

**RIVER DEBEN
ASSOCIATION**

**Autumn 2006
NEWSLETTER**

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RIVER DEBEN ASSOCIATION OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE

September 2006

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Editorial

This latest edition of your Newsletter has been filled by the usual



stalwarts, but also with two very welcome articles from new contributors. "Goldfish Fights Back", from the eponymous John Fish, is a fascinating article on the rebuilding of a Dragonfly dinghy, using the Nest System of epoxy resins. Congratulations to John for his interesting article (could this sort of article about unusual Deben boats act as a model for future contributors?) and for his bold restoration project using a relatively new technology. We look forward to seeing how Goldfish performs under sail next year and wish him all the best. The title of his article, reminiscent perhaps of EADT of yore, is entirely my responsibility. Leigh Belcham, another new contributor, draws our attention – if we needed reminding – to the anti-social behaviour of some power-boat and jet-ski operators on the River. He has also shown us what we can – and indeed should – do that is beyond merely muttering and waiting irritably until the wash and noise of them has subsided. We can complain, and he shows us how to do this effectively

Of the "stalwarts", our Chairman, Ed Stanford, demonstrates once again the enormous range of his vigilance on our behalf and identifies a new enemy to the peaceful enjoyment of the River in the shape of Paramotors. I never knew their names but I have always secretly envied their owners in the sky, though never in front of the Chairman. We owe a lot to Ed for his energy and for his endless reserves of good humour in the face of bureaucratic laziness and silliness. Simon Read's article on the Sutton Shore deals

with just such obstacles in relation to one quite simple and straightforward community-inspired enterprise which has been brought almost to a stand-still by local government, and by central government, agencies. His patience is clearly wearing very thin (the original title was "Wild Geese", as in "... Chases") but I do know that his sense of humour is still very much intact and that his laugh and colourful turn of phrase may still be heard at the Woodbridge and Melton end of the River. I hope they won't be subject to any Anti-Social Behaviour Orders. We have two articles - no less - from our only professional writer, and another regular on these pages, Robert Simper. The first, on the Ramsholt right-of-way controversy, is a rare and very welcome story of a successful Deben community initiative. Robert deserves our gratitude for persisting with this issue, even when costs were mounting alarmingly. He has also shows his metal - not to mention his own delightful humour - in his other article, on the writing of his new book, "Up the River Deben". His persistence in seeking a good story, whatever the conditions, and in sticking to a book-title which his own family felt was dangerously redolent of "Carry On" film-titles, shows real character.

Finally, Denzil Cowdry has produced another article, ostensibly on fishing in the Deben, which I have re-named "Two Small Soles and a Flounder". It was Denzil who, as Chairman of the RDA, got me into this editorial role and has since signally failed to extricate me from it. Reading his piece provides the usual pleasures as we discover anew what Denzil saw and "could not help but note . . ."; what a "casual observation revealed" to him; what a "93-year-old Norwegian lady" said to him; about what size of hook a River Deben bass "likes" to eat his

ragworm bait off. I can't help remembering, at such moments, the Chinese cormorant which Denzil described to us in Issue No 31 and which he assured us of being "happy" to be suspended upside-down with a Chinese fisherman's fist up its gullet. Such things make me "happy" to be editor, even if occasionally in a sense somewhat similar to that cormorant and that hooked bass; also deeply grateful for Denzil's

Chairman's Notes

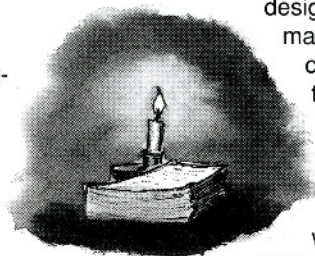
Our project to protect the salt-marsh on the Sutton shore has taken up a lot of time since my last report. As Simon Read's report in this newsletter reveals, we have run into such a bureaucratic fog that we could not meet the deadline set by Suffolk Coast and Heaths for funding applications under their Sustainable Development Fund. So the proposal is being held over until next year assuming that further funds will become available. In addition to all the bodies which have a say in such an apparently simple proposal, we have found that we will need to submit a full Planning Application to Suffolk Coastal District Council together with the appropriate fees. We may need a licence from DEFRA costing £500 and we shall need to commission a full environmental impact assessment. And all we propose is a simple plastic netting barrier and the part restoration of a footpath!!

However it has not all been bad news; a Planning Inspector turned down the proposed holiday cottages at Waldringfield and, more importantly from an RDA point of view, an inspector also ruled that the footpath from the corner of the Ramsholt Arms to the old ferry landing is a Public Footpath and should be

continuing sense of curiosity and his generosity in sharing its fruits with us.

Contributions are always gratefully received and if anyone wants to be editor, I am willing to share . . . or even surrender . . . this happiness.

Nick Wright



designated as such on future maps. This should help our case for the footpath from the Sutton shore to the ferry landing there to be designated as a Public Footpath. We have set the wheels in motion with Suffolk County

Council on this. You may wonder why we bother. The point is that the RDA always seeks to ensure that access to the river is as open as possible and the best way to secure this for the future is to get Public Footpaths designated wherever possible. The recently- blocked footpath at Wilford bridge shows that we cannot let our guard down.

On a wider front, Denzil Cowdry and I attended a meeting of the Stour and Orwell Estuary Management Group in June and came away with some interesting and Deben-relevant points. On the question of speeding and jet-skis the delegate from the Harwich Harbour Authority (which exercises control over the two rivers) admitted that catching boats speeding was not easy and that there had only been one successful action in five years. The problem is to identify the culprit reliably and to have more than one witness. In reply to a question about launching it was pointed out that public

roads run alongside the rivers and it is almost impossible to deny access. The article in this Newsletter from the Felixstowe Ferry Forum outlines the problem for the Deben and makes a number of suggestions which I hope members will act upon. Later in the year, the RDA hopes to host a meeting of interested parties to discuss the question of speeding and anti-social behaviour in general. It's a great pity. Everyone should be able to enjoy the river in their own way but it has to be with proper regard for the enjoyment of others - a little thoughtfulness would go a long way.

Reverting to my earlier point about public footpaths, it was interesting to learn at the Forum that the Right to Roam legislation may be followed up by a similar right of access to the coastline. At the Forum meeting, we were told that Suffolk had been identified as a suitable area for study of the practical problems which such access might create. Preliminary work has shown that there will be many problems to overcome. Wouldn't it be great if there was to be a properly designated footpath right around the Deben estuary! But as modern parlance has it "don't hold your breath!"

Following up on my "quiet enjoyment" point earlier, many of you may have heard the racket made by the paramotors early in June. For those to whom the word is a mystery, a paramotor is a modern rectangular parachute with a small motor underneath it. They are launched from the ground and are similar to microlights. The problem with these machines is that they are both noisy and slow moving so that their noise "footprint" is very large. The problem arose when the British Paramotor Championships (yes really) took place with launches from Sutton Hoo. Most of the machines flew away

quite quickly but a number remained over the Deben for some hours occasioning some adverse comment from one or two members. I wrote to Suffolk Coastal about it but they advised that they have powers only over noise from premises. They suggested that I write to the British Microlight Association and/or the Civil Aviation Authority. After an exchange of correspondence with Lt Col Finnigan of the Microlight Association in which I protested about the noise intrusion on a Sunday morning, I was told that "foot-launched aircraft such as paramotors and powered hang gliders are not currently subject to formal airworthiness standards as they are not regulated by the CAA". In other words they can make as much noise as they like and very little can be done about it. So I wrote to the CAA. Their reply confirmed what Lt Col Finnigan had said but added a classic piece of bureaucratic nonsense, to wit: "The Department of Transport which is responsible for aviation policy states that environmental problems such as noise nuisance are best tackled at a local level". Since SCDC is powerless in this regard, it looks as though the only recourse we have is to direct action. (Has anybody got a surface to air missile!!!) In fact I have sent the entire correspondence to John Gummer for his comments. This is not a trivial matter since jet skis present the same control problems.

Following a recent court case on the South Coast involving a jet ski and a swimmer in which the swimmer was injured, the Court decided that jet skis are not craft, as defined in various Navigation Acts, and are not therefore subject to the Collision Regulations. In fact they are not subject to any legal control at all. I would be the last to propose additional regulation and control but in these two cases it is difficult to see any other solution. One person's pleasure should

not be at the expense of fifty others.

But enough of these matters. In the Newsletter you will find an article describing the total rebuilding of a "Dragonfly" dinghy. I am sure there are many members of the RDA doing similar things which the membership would like to hear about. Please contact our editor if you feel like writing something for us.

Committee member Jo Masters is organising the annual litter-pick along the river bank on Sunday 15th October please help if you can. Jo's telephone number is listed inside the front cover.

Finally (phew) our half-yearly meeting is being held at the Felixstowe Ferry Sailing Club at 7.30 on Friday 27th October when our speaker will be Prof. Tim O'Riordan, ex University of East Anglia. Tim is an excellent speaker and very knowledgeable about the politics and realities of coastal and river defences. I look forward to meeting you there.

Ed Stanford

RAMSHOLT LANDING HARD

The dispute over whether the boat landing hard at Ramsholt Dock was a public right of way grew out of the decision of the Trustees of the Bawdsey Estate in about 1997 to double the rent charged to boat-owners who left their dinghies ashore. This increase was very unpopular and many boat-owners refused to pay and some are still not paying.

It appears that, in an attempt to strengthen their claim, the Bawdsey Estate put in writing in 2000 that the public did not have the right to walk between the Ramsholt Arms and the bottom of the Hard "without permission of the Bawdsey Estate". The agent later suggested to a boat-owner running fishing trips that his customers would not mind paying, say £1, every time they walked up the Hard.

As a boy from about 1947 I had gone down to Ramsholt Dock on a bike and later had a dinghy there and I felt very



strongly that this was a public landing. No one had ever challenged my use of the landing nor had I heard of anyone else being challenged. I sought advice from the Suffolk County Council about the legal position and they assured me that they would recognise a public right of way footpath from just outside the Arms to the end of Hard, but that the quay and dinghy park were obviously private property. So far so good, but then for some extraordinary reason the Suffolk County Council suddenly reversed this decision and ruled that there was no right of way. I then lodged an appeal.

The total cost of this case, thus far, has been around £11,000 so I could not have kept going without the help of the RDA, yacht clubs and individual boat-owners who kindly gave money. Most of the cost was borne by the Ramsholt Fairway Committee. Harbour Master George Collins and Secretary Tom Owls stood staunchly by the action. Many other river-users, including Richard Ballam, also loyally supported the action with advice and information.

Johann Wyly, of Mills and Reeve, took on the action. We managed to collect 345 written evidences, a large number of these having been rounded-up by Rosemary Schlee, from people who said they had always used the Hard as a public right of way. Forty-five of these evidences were from people who had used the Hard before 1965 and we even had a few from before 1939. The Bawdsey Estate submitted two written evidences from people who said they believed it to be private land.

There then followed a wait of nearly three-and-half years for the Government ruling. Finally, in August 2006, Erica Eden of the Planning Inspectorate at DEFRA, Bristol,

upheld my appeal and Julie Hume of DEFRA Rights of Way, Newcastle, agreed with Ms Eden's findings and wrote to the Suffolk County Council saying that it should recognise the Ramsholt Boat Hard and the path leading to it as being a public footpath.

Robert Simper

UP THE RIVER DEBEN

The two most difficult points to overcome about any book are the basic theme and the title. The rest grows organically, with a lot of hard work. It was a comment made to me in Maldon that made me switch to a mainly photograph book. Someone said "I really enjoyed the photos in your *Creekside Tales*". This is a book based on living beside the River Deben for forty-five years, but the photographs were supposed to be incidental, to illustrate the story. However I decided that if the words that take hours and hours to write are not being read I would do a book of colour photographs.

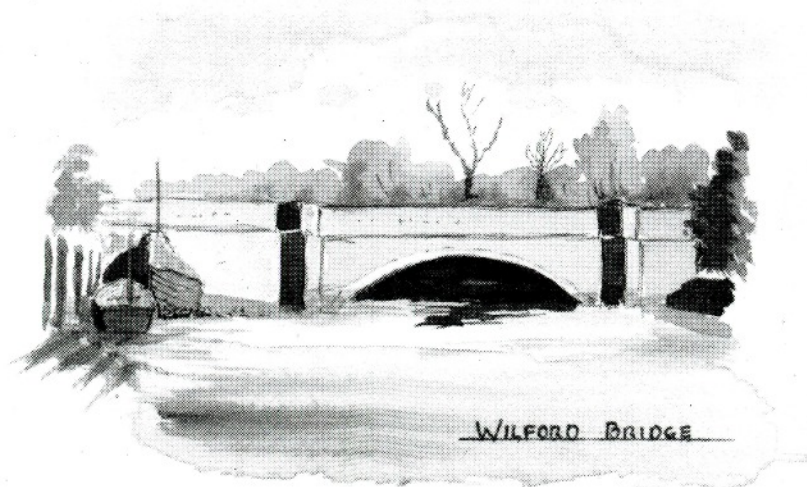
My father's passion was golf, one I did not share, and although he is nearly ninety-one, an annual highlight of his year has been to present a golf trophy at the Felixstowe Golf Club. Since he has given up driving, we take him around there and then sneak off down to Felixstowe Ferry to look at the boats. One perfect summer's evening, we reached the ferry landing when the sun was just in the right place for a good shot. We had the first photograph for the book. Then we lost the photograph on our computer files. I spent ages looking for it and when the book was already at the printers, Pearl found it on her computer files and we sent it off just in time.

My original thought was that it would be "One Year in the Life of the Deben", but it actually took us about two years and I also had to draw on some photographs, like the ice picture, that I had taken in 1963. Shots on the water happen very quickly: one moment there is the perfect view and the next moment the angle and light has gone. Whenever possible I have had my camera lying beside me in Three Sisters and clicked away. Often when sailing, I would be concentrating on where we were going. Well, you are supposed to, and Pearl would suddenly say "Look!" and up would come the camera. For the technical buffs out there, it's a Nikon D100, but sometimes we used a small camera Pearl carries in her bag. I don't think sophisticated equipment makes that much difference with maritime photography. It is really being in the right place at the right time and that is more difficult than it sounds.

The Deben may not be very big. You can sail up it in a couple of hours (speedboats do it in a few minutes – what ever

happened to that speed-limit?) but there is a lot going on and it is difficult to keep up with everything. There is, however, a kind of Deben Mafia, a network through which news travels by word of mouth very quickly. Get stuck on the Bar (no, I have not done that for thirty years) and everyone in the district will know about it by the time you pick up your mooring.

Again these forms of Chinese whispers alter the facts as they gather speed. Take the yacht-sinking on July 16. Within three hours of it sinking the word in Alderton Shop was that it had been an 18ft fishing boat that sank crossing the Bar and the Coast Guard had rescued the crew. By midday in the Ramsholt Arms a reliable source said it was a sizeable yacht on the way from Kent that had sunk off the bar and the crew had swum ashore. The East Anglian Daily Times, a paper I respect over the London gossip sheets, reported that it was the 35ft wooden motor cruiser Debora that sank and that a passing yacht took the two young men off. So, as far as I was concerned, that is what happened.



Historians often spend decades happily arguing over points of history. The Sutton Hoo treasure and longship were found in 1939, but learned people are still writing long theses about whether Raedwald, king of East Anglia, was buried in the longship with all his treasure or whether it was someone else. In a way, historians have an easy time. After all, King Raedwald died in around 625, so there is no-one around to disprove whatever conclusions you come to. (The case for it being Raedwald, not the king of the East Saxons, has been strengthened by the discovery of a similar burial at Prittlewell near Southend). You are reasonably safe with Victorian history: every witness to events has been dead for two generations. Providing you have got a written account, no-one can disprove any theory, but with contemporary events you can be in dead trouble. If something happened last summer, there will be several eyewitnesses alive, well, and standing on Woodbridge Quay, all with a totally different account of what took place.

OK, I said I was not doing a book with facts piled one on top of each other. But long informative captions have always been my trademark. The best way to get reliable information is to be there when it happens. When I was told, after a River Deben Association meeting, that "the stone barge is coming in again at the end of the month", I knew I had to be there. Well, the barge didn't arrive. I know because I was there watching the waves breaking on the empty channel over the Bar.

This was something important and I felt I needed to record it. It was time to consult an expert: in this case John White, Harbour Master at Felixstowe Ferry. Even John was getting his information second

hand, but the Environmental Agency website confirmed a barge would be bringing stone into the river to make up the river-defences to defend the Golf Club and the ferry houses.

This should have happened in January, but in February John phoned and said it was fairly certain that the barge was coming in at dawn the next day. It was bitterly cold and dark when we arrived at Felixstowe Ferry. To my amazement, there, out on the golf course, were two sets of men trudging around playing golf in the semi-darkness and biting cold wind. I thought I was just slightly mad to have driven around the Deben several times in midwinter just to take a photograph of a rusty barge, but playing golf in the dark, that's got to be certifiable!

Getting new photographs was not the only problem. I was writing about the same places again. As one Woodbridge boatyard owner said, "Surely there can't be anything new for you to say about the Deben." There is, but he did have a point about not repeating myself. After all, the first book I wrote about the Deben was *Woodbridge and Beyond* in 1968.

I had just had a modest success with a little booklet about Snape Maltings and was asked to go and meet the publisher Derek Verschoyle. The Deben Bookshop, the first one in Woodbridge, had just opened and, flushed with success, the owners decided to start a Publishing House. I went to meet Mr Verschoyle in the little office behind the Bookshop. It was a hot summer's afternoon and Mr Verschoyle sat drinking rosé wine. He said that he would publish a book about the history of Woodbridge and the Deben. He was the first real publisher that I had ever met and I noted that he didn't suggest I joined him with his wine.

By the time I had finished writing Woodbridge and Beyond Mr Verschoyle and his Publishing House had vanished. I threw the manuscripts into a bottom drawer and there they stayed for five years until Ken Spence of the East Anglian Magazine asked me if I had anything he could publish. I took my Woodbridge/Deben effort in to him and once again found myself sitting in an office on a hot afternoon. Ken Spence took one look at my effort and said with great authority "Its too long" and got a pen and started crossing bits out.

I was horrified and Ken Spence, seeing the look on my face, said "Trust me" and, with a glint in his eye and a strong desire to keep down printing costs, assured me that he was good at editing. Those cuts hurt a lot more than not being offered wine and I still know where they were. Now this little book seems slightly old-fashioned, but, forty years on, and after many reprints, it still sells. There are bits of local history that would otherwise have been lost for ever. Old "river men" told me stories years ago that I have put into these books. The funny thing is, once you have written something down, you forget it.

So with Up the River Deben I spent a lot of time looking back to see that I was not repeating myself and often cutting out bits when I had. Over the years I have realised, after slogging through countless badly written local history books, that Mr Spence, with his editing pen, was a vital part of the process.

It was Ken Spence who made me come up with a list of possible titles and then he chose Woodbridge and Beyond. It was the same process with Up the River Deben. Every month it had a new title. Since the book starts at Felixstowe Ferry

and finishes at Debenham I thought we had an appropriate title, but my son, Jonathan, thought it sounded like a Carry On film. He could be right, but I stuck with my title.

Of course you can never find out the whole history of a river, or anywhere else for that matter. There are gaps and the good thing about a book is that people fill in the missing pieces. I spent ages trying to track down the story that someone had rowed from Felixstowe Ferry to Debenham. I still don't know whether this is true or not, but the week after the printers had finished work on Up the River Deben, by chance I came in contact with a man who had rowed from Debenham to the Tide Mill in a day. What is more, he had actually been working for us on one of our projects! The information is often right in front of you; you just have to have an eye for spotting it.

Sometimes it is just impossible to recall incidents from the past. I still remember being told by the Woodbridge blacksmith "Chubby" Goldsmith, who had a fund of river stories, about a Woodbridge barge skipper who was sailing through Sole Bay in a strong breeze when he slipped while tending the mainsheet and was pulled up to the mainsheet block which took off most of his fingers. I don't suppose I shall ever find out the name of that man.

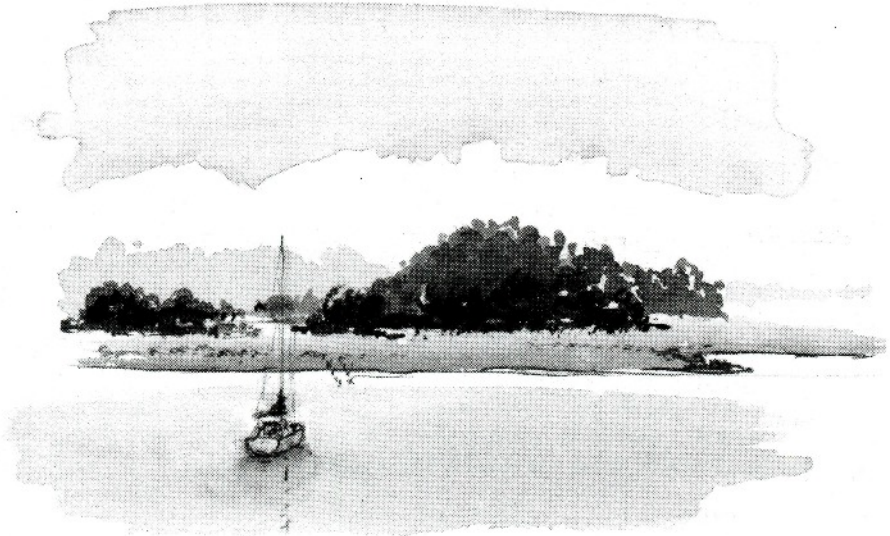
Robert Simper

The Sutton Shore Project: can community initiatives survive?

I know a village on the west coast of Norway, in Sogn og Fjordane district. Like a great many such small settlements, it clings to a green shelf on the edge of the fjord. At the head of the fjord there is an unstable rock face with a fault line across it which, if it fell, would generate a wave large enough to destroy all of the wooden houses at the waters edge. Ten years ago, a German minerals corporation negotiated a contract to extract granite from the mountain and ship it out directly from a terminal in the fjord. Now every day the sheer cliffs echo to sirens and reverberate to the percussion of the blast. Although the village has received a fillip from this new busy-ness and the employment it has brought to the region, it does not stop the occasional apprehensive glance up at that rock face.

Everyone has something to sell and there is a market for everything. I have to admit

to a moment of incredulity upon learning that something as ponderous as blocks of granite should be imported from Norway to give transferable strength to our soft East Anglian Coast. I suppose it is in the nature of globalism that not only are solutions to problems shared, but also the wide choice of materials offer alternatives to vernacular solutions for coastal defence problems. It is also in the nature of globalism that change may be affected more swiftly than it is capable of being reversed. It has been pointed out to me that there would appear to be an inconsistency to the rules that allow large amounts of granite to be placed on the beach, but not permit the erection of a false cliff of soft landfill material in front of a site prone to erosion, in order that it might leach away whilst being continually renewed. The difference is certainly not in the matter of ingenuity but more down to who had which idea. The use of "rock armour" is one of a repertoire of coastal defence solutions preferred by the Environment Agency and may not always be appropriate. The use of sacrificial landfill is a private solution and is



disapproved of as unsustainable and offensive to the "geodiversity" of the Suffolk Heritage Coast.

The polemics of this situation are only of interest here in that, in our own small way on the Deben, we too have experienced similar inconsistencies. In previous newsletters, I have discussed our proposal to join the debate over habitat creation/protection by identifying a saltmarsh area suitable for stabilisation and renewal. As you may recall, this is on the Sutton Shore, directly opposite Ferry Quay in Woodbridge, where there is a landing hard complementary to that on the town side of the river.

The landing hard at Sutton originally incorporated a river wall that ran along the upstream perimeter of a sizeable saltmarsh, connecting it to the shore at a point where there is a derelict structure, the old shelter for the ferry passengers. Through neglect and tidal scour, this wall has started to collapse, exposing the saltmarsh behind it to the full effects of erosion when the tide is ebbing. Our plan was to find an acceptable means of renewing this wall thereby stabilising the saltmarsh whilst coincidentally re-establishing the viability of the landing hard for general public or ferry service use. The existence of the Sustainable Development Fund, administered by Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) gave us the incentive to undertake some preliminary consultation with the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Unit and the Environment Agency; on the basis of which we were reassured that this could be viable and within the terms of reference for the grant.

However, once embarked upon, the consultation process became increasingly torturous, not unlike one of those games where your opponent knows all of the

rules and only informs you of them as they crop up. We thought that we had approached this project with our eyes open and fully aware that the Environment Agency and English Nature would be difficult organisations to pin down, but had not bargained for quite the amount that we would be driven around in circles.

The Sustainable Development Fund is £100,000 per annum, devolved from DEFRA and renewable over three years, against which bids are invited from the local community for projects beneficial to the AONB. The deadline this year was 7th April. We started formally seeking advice and consulting interested parties in October 2005 when our plans were no more ambitious than to replace like-for-like and simply replicate the current decaying structure. After a fairly intensive meeting on site with representatives of Suffolk Coast and Heaths Unit, the Environment Agency and English Nature, however, we understood that under the present circumstances it could not be so simple as to repair the wall. The dynamic of the Deben Estuary is at present under review by the Environment Agency, which, in spite of the Estuarine Strategy being currently in abeyance, puts a question mark over the viability of any new initiative for the river. The area is an SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest) and consequently stringent environmental controls are applied. The effect of a replacement structure upon the dynamic of the foreshore was queried and, bizarrely, even the question was raised over the detrimental impact upon the biodiversity of the material "under the footprint of the wall". The outcome of this meeting was a recommendation that a solid wall would not be acceptable. A "soft" solution was recommended which would impede the tidal flow sufficiently to

encourage the deposition of silt and to arrest further erosion of the saltmarsh.

At this stage we engaged Andrew Hawes, of Hawes Associates, to carry out a feasibility study of the site and to propose a suitable engineering solution. This was aided by a grant from Suffolk Coast and Heaths Unit towards the fees. What he came up with was an ingenious structure of freestanding screens made of a plastic geogrid mesh held between pairs of stakes. Combined with brushwood or compacted reeds, these would form a tidal mitigation barrier. An important consideration is that the structure as a whole should not be continuous so as to impede the passage of wading birds through it, therefore in plan the screens are offset from each other. To ensure public access from the landing hard he had designed a boardwalk to be incorporated into the structure. We were delighted with such an elegant solution to a complex brief to design a structure that slows tidal velocities but is not a continuous barrier, is a light structure but nevertheless incorporates pedestrian access.

I forwarded this design proposal to the Environment Agency and received the response that saltmarsh erosion is a natural process, querying the wisdom of maintaining saltmarsh in an unsustainable location, and asserting that any benefit would be marginal in the long term. It carried on to say that if there was any "detrimental impact", it would be required for the works to be removed and the area restored to its original condition. Bafflingly, it states that a situation to avoid is that of "a permanent lateral structure forming as a result of the accumulation of sediment behind the structure". This we had considered to be an object of the exercise. It continues to

say: "This would isolate the saltmarsh from the estuary and therefore alter natural processes operating". The structure we have proposed is to remedy a new gap that has developed in the wall over recent years. There are already two other gaps through which the tide enters and leaves. The recent breach has the effect of increasing tidal velocity through the saltmarsh and therefore the likelihood of erosion. This is what we seek to address. With a maintained wall structure along the upstream edge this saltmarsh has been in equilibrium for at least 150 years.

We decided that we could answer these reservations and so pressed ahead with the application, which failed to be supported by the committee, but we were encouraged to resubmit if we could satisfactorily address some reservations:

The committee wished to be reassured that the Environment Agency and English Nature were in support and wanted to see this in a written form: a difficult proposition, for in our experience no officer in the Environment Agency or in English Nature will give a clear and unequivocal response to anything that is not already defined by policy.

There was the question of whether this was a flood defence measure that facilitated public access or a walkway that incorporated flood defence. In the feasibility study, Andrew Hawes was at pains to emphasise that this was an integrated solution in exactly the same way as the original wall. The only difference was that we had been warned that a solid structure, given the environmental designations applying to the site, would be unacceptable. To be correct, our application was not to construct a flood defence structure, since

it is a characteristic of saltmarsh that it is subject to tidal inundation. It was made clear in the application that the intention is to mitigate the effects of erosion on the saltmarsh when the tide is ebbing and not to act as any form of flood defence.

The question over public safety and liability for the structure arose, which is one that will need to be addressed, however we have since established that although the path along the decayed section of wall is no longer registered as public footpath by Suffolk County Council, there is a willingness to re-register it if it is restored and also there is the potential of financial support towards its maintenance. Where the ferry landing meets the field behind there is indeed an up-to-date public bridleway sign.

The date by which we had to get a new application in was 12th June. Although we considered that we had answered most of the questions, it was highly unlikely that we would have all of the formal endorsements necessary by that time, but we set about tackling it:

The Environment Agency advised us that we would need to ascertain whether the proposed works qualified for an application for a FEPA (Food and Environment Protection Act) licence for which I must consult the Marine Consents Unit of DEFRA. This I did and discovered that, yes, since we are proposing a new engineering structure below mean high water, we must apply for a licence. However since this is the kind of public initiative that, in the representative's words, they wish to encourage and that its value is less than £50,000, we would qualify for a "Beneficial Use Licence", which will cost £525.00, thank you very much. Mr Hanham, the officer at DEFRA, further told me that if we were replacing

like-for-like by building a solid wall we would not have to apply for a licence. It is the need to conform to advice by designing a new structure that obliges us to seek a licence.

We were also advised that there is also the strong possibility that we might have to seek planning permission for the work and so I duly approached Suffolk Coastal District Council, Planning Department. After a delay that took us to within a day of the deadline for re-application, I received a response:

There are no "permitted development" rights for what we propose, therefore we would have to submit a planning application.

Since the work is to be carried out in an environmentally sensitive area we were advised to consult further with the Environment Agency and English Nature and that any planning application would have to be accompanied by an "appropriate assessment" under The Conservation (Natural Habitats Etc) Regulations 1994. Liaison with English Nature and with the Environment Agency will be necessary in this respect.

It was further pointed out to me that were we to be proposing to replace like-for-like, i.e. to all intents and purposes, repairing the existing structure, we would not have to seek planning permission!

This is as far as we have got at present. Needless to say, we failed to meet the extended deadline but fully intend pursuing this into next year's round of applications; that is, assuming that the fund remains unaffected by the current cuts in DEFRA's budget!

It is important to us that we do not lose

sight of the purpose behind this project at Sutton. It was to seek ways in which the local community may effectively work in partnership with those public organisations entrusted with the responsibility for the environment. With this in mind our next move will be to probe the extent that community initiatives are truly welcome. We will seek a meeting with Suffolk Coast and Heaths Unit to explore the possibility of a little more active endorsement of our plans. We would not be asking them to do the spadework, indeed we have already accomplished a great deal. But we would like reassurance that this project is desirable. Perhaps the Sustainable Development Fund is, after all, not appropriate. There are other sources of support and in our opinion if there were greater commitment to partnership on the part of Suffolk Coast and Heaths Unit, we could overcome a great many of the obstacles that we faced over the past year. The effect is that an extremely modest project is treated in exactly the same way as one that could have a major environmental impact.

To us this experience is a warning that, although well-meaning, if public institutions such as the Environment Agency and English Nature fail adequately to work with communities, there is the strong likelihood that debate will break down and be replaced by suspicion and alienation as we have seen happen on the Blyth and at Easton Bavents.

Simon Read

Two Small Soles and a Flounder

This is probably the subject about which I know the least but, with exquisite fairness, the Editor requires a certain balance in the content of the Newsletter. Apart from a few practical experiments, most of what I give you is hearsay.

There are fish in the Deben during the summer months: mostly a plentiful number of small bass, five to six inches long. They like ragworm on No 6 hooks and are most easily caught one hour either side of high or low water, particularly at junctions of one tidal stream with another and where you see gulls congregating. Only bass the length of a ruler can be brought ashore.

To date this year I have only been out on the Deben twice to fish. Netting is always difficult because of yacht movements. On the first occasion, I put my fifty-metre trammel (double layer) net at the back of the island at Waldringfield for the first hour of the flood. The result was a 1.3 lb. Flounder and about sixty crabs. Extricating the entwined crabs took a fairly smelly two hours! However, the boyhood recollections of a Waldringfield



friend about spearing flounders in the shallow water at the Tips were borne out. The flounders are still around, with some of good edible size.

When fishing with a rod on the second outing, my eight ounces of worm (about £7) produced a dozen small fish. Little bass seize large worms avidly and then fight like mad for a minute or two, so that every "bite" gives an expectation that you have caught a big one. Thus, most outings are a series of minor disappointments. You always hear about other people getting a good bass on the Deben and I know that a number have been taken this year.

Early in the season I spoke to a friend who had drawn a small trawl from his day-boat from Green Point to the Waldringfield trots, but had caught just two small soles and a flounder.

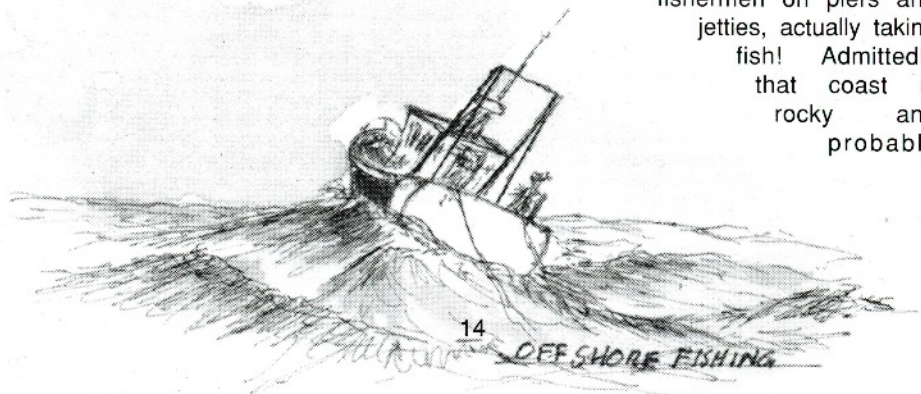
Off-shore the story of fewer and smaller fish is the same. There are only two registered fishing boats at Felixstowe now, though off Aldeburgh it is still worthwhile for several boats to trawl for sole in the summer and to net the herring in winter. There are some cod about on our shore but the official view is that, as North Sea temperature increases, the cod are moving north to be replaced by the

ubiquitous bass.

How different was the story of sprats and herrings on the East Coast in the early years of the twentieth century when it was possible to dip a bucket into some creeks to get a half-fill of the teeming sprats! Hundreds of tons of the surplus were simply put onto the fields as fertiliser.

Each year the Fisheries Officer from the Environment Agency takes water samples from the Deben and other estuaries for analyses relating to fish-stocks. The tiny fish and other relevant material in the water is counted and compared with previous years to determine the "state" of the fish population. From this scientific viewpoint it can be said that the range of fish species and their population has remained the same for the several recent years since samples were taken. Thus the decline in sole, plaice, flounders and eels must pre-date the current decade, if anecdotal evidence is true. However it is reassuring to know that there are good prospects of the estuary species holding their present populations.

From a fishing point of view, our side of the North Sea does seem to be bad news. On a yachting trip along the French coast from Ouistrehem to Boulogne, particularly in Fecamp, I could not help but note the large number of evidently active small fishing boats, as well as great numbers of individual fishermen on piers and jetties, actually taking fish! Admittedly that coast is rocky and probably



better for shellfish than ours and some of the boats were equipped for lobsters and crabs. Many, however, had nets. Another casual observation was the number of stalls in the fish-markets, each with tray upon tray of freshly-caught fish. I have no wish to question the application of E.U rules, but there were a lot of small fish in the trays: smaller than those marketed on this side of the Channel.

At the summer solstice, further north, a 2000-mile cruise from Bergen to the Barents Sea, beyond the Arctic Circle, has shown the enormous wealth of the Norwegian fishing industry, although one third of the annual Norwegian fish harvest now comes from fish farms. Cod are being farmed successfully as well as salmon. Among the skerries, behind the islands and even in the fiords, you are able to see large fish-farms, some with huts on the floating structures for processing and storage. Dozens of small communities along the coast and in the Lofoten Islands prosper by exporting fish and fish products: a total of 1.5 million tons usually.

Catching your fish is, of course, only the first step to the table . . . it still has to be cooked. Without disrespect to our national dish, and admitting that Norwegian cuisine is not over-laborate, I would still advise a trip there to enjoy superbly-prepared fresh fish and accompanying sauces. A 93-year-old Norwegian lady talked to me of war-time hardships when, in some remote areas, coastal villagers were obliged to boil tiny crabs for their protein. That set me thinking. Does anyone have a good recipe for small-crab soup?

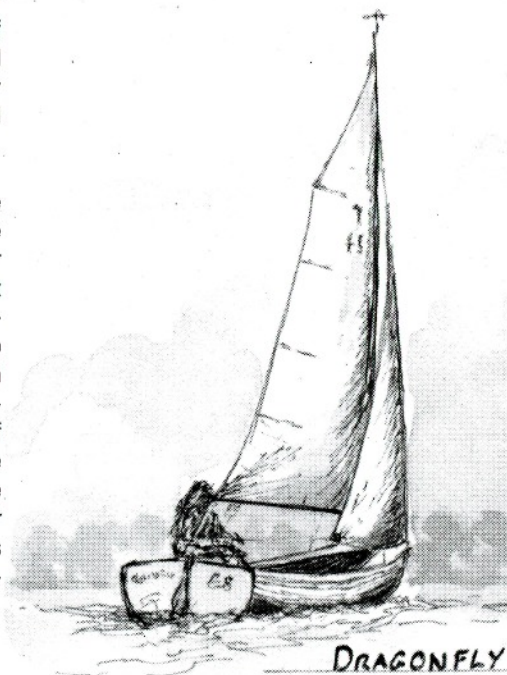
Denzil Cowdry

Goldfish Fights Back

Some may think it remarkable to discover a "Goldfish" in the Deben, but there was one – some 58 years ago – and soon there will be another.

In 1948 my father bought, new, one of the earliest Waldringfield Dragonflies (No 12) and, because of his occupation as a jeweller and goldsmith, the name followed axiomatically. I learned to sail in her and developed a life-long love of sailing and boats, not to mention of the river itself.

Maybe twenty years ago, I was saddened to spot in the long grass outside The Ramsholt Arms a derelict boat that looked rather like a Dragonfly. Pint in hand, I sauntered over to take a closer look, only to make the shock discovery that No 12



was carved on the transom. Somehow that sighting never quite left me and, with the recent resurgence in popularity of the class, I resolved to acquire one of my own. Because building new is more or less impossible, the Class has devised an effective system for recovery and restoration of boats found laid-up in sheds and other places, and I was duly introduced to a possible acquisition. For some months I was torn between this immensely appealing project and more practical things like a new bathroom or re-laying the patio in the garden. I don't know exactly when the die was cast but when our eldest son wanted a hand moving house and hired a large van for the purpose, I knew that it was going to be used to move a boat too!

Number 45, named "Wing Sang" by her first owner, an American serviceman at the Bentwaters base, duly arrived in our driveway in September 2002. I have decided, in the light of the re-building described below, to re-launch No 45 as "Goldfish".

To begin, I had no great plan and, frankly, not much idea as to how I should set about my new hobby. I soon discovered that simple rubbing-down or scraping and re-varnishing was not going to do it and that a more serious operation was called-for if the boat was to become viable again. Apart from four decades of poorly-applied varnish, with sand and mud included, the deck was rotten and the copper nail-fastenings had corroded the adjacent wood making all the fastenings loose. A search for plans in Waldringfield Boatyard and in Robertsons of Woodbridge where the entire class had been built, so that new bits could be made, proved fruitless. Fortunately, I discovered someone with some old, faded, sepia prints which

included, crucially, a full-sized half-sections drawing.

After tracing these, which brought out the details with brilliant clarity, my own plan began to emerge. Some time passed while I just fiddled with the boat. I wasn't ready to jump in with tools and do stuff yet! What I needed to occur happened out of an "interest only" conversation with friends. Three of us visited the Blackwater Sailing Club at Heybridge Basin to see how they restore their boats. We were shown a half-dozen examples of boat restored by the "West System". "West" is the trade name for an epoxy resin which is primarily a very high strength glue but has the virtue of being almost 100% waterproof. It is formulated in various ways including a very thin runny liquid designed to soak deep into wood (indeed it has been known to soak right through) whether it is sound or rotten. The result is timber with new strength and a new service life, and I was sold on the result. Before actually doing anything, I took my proposed plan of action to the Class AGM to seek its approval. Opinion varied. Some were keen to see it all happen but sceptical as to whether I could do it. A couple were pretty much against the whole idea. Overall, approval was given with the caveat, "we watch with interest!"

Mine is the youngest of all the Dragonflies, but, even so, it had split planks, many broken ribs and soft and rotten bits. Like all the other boats, the corroded fastenings had allowed the boat to flex out of shape. The aft section of the hull had visibly sagged so that the keel was not a sweet curve from stem to stern, but more a wavy line.

Task One was to build, using the full-size sections drawing, a complete building mould: effectively the same as used by

Messrs Nunn and Robertson for the new boats. With every last interior part removed (deck frame, thwart, king post and samson post, centreboard casing, various knees) the mould assembly should have dropped easily into the empty hull. It didn't; it wouldn't; indeed it couldn't! Forty years of weathering, sagging, distorting; combined with the probability that the boats were not built accurately to drawing in the first place, saw to that.

Thumping great coach-screws and big washers were used to secure the keel tightly to an internal strongback. At least the keel was now true, but still the sections would not go in. I devised a system of forcing screws to pull the sections into the hull until they fitted correctly on the strongback. The old lady protested somewhat and gave off some horrendous-sounding creaks and groans and just one "crack" as a port-side plank split in protest, but it worked! The hull was now shaped as in the drawing.

She was turned upside-down and rested on a purpose-built cradle on castor wheels. Just under two thousand copper nail fastenings were removed (but not all at once!). The keel is made in two parts and when they were separated on the bench it was amazing to see the original saw-marks on unblemished creamy-coloured oak. It is often said that shipwrights build by eye and that accuracy and precision are not ideas they understand. From what I have seen of the construction of my boat, built in the twilight years of wooden boat building, I would only partly agree with that notion. Like anything else in life, if you aim high and fall short, the result will still be OK. Shipwrights build to high standards of precision but wood, being a natural material, will twist and buckle and bend all

on its own. What was spot-on yesterday will have shifted a week later and to some extent the builder just lets it stay that way and locks these little distortions into the build.

Each of the 24 planks in turn, once removed, was hand-scraped to rid it of paint, varnish, Deben mud, sand, old nails and screws. Where long splits had occurred along nail-hole lines, I sheathed that area with a fine glass scrim or cloth. When wetted with epoxy resin this becomes invisible but it imparts great stability and strength to the plank. Gluing a plank back into place next to its neighbour was a process most often done in the early hours, after an evening of dry-run preparation. I devised a system of temporary beams inside the hull with small jackscrews to push the lower part of the plank out, and small lashings to hold the high spots down. All but the top two planks have been re-used, preserving the lovely golden glow of old varnished timber.

All the ribs have been replaced and appear identical to the originals. They were not steamed to make them flexible in the traditional way, but laminated from five thin laths of wood. These, I believe, will be stronger and hold the hull stiffer than before. Consistent with the gluing, rather than nailing, of the planks, the ribs too have been glued in situ. If it works, and the epoxy lives up to its reputation, I will have a very stiff boat that should perform well. We will see!

Much of the remainder of the restoration is straightforward re-finishing of interior woodwork, re-skinning the deck and fitting out with standing and running rigging and lots of new blocks and cleats and gizmos for racing. None of it is "rocket science" and most of it is what many dinghy sailors

do as a matter of course. At the time of writing, this is where the project is, and has been for quite a long summer break. I hope to launch her sometime before the year-end and join the racing fleet in 2007.

Then, I guess, it will be back to the bathroom . . .

John Fish

Anti-social Behaviour on the River.

Our Chairman has received a letter from Committee-member, Leigh Belcham, dated 1st August, and written in his capacity as Secretary of the Felixstowe Ferry Forum. Your editor has seen fit to reproduce much of this important letter verbatim and has done his best to summarise the rest.

Anti-social Behaviour Monitoring

The welcome sunshine this summer has sadly but predictably brought with it an increase in jet-ski and other powerboat activity on the Deben. While the patience of other water-users, local residents and

visitors the length of the river has been sorely tried, people at Felixstowe Ferry have been affected particularly badly.

Residents, especially those of Harbour Villas, have suffered noise and fumes most Saturdays, some weekday evenings and every Sunday throughout the season. Yachtsmen and dinghy helmsmen attempting to enter and leave the river have not only had the tide and the shifting shingle knolls to contend with, but also the recklessness of those who ignore the speed limit and basic rules of navigation, weave in and out of other craft, and do their utmost to deposit in mid-channel the occupants of inflatable "toys" towed astern at high speed. Powerboat and jet-ski trailers and vehicles often obstruct the pavement, damage the verges or occupy the sailing club car park, while the owners not infrequently use the two slipways without any attempt to pay. Attempts to remonstrate with miscreants are all too often met with verbal abuse.

That's the bad news. The good news is, firstly, that two, 10-knot speed limit signs, have been positioned prominently at the



mouth of the river. Secondly, that an Anti-social Behaviour Monitoring Area has been designated between the sailing club and Martello Tower "U", extending 200 metres offshore. Warning signs and posters endorsed by SCDC, Suffolk Constabulary and Suffolk Coastal Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership have been strategically positioned in the area. These urge powerboat and jet-ski operators to operate seawards of the monitoring area and encourage the reporting of behaviour that causes "harassment, alarm or distress".

While the three sponsoring bodies have undertaken to carry out the monitoring and to take any further action deemed necessary, they have to rely on us – residents, water-users and visitors – to provide credible evidence of any anti-

social behaviour that takes place, within or outside the designated area. Without it they can do nothing.

Now we have the chance to make a difference. Let's report every incident we can. The more information received by the authorities, the more they can do. Remember to include the registration numbers of vehicles linked with particular craft/individuals, and the names, home ports, SSR or Datalog numbers, descriptions of offending craft, etc, as well as dates, times, location and details of what occurred. The more detail, the more effective.

If you can't get hold of SCDC's Anti-Social Behaviour Reporting forms, phone Kate Rookyard, the ASB Officer on 01394 444763



THE RIVER DEBEN ASSOCIATION

AUTUMN MEETING

To be held at
The Felixstowe Ferry Sailing Club
Felixstowe Ferry

**On Friday 27th October,
2006 at 7.30pm**

Professor Tim O’Riordan

Adviser to the government and
English Nature on environmental matters

will give a talk on

coastal change and strategy

entitled

“Memories and Predictions:
looking forwards by looking back”