commissioned a study of river usage in these upper stretches of Estuary Deben. Planners eye the vistas that can be sold for unimaginable fortunes and locals fight to preserve the status quo. The removal or re-positioning of the mud can cause bitter arguments.

Wild-lifers; the sailing bods; developers; local businesses; the tourist and tripper trade; ecologists; artists and photographers; nimbies and honest folk who just want to preserve what's old - they are all at it! Struggling to state their case; vying for control. Good. The River Deben has not lost its grip on our imagination and our ambition and it never will.

Michael Weaver is Head of the History Department at Woodbridge School, Chairman of the Woodbridge Tide Mill Trust and a Freeman of the town of Woodbridge.

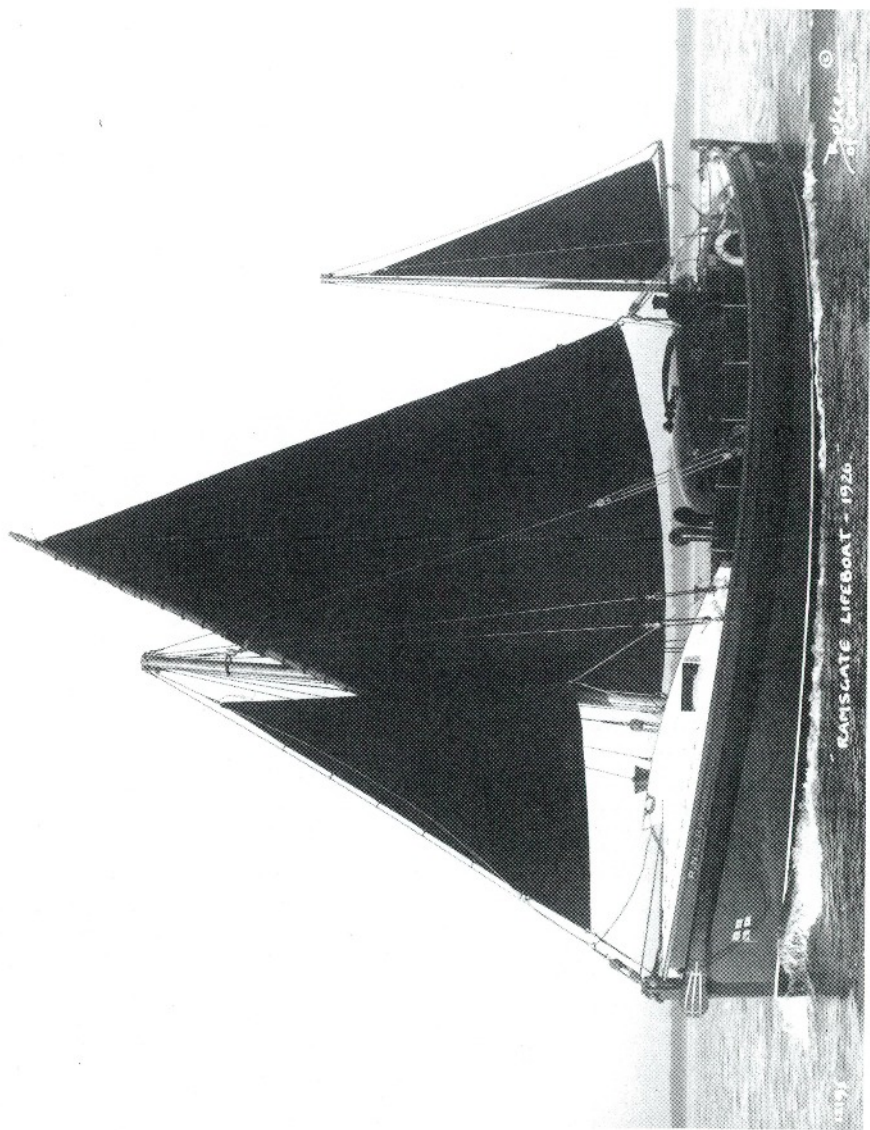


### Trimilia - 3000 lives saved

There are a few boats which have been part of the Deben for many years, two or three of which have been resident in Bass's Dock since most of us can remember. Frank Knights' Yet is one and Trimilia is another. Most of us know Yet resplendent in her turquoise paint lying outside Frank & Christine's house but Trimilia has had a number of colour and style incarnations so is, at least to the casual observer, less obvious, but Trimilia has an honoured past for she is a Dunkirk "Little Ship". She directly rescued 3,000 of our beleaguered forces from the beach-head - this is just a snippet of her story.

Daniel Elves, a cabinet-maker and restorer who is her current owner has very kindly lent me just a little of the extraordinary archive of material that survives on her history. We are fortunate on the river to have at least one other well known Dunkirk ship, Peter Packard's Nyula", for many years painted a fine dark blue; she is now in new hands painted white with a blue line round her, restored to her original name of "Betty" and lying at Waldringfield.

Trimilia is fortunate to have fallen into such caring and capable hands as not only is Daniel immensely caring of this archive while adding to it steadily he is also capable and concerned craftsman so that even the deepest recesses of her hull and fittings are getting the best treatment to ensure that she survives as a witness in Woodbridge to that valiant initiative that did so much to keep our nation's faith alive in the darkest days of WWII.



These two Beken photographs were taken on Prudential's commissioning trials in The Solent in 1926. Beken still have the plates from which these two prints were created for this article





Like many who went to Dunkirk Trimilia is a lifeboat - indeed the Ramsgate lifeboat of the day. When she was in service her name was Prudential, indicating that she had been provided through collections made from employees of "The Pru". She was built by Saunders at Cowes, one of the main RNLI contractors, as a sailing and motor life-boat and was in service from 1925 to 1953 ending her service days as the Commodore, Lifeboat division's, flagship at the Spithead Naval Review. She is interesting because she is a 'Watson' but not quite as the Ramsgate men did not want a self-righting boat (this was not uncommon) so the design was altered to become 'A Ramsgate' of which only one other was built.

Her record at Dunkirk was one of the finest as she was taken there by her own crew, lead by their coxswain Howard Knight, on Thursday 30th May towing seven wherries with supplies for the soldiers. By using the wherries as ferries to the lifeboat, working out to the big ships, they ferried 800 men on her first night. Her name records her saving 3,000 lives in all, the last being taken home to Ramsgate being towed by Prudential in a string of small craft full of troops, while having lent her engineer to a small coaster, whose engines were failing, to help her home as well.

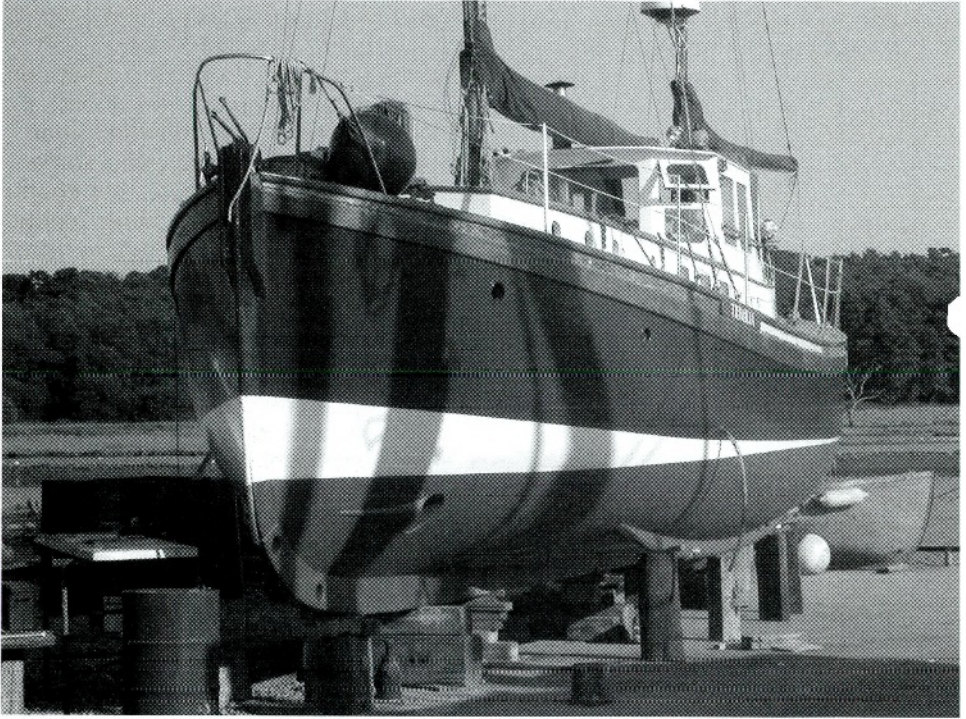
Prudential arrived home in a sorry state, covered in shrapnel damage and holed, but such was the enthusiasm for the boats that had rendered such service that Prudential was 'adopted' by The Walton School for Girls at Aylesbury headed by Miss Violet Bonnings,

wonderful stuff; Howard Knight was awarded the Medal for Gallantry.

Her conversion to her present state as an auxiliary ketch was done by Frank in the early 60's, in which her original petrol engine was replaced by the fine Russell & Newberry engine she has today. Daniel has original working drawings for the engine and gearbox which is a considerable and lucky survival, because they must be very rare indeed; as an enthusiastic early engineer I had never heard of the makers before. Anyone who keeps a boat of this type carefully is to be thanked for boats as history rapidly vanish or degrade. Most of us will remember her as bright yellow and covered with carnations and chrysanthemums, patrolled by Richard Rothery's borzoi while I, for one, am delighted that someone as young as Daniel and his lady should carry on the Dunkirk tradition with such zeal. The photo of her today is taken at Mel Skeet's yard where Daniel is doing much 'heavy' work on the hull to ensure that she keeps going. It is a sadness that, with the confusion going on along the Tidemill to Bass's Dock frontage keeping Trimilia here is no longer an option so she will be moved up river.

Trimilia is an active member of the Association of Dunkirk Little Ships which has an index of some 700 boats that took part of which it is thought that some 500 may survive scattered round the world; 120 are active members of the Association.

So, whenever you see her give a thought to those dark days and the part



Trimilia as she is today being worked on at Granary Yacht Harbour.

she played in our nation's survival and the heroic men who manned her then; would we today rise to such a sacrifice as did they?

### Is This A Record?

Frank and Christine Knights have set a further stamp on Frank's retirement by selling YET. Frank has owned her for 64 1/2 years. She is to be taken out of the water and given a complete overhaul locally. Having watched Frank tack her up the river over many years with the unhurried skill he does everything I shall miss her and we will all miss that distinctive turquoise

paintwork in Bass's dock. If I can persuade them both I hope to have a substantial story of them in the next issue.



### TAILPIECE

O800 hrs and the burgee hung lifeless while thick low cloud mooched above. No-one was in sight in the marina at Levington as I undid warps to clear

away for Woodbridge. Outside a yacht of similar historic vintage lay at a mooring awaiting me to make the passage together - neither of us have engines. In order even to move from the marina I had to hitch a lift from an early bird going out, then came a breath from astern that just gave the venture some credibility as the two yachts one 75 years old the other 98 set off down the Orwell. Progress was agonisingly slow with a need to take judgments long in advance to keep out of the shipping and off the buoys.

There are two new port hand marks at the upper end of the dock complex, one happily named Pepys - at Pepys the rain set in while we had only an hour of tide left to get to Landguard. At the Guard I was trailing and, fearful of not getting to the Orwell entrance before the tide turned, I thumbed a tow out to Landguard and across the shipping lane from a delightful pair in a small Hunter with a 4hp outboard!

I cast off at Landguard with the turning tide at 11.30 hrs while my friend crept across the shipping lane in agonies as the traffic was brisk - 3½ hours to sail a mere 4 miles. The rain condescended to stop but the clouds stayed low and sullen. We set course up the coast, with the microscopic breeze fine on the bow - the Landguard mark stayed in view for an hour and a half as the tide was now against us down the coast. My friend, with the larger boat, adopted a freer course out to sea while I crept along the coast watching as Charlie Manning's pink cake appeared glued in the same place on my beam - I could have walked the distance up the coast

faster than I was sailing.

As the morning drew into afternoon, and people motored everywhere, the sky began to lift and the wind veer to free us while filling in to about force 1. I crept past Harvest House and started to dice with the only other people sailing, a slightly larger modern yacht. This employed the next hour! At 14.00 the sun crept out, the wind freed and picked up to force 1½ and I could just see the Haven mark - but at least I had crawled past the competition who gave up to motor. Suddenly, as these things do, the whole thing looked possible as, with 3 hours of flood to go, I could just pick up the Bar buoy. My friend was putting his leg inshore as we both arrived, in sun with a light free breeze, at the entrance, myself about 400 yards ahead. Pure narcissism dictated I put a pirouette in the entrance so that we sailed in together to present the happy walkers on the beach a real view as the only two boats sailing, two period gaff yawls looking gorgeous - they waved and smiled and we knew we had added a little extra to their day.

In up past the Horse buoy with the breeze a little fresher and free with bright sun made the whole thing worthwhile - but there was a delight to come. From the Horse up to The Rocks the larks sang. We could only hear them when we weren't beset by motorists and speedboats but as they passed on their pressing, roaring way and left us the only sound, from both banks of the river, were the larks - not just one or two but dozens, a heavenly chorus serenading us home. It was hardly as though we had come from the

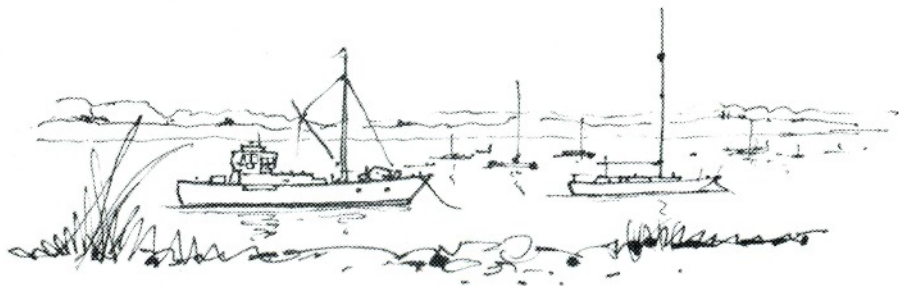
antipodes but the micro passage had been fraught with some doubt and damp and we felt they were our welcome for having stayed the course. Those others, rushing with noise and haste and smell, could not hear the larks but in our silence it was they who added the lustre to our homecoming as the tide and a free breeze swept us up the river. Bird people will like to know that there are so many larks but those who thrash up and down the Deben will never know because the noise they make drowns the larks' heavenly song - and in their haste they do not know the serenity they miss.

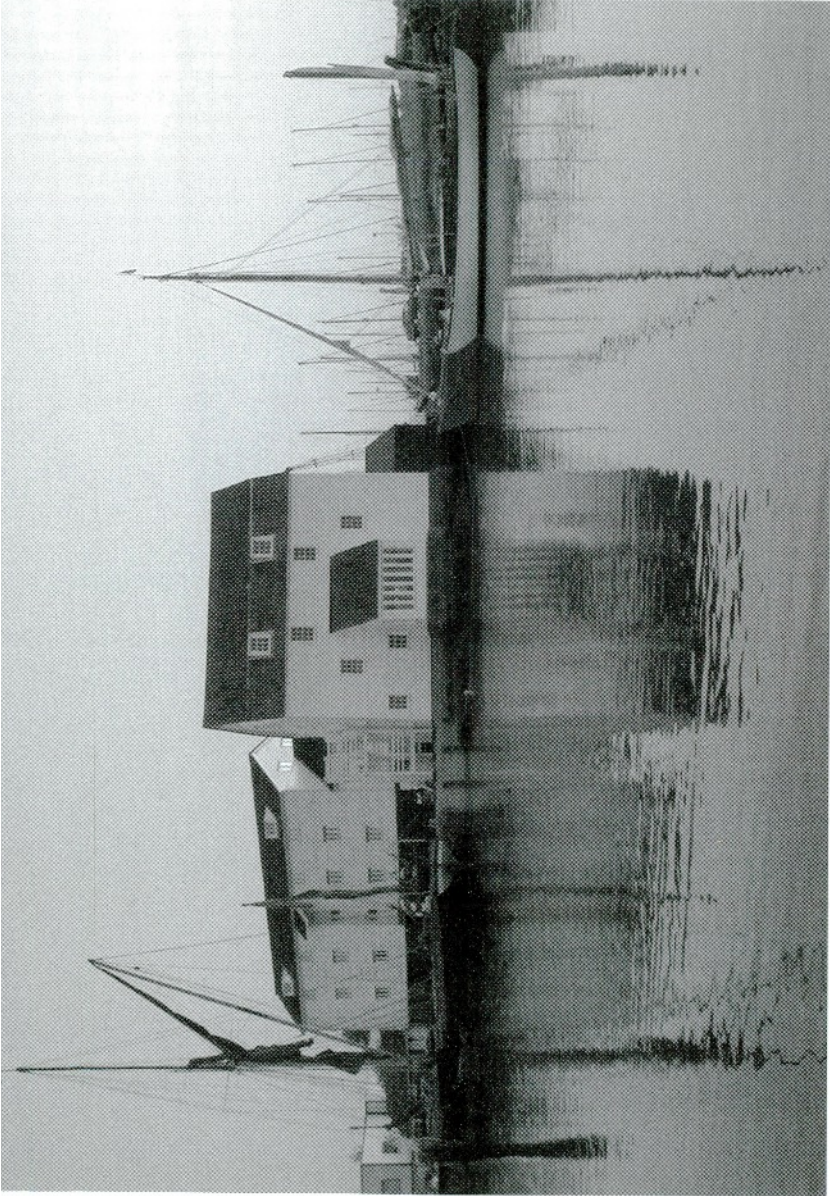
## STOP PRESS

**NICK BUBB, DEBEN YACHT CLUB,  
PREVAILS OVER FRENCH**

It is a long step from sailing a Mirror on the Deben to competing with the best

young international off-shore single-handers. At 23, Nick Bubb is one of the foremost British contestants for the annual Mini-Transat from La Rochelle to the Caribbean. With the sort of initiative, energy and determination that saw Ellen Macarthur through to success, Nick, now with two sponsors, is striving for selection to compete in 2003 where he stands as 2nd reserve to enter the fleet of 100 boats. Good results at qualifying events could enable him to squeeze in if there are late withdrawals or disqualifications. His 2003 successes include eighth place overall in the Trans-Gascogne, a two-stage solo 600 mile event in which 80 boats participated, eighth place in the crewed Mini-Fastnet against 80 other boats. He came first in the Fastnet Prologue, a round the buoys event. Currently he and his boat are in Rochelle. France provides two thirds of the entry so Nick has been brushing up his French, apart from other preoccupations. You can keep up with Nick on [www.nickbubbchallenges.com](http://www.nickbubbchallenges.com).





20th September 2003. The first boat to lie alongside the New Tide Mill Quay, and the first Thames barge since - the mill ceased trading in 1952? A Magnum of Moët was drunk on board for dinner that night to celebrate the occasion, and the hope that it might be the first of many.





# **RDA AUTUMN OPEN MEETING**

At 7.30 pm Friday 31st October 2003

## **Woodbridge Community Centre**

There will be an update on planning matters, on the river as a place of recreation and enjoyment, on its future with managed retreat, with time for members and others to contribute their ideas and concerns.

Refreshments will be followed by a talk entitled:

**“The first year’s trading at Sutton Hoo and future plans”**

by

**Keith Turner**

Area Manager of the National Trust