



**RIVER DEBEN  
ASSOCIATION**

**Autumn 2007  
NEWSLETTER**

**No: 35**

## RIVER DEBEN ASSOCIATION OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE

### September 2006

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## EDITORIAL

Waiting with my customary patience, on a very wet day, in a traffic queue



before the Wilford Bridge, I became interested in a white van in front of me bearing the jaunty title "Enterprise plc". This was accompanied by the logo "Maintaining the infrastructure of the UK". I was not familiar with this company and was intrigued that a firm with such an important task could have escaped my attention for so long. The first volume of my Shorter Oxford Dictionary happened to be at hand in the car, so - as the queue showed no inclination to move along - I looked inside it to refresh my memory on the meaning of "infrastructure". The SOED is quite severe about compounds beginning with "infra". While "infratrochlear" made it into these pages, "infrastructure" did not. By the time that I had moved onto the bridge I had persuaded myself that the van ahead was engaged in the business of maintaining this particular British infrastructure: a structure which was then "beneath/infra" my wheels; clearly being worked on and "maintained", Infra-wheels. But no; the van ignored the works on the bridge and sped off towards Sutton on some other infrastructural errand.

Determined to follow up this line of enquiry, I completed my task (which was to guide sixteen windswept and sodden, middle-aged, enthusiasts around the mounds at Sutton Hoo) and returned home to my computer. Readers will be delighted to learn that "Enterprise plc" does in fact exist. "They operate night and day", it's web-site proudly announces, without any silly modesty, "Maintaining the country's infrastructure and providing

other essential services". It was then, while drying myself in front of the Dell screen and hoping that the "Enterprise UK" van didn't have to spend the whole foul night up there on Sutton Heath, that I thought of the theme of this editorial. Actually, I had thought of it on Wilford Bridge but I have brought you to it in the roundabout manner of a very boring preacher of Sunday sermons. "Infrastructure of the UK", it seemed to me - and in the absence of an authoritative ruling on the meaning of the word - must include the boating, and other, activities on the River Deben whose protection and enhancement is actually the "night and day" task, not of Enterprise UK, but of your volunteer committee. I might even put in a subsidiary claim - an infra-claim, as it were - for the National Trust and the work of its army of cheery volunteers at Sutton Hoo. The Alde and Ore Association, too. Britain's infrastructure and essential services, I felt sure, would be able to dispense with white vans marked "Environment" or "Enterprise" or "Nature" or "Heritage", but could not survive without dedicated volunteers.

This sermon is now approaching a predictable climax ...

O ye members of the River Deben Association: pay your subscriptions with a smile; be ye humble and grateful towards your honorary Chairman, Treasurer, Secretary, and others in the RDA hierarchy, for their "night and day" activities (without benefit of white vans) on behalf of the River. Be ye responsive and obedient to your Newsletter Editor when he demands contributions in the form of articles and letters for his paltry newsletter, and forgive his wordy hysteria. Help us maintain the "infrastructure" of the Deben, and write a letter to the Editor starting

"Dear Sir, As Chairman of Enterprise plc, I take great exception to your insinuation that ..." Help us to fill the occasional vacancies on the committee as they are announced. Come to the meeting announced on the back cover ... and write to us.

Ranting over, I am deeply grateful as always - to the contributors to this issue. Tom Ellaway has been dragged from his retirement from writing to offer two delightful stories of larger-than-life figures from the Deben's past. My old friend, Darrell Smith-Lyte may be regretting the telling of his "sea-cocks" story while in his cups, after a particularly good dinner we had together the other night, because he's now had to re-tell it to everybody. He had forgotten that I am, not only the Editor, but was also once a schoolteacher! John Symes has generously offered the tale of a very recent cruise on board his Patient Griselda, one of the most attractive boats on the River Deben whose mooring outside Martlesham Creek always turns my head as I pass it. Denzil Cowdry's "News From the Hard" has developed into a perfect vehicle for his natural curiosity and concern for the river. I am grateful, too, to our wonderful Hon Secretary, Wendy Brown, who has never once let me down with committee-minutes and announcements. She has now announced her own retirement from the job and she will be much missed..

Nick Wright

## CHAIRMAN'S REPORT



My comments are being written in mid-August under pressure from the editor, so ahead of Maritime Woodbridge on 8th and 9th September. I hope

that most of the membership will take the opportunity to visit the RDA stand. Last year, there was criticism of us for not participating directly (although we did make a cash donation towards the expenses of mounting the event). So this year we have purchased a simple display stand and have arranged some illustrative panels for it. I hope that everyone approves. If you missed it, we will put it up at the half-yearly meeting [see outside back cover of the Newsletter].

In mid-June, Simon Read and I attended a full-day meeting of the Stour and Orwell Estuaries Management Group which brings together all those with an interest in the two rivers: Harwich Harbour Authority, RSPB, Suffolk County Council, and so on. Two matters arose of relevance to the Deben. Under John Prescott's plans for increased housing, the Haven Gateway (roughly the area from Southwold to Clacton, and about ten miles inland) is scheduled to provide land for 29,600 houses which will result in some 50,000 more people in the area. Simon Hooton, of Suffolk Coast and Heaths, calculated that as 3,000,000 more hours of leisure time.

Inevitably this will lead to increased pressure on the Deben for more sailing, angling, walking and - dare I mention it -

more para-surfing and jet-skiing. What are the implications of this likely scenario on river walls, bird life, river access and so on? Are there enough visitor moorings; should there be more, and if so where? No-one needs reminding what a wonderful place the Deben valley is. How do we believe that it can be preserved and yet made available to more and more people? Over the next few years there will be many debates on this subject, both formal and informal. If you have a view, please attend any meetings where local opinions are being sounded out. It is possible that the RDA may decide to undertake its own survey at some later date.

The second issue was that of Coastal Open Access which was dealt with by Peter Tuley of Suffolk County Council. He pointed out that present coastal access suffers from a number of problems: a mixture of access arrangements, uncertainty over landowners' rights, lack of clarity on access for members of the general public, failure of the Environment Agency and others to maintain footpaths, and so on. To give a non-Deben example: if you want to walk north from Covehithe to the Mere, you will find that the cliff-top path has been eroded away. Access to the field that borders the cliff is blocked with barbed wire. Are you entitled to climb over or through it? Are you entitled to remove it? Should it be there at all? There are similarities here with East Lane where the path towards Bawdsey has not been restored. The problem is that if a path disappears through natural erosion, it is no-one's responsibility to restore or relocate it although Coast and Heaths and Suffolk County Council do their best. If a path is destroyed by building works, then the contractor has to reinstate it.

The Open Access proposal will address

this problem by establishing a ten-metre wide strip within which the path will be located and there will generally be enough space to relocate it should erosion occur. Interestingly, it is envisaged that the path will run within 200 metres of the shore-line wherever possible. There is pressure from Natural England for Coastal Access to be established quickly but there has been no provision for compensation to landlords, so fierce opposition may be anticipated from the National Farmers Union. I understand that Natural England has asked for less than £70 million to fund this project, which seems an amazingly modest amount. There was, in fact, a web-site established to seek the views of the general public for three months from 19th June. It is/was [www.defra.gov.uk/news/latest/2007/coast-0619.htm](http://www.defra.gov.uk/news/latest/2007/coast-0619.htm) (phew!). I wonder how many comments they got.

The question of funding is getting more serious. It seems that only £1 million has been allocated for capital expenditure on Suffolk's coasts for 2007/2008. Clearly, if something nasty happens, there will be emergency funding, but the budgeted sum seems pitifully small. I learn from the Alde and Ore Association that the Environment Agency has said that the annual bull-dozing to recharge the Slaughden bank costs £400,000 and that they may have difficulty finding it. What are the implications of a breach in this bank? Is the lower part of Aldeburgh destined to get its feet wet? Are residents expected to pay for their own flood defences?

There is, as you know, a not dissimilar situation at East Lane, but here the local landowners have got together and made some of their land available for building. The proceeds will be paid into a trust which will in turn pay for an upgrade of the

local coastal defences, both here and at Shingle Street. It was with this as background that I have suggested to John Gummer that the title of his remarks at the half-yearly meeting might be "The Politics of Coastal Erosion".

You may be wondering why there has been no mention of the Sutton Shore project so far. Once Maritime Woodbridge has ended we will pick up this project again. The marsh was recently visited by a Fisheries Officer from Suffolk County Council who did some experiments to show that the salt-marsh is an important nursery for several fish species, including bass. I hope that our plans will have the full support of the angling community at least. Whilst at the Stour and Orwell meeting, I met the local Crown Estates commissioner. He's an important person because what we propose would affect the river and would therefore need his approval ... or perhaps not. It appears that some time ago there was an administrative mix-up as a result of which the river bed on the Sutton side was vested in the Pretty Estate and then in the National Trust. Amazing what you learn when you start asking questions!

If I may return to the Stour and Orwell meeting once again, there was an interesting presentation from John Brien of the Harbour Authority. He talked about the results of bird counts, salt marsh erosion, the deposition of mud in some places, and other topics. I was delighted to hear him say that future studies would embrace smaller areas in more detail, rather than whole river systems. It is useful to know how many waders there are, but equally important is to understand why their numbers are rising or falling. Is it food supply, disturbance by walkers with free-running dogs, or what? All our rivers suffer from a

lack of hard data on which really meaningful plans can be based. Let us hope that what can be learned from the Stour may have some lessons for the Deben.

Finally, and most importantly, you will have received my letter about the retirement of our Secretary, Wendy Brown. I hope that by the time you read this, someone will have volunteered to take over this role. The RDA is going to be called upon for its views on many aspects of the river during the next few years. An efficient Secretary will be important in keeping the Committee in order and helping to ensure that the RDA plays its proper role in representing members' views.

Ed Stanford



## NEWS FROM THE HARD

My first article under this title never really defined what I meant by a "hard". Well, in my vernacular, in the purest form a "hard", in a muddy estuary, is a place where the swirl of the tide uncovers some shingle which stretches out as the tide recedes to give a dinghy the chance to come ashore and for its occupants to get out without dirtying their shoes. Not very concise!

Forking through history, these natural nards were improved by the construction of concrete or boarded slipways, sometimes followed by a jetty, for loading and unloading larger boats or simply tying them up.

Some slipways and jetties, of course, were established for other reasons. At Methersgate Quay, for example, we have both, at a point where the estuary narrows and, consequently, there is deep water near to the shore. People would have gathered on the jetty when a barge arrived to move corn; conversation with the crew would have brought news from Felixstowe as well as from London. Most barges took on extra hands at Felixstowe to assist with the onboard stowage.

So, having dealt with the yards at the top of the river in the last issue, let us proceed downstream to the next, hard, slipway or landing-place that occasions interest.

The Melton Boat Club owns both a slip and a jetty on a muddy corner of the Deben's west bank just above Woodbridge. Over the sea-wall and through a gate in the sea defences you see the masts and top structures of a few small yachts and a half-dozen sailing dinghies. The unfortunate backcloth to this attractive scene is one of the new blocks of flats at Deben Mill. Click ... and

the history of this "ancient" hard evolves. At the turn of the century the remains of an old weighing "platform" were still to be seen at the end of the jetty. Barges evidently came alongside with corn to be milled or to take away flour. In either case, weight determined costs. Reportedly also there is a Thomas Churchyard water-colour of this corner of the estuary, painted from the west bank, showing trees long since gone.

Melton Boat Club is looking to extend its membership and can offer launching facilities via an old tractor, as well as winter storage for small yachts. This is essentially a DIY yard with the chance of mutually-arranged help. Most of the boats on the Deben represent much more to their owners than the floating "toy" moored to a buoy, seen by unknowing visitors. Apart from launching and recovery, tasks such as cleaning the bottom, hull painting or polishing, rubbing down and varnishing teak-work, replacing rigging, washing sails and winterising valuable diesel engines are all part of the joys of ownership. Even quite small boats can become the source of time-consuming effort, just for normal maintenance. DIY is the norm at Melton Boat Club. A spring tide makes light work of handling a boat on the slip, but that is only the start!

Just a little further downstream we see Robertson's boatyard, distinguished in the past few years for doing quality work on traditional wooden yachts, for making and modifying transatlantic rowing-boats, for providing technical support in the South Atlantic for the TV film about Scott, and a continuous stream of other novel projects. The dredging of mud from the lower end of the two slips at Robertson's has become increasingly necessary: proof of the silting that now bedevils the entire

estuary. Cradled in the main slip this month is a 1956-built ex-RAF target-towing launch, presently in the hands of the Royal Navy Volunteers, Ipswich, formerly the RNVR, but no longer publicly-funded. The launch is having its diagonally-planked hull and its keel attended to with the sort of expert care that has given Robertson's wide recognition for enduring workmanship. As an aside let me add how heartening it was to hear that young people still had the chance to prepare for naval service in an emergency ... shades of Dunkirk and Mrs Miniver. What a shame that a more up-to-date craft is not available to them!

The pleasing modern half-tide marina at Woodbridge provides lifting facilities but as yet no slip, and hence technically is outside the scope of these jottings. However, the slowly gained success of the enterprise is an indicator of the Deben's increasing use by those affording the luxury of pontoon berths as well as visitors from home and abroad, mostly Dutch or German.

Whisstocks slipway, with Woodbridge town centre close to hand, gets little recognition for having been one of the biggest (deepest) and best on the East Coast in its time, capable of handling large vessels on the right tides. Today what might be described as the Bass Dock/Tidemill bay is heavily silted and resilts quickly after every dredging. When the last big yacht left Woodbridge a couple of years ago, a channel had to be dredged for it at the end of the slip.

To the uninitiated, the low-tide scene at Bass Dock is rather tired and sorry-looking. Houseboats are always a trifle untidy but the craft in the dock are notable for their variety. The general lack of bustle

and activity is regrettable, even looking back only ten years. Let there be a hastening of the new building planned for the Whisstock's site with, one hopes, extended access for the public to give this part of the town a place where people can meet, gossip, and admire the age-old view across to Sutton Hoo.

Are you getting a feeling of decay and loss of use in our boating facilities? Well, let us move on to Everson's slip, behind which the old buildings look charming but rather derelict and the slip itself steep and evidently suitable only for small craft. But there is new energy about.

You have to search around for the 21st-century maritime vigour of the Deben and, more particularly, of the front at Woodbridge. Often it is just a question of being there at the right moment: any high tide in summer is always good, with a stream of boats leaving and entering the marina. In early August, Junior and Mirror Week at the Deben Yacht Club attracted the largest entry ever, with more than 100 children, as well as adults, competing in various classes. In view of the high winds experienced this year, the training and encouragement given by the club to young helms and crew were well-tested. In my view, the overall standard of boat handling in the congested water off the Clubhouse was exceptional. Allegedly, only in its second year, the Maritime Woodbridge week-end in September will attract several thousand visitors. Certainly the stalls, visiting boats and side-shows are even more numerous and interesting than last year. The 44' half-replica of the Sutton Hoo find, *Sae Wylfing*, will be rowed by a crew in Anglo-Saxon costume; Arthur Ransome's three yachts, the source of experiences that led him to "Swallows and Amazons" and other



books, will be in Bass Dock, and Victor, a restored Thames Barge, will be at Tide Mill Quay, formerly Town Quay.

Deeper-rooted, more enduring, and economically beneficial, are some signs of a real resurgence in building boats. I will pass quickly over Everson's steep ramp into the muddy Deben, already mentioned, and peep into the shed. There Jeff

Stinson, manager and distinguished dinghy (Larks)

Sinton



and offshore sailor, has interesting plans for recommencing building. The first edition of an 18-foot glassfibre, diesel engined, work/picnic boat, ideal for families on the Deben and adjacent estuaries, is already on the stocks; a pretty clinker-built 9-foot lug-sail dinghy, itself beyond repair, is being patched up prior to making a mould for reproduction in glass-fibre. A little less exciting, save for the fact that it is happening in Woodbridge, the yard is finishing standard 8-foot dinghies with good quality teak woodwork.

Economics, and sometimes the reality of access and communications, often drives boatbuilding inland. Anglia Yacht Brokerage at Rougham Industrial Estate, Bury St Edmunds, is an inland "yard" rooted in the Deben, with Waldringfield resident, Alex Haig, running the show. His speciality, a niche in the market, is mod-

ern yachts of traditional design; up to 26 feet. The Drascombe range, new and second-hand, is the main line, but there are a surprising number of variants in his yard, including a new mini-yacht from South Africa. This year we have to congratulate Alex for having embarked on his own design, of which four have been built already. He describes the boat as a "hot-tered-up" Drascombe Dabber: 18'6" overall,

lighter above, heavier below, with two unstayed masts: the balanced lug

main and mizzen setting 150 square feet of sail. As the owner of a Drascombe Dabber, I know he has made a good choice. Easily sailed by anyone, very stable afloat, room for four on a picnic, comfortably driven with a 4HP outboard and, if you have a fishing net, you can handle it over the side, with the mizzen to keep you steady. We wish these returns to building small boats every success.

The mention of my fishing net reminds me that, in the last issue, I sought a fishing correspondent. There were no takers, so the post is still open. Remember that I got the sack because I could not catch a decent-sized fish! However, news from the hard at Ramsholt is that there has been a run of young eels in the estuary, about twelve inches long. They certainly wriggle on a fishing line.

Denzil Cowdry

## **A LITTLE ABOUT THE SUBJECTS OF THESE ARTICLES**

These articles refer to two men, one of whom died some twenty years ago and the other, twenty years before that. They were Claude Whisstock and Ted Marsh and many of you will not have known either of them, so here is a bit about them.

Claude was a boatbuilder and a very good one at that. Ted was a seaman who finished his time at sea as the bosun of the Achnashie, a four-masted barque which was Scottish-owned but the crew of which all came from Woodbridge. Why? That is another story.

Firstly Claude: in 1926 he founded Whisstock's boatyard down at Ferry Quay which, although now defunct, for over forty years built wooden boats to very high standards. During all but the last few years of that time, Claude was its Managing Director.

I got to know him when I brought our boat into his Yacht Harbour. He was not always a boatbuilder and spent his early years at sea. That was during the Depression, just after the First World War when crews were small, overworked and underfed. "It was either come ashore, or die", he explained to me "So I came ashore". The result was that he first learned boatbuilding and then set up his own yard and his yard built some excellent boats. It was thus clearly the right decision.

His fund of anecdotes was enormous and it is some of them I have written for you.

Ted Marsh I never met. He died when I was still living in Paris, but I have heard so much about him that I sometimes feel that

I knew him. He was born in the Boat Inn, just opposite the Cadet Headquarters in Station Road, Woodbridge. It is now a private house. He was a seaman of some standing but, after retiring, he became the rigger of Claude's boatyard. He really knew about rope and cordage. He needed to, after all. The Achnashie had no engine; her rig and sails were her only power.

That is enough, I think, for you to know where the articles are coming from. They are about a time when the River was still a commercial route and many of the men who worked on it were employees in an industry now long gone.

Tom Ellaway

## **AS WHITE AS A HOUND'S TOOTH**

I think that our view of the Thames sailing barge can be a bit romantic and there is no doubt that seeing them at sea or on the river must needs contribute to such a view. Their undoubted beauty plus a feeling of nostalgia for past times that seemed slower and easier than today, where such a thing can have been an everyday workhorse, must contribute to this. I do not know. But, then, if we think a little: what would the average bargeman and his wife have thought if offered to swap with their present-day descendants? Some might have preferred to stay as they were, but how many? Not a lot, I think.

Be that as it may. We shall now never know, but there is a tale, one of Claude Whisstock's, about those times which might make you smile. I know it did me.

Because of the amount of coasting traffic back then, there was much more inter-

change and contact between seamen, mainly from the East End of London, and the men who worked on our river. They knew each other well but the interface between them, what with the differences between their respective ways of life and cultures, must have caused some raised eyebrows on occasions ... like this one in fact.

Claude was in his yard one morning when in ambled a man whom he recognised as the mate of one of the barges, of which there were always several on the river in those days, loading or unloading. "The skipper asked me to come down and tell you," he said " that our barge has dried out over a broken end of a pile ...that's right through her bottom."

"Well, what does he want me to do about it?" asked Claude, adopting the classic East Anglian stance at such times. But, as always, off he went up to her, taking a shipwright with him, to see what could be done.

A pile or dolphin, as you know, is a post to which a vessel can be tied, so that she remains upright when the tide goes out. This one had broken off below the water, long years before, and its broken end had worn down to a fine point. Just the thing, in fact, to punch right through the bottom of a barge moored above it as she dried out.

Her underwater planking was, as Claude put it, "a bit soft" but, as she had been holed between two floors, nothing else was damaged. The floors, as you may know, are not the sole, which is what the floor of a house would be known as in a boat, but the cross-members from one side of a ship to the other, layed across the keel. The shipwright soon had the projecting end of the pile sawn off on the inside of the vessel and had nailed a cop-

per patch, known as a tingle, bedded on white lead and putty, over the repair. Meanwhile a boy had been sent under the vessel to saw off the pile on the other side of the planking.

This arrangement was rather less successful . The boy came frequently up for air and every time he went back under he started the saw-cut in a different place. This was clearly no good but I suspect that working under several hundred tons of barge just supported by soft mud cannot have been the ideal place for concentration. Finally, the exasperated shipwright finished off the job, just in time to get out before the tide returned.

Off she lifted and not a drop came in. As tight as a drum she was. "It was lovely bit of wood, that pile" said Claude, "as white as a hound's tooth". I loved his turn of phrase.

I remember once he looked at our boat when the time came to renew her insurance. Because she had just turned thirty, the insurance company required it. Well, that would have cost a lot of money, so I went to see Claude. "Put her on the posts" he said, and so I did. Claude spent about two hours: here, there and everywhere about her, with me sitting in her wheelhouse more than a bit concerned. Finally, he came in and plumped down on one of the seats. "Damned fools!" he said. "She is as sound as a bell of brass." What a lovely phrase! Like going back in time. I asked what I owed him. "Buy us a pint," he said and that was it. He squared it with the insurers and we never heard another thing about it. Well worth knowing, was Claude.

Anyway, back to our barge. They swung her out into the river and set off down in the direction of Claude's yard. "What do I

owe you, guv'nor?" said the barge skipper. "Oh we will slip her and repair her properly. Then I will send your owners a bill for the lot," said Claude. "No, no, no," said the bargeman. "That's the soundest bit of wood in the ship!" And that was it! A few pounds changed hands and off she went to sea, duly plugged with a piece of pile. She came back many times to this river but nobody ever looked to see whether she still had it in her. It was probably never properly repaired. After all, as Claude said, that bit of wood was as white as a hound's tooth!

Tom Ellaway

## A SPOT OF DUCK SHOOTING

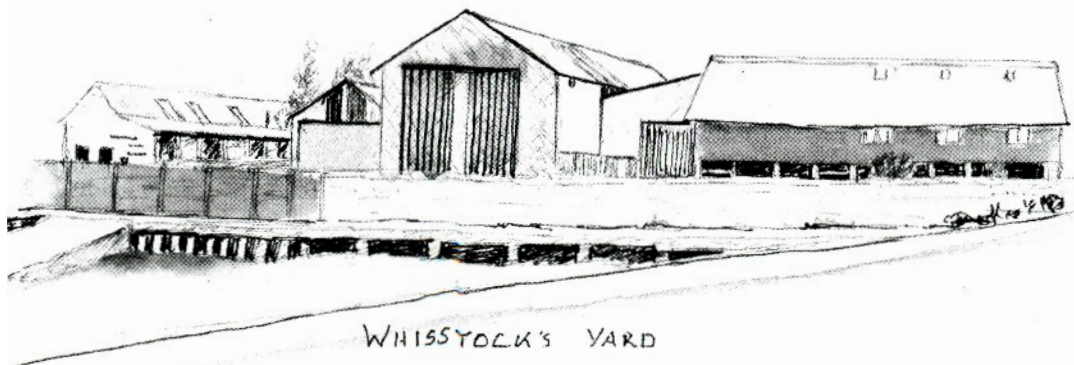
This is a tale told me by Claude Whisstock many years ago, about an incident from even longer past that makes a point. Claude's rigger at that time was one Ted Marsh. Held in considerable respect was Ted. He had been the botswain of a great four-masted barque, the Achnashie, which was Scots-owned but the entire lower deck crew came from Woodbridge. Most of them lived in our street, actually,

but none of this is german to the story ... so back to Claude.

He decided early one morning, to take his gun and dog down river to shoot a duck for the pot. The nearest boat was Ted's little rowing dinghy so, embarking dog and gun in her, Claude set off down river to just opposite Kyson Point. He tied up the little boat and went ashore in search of dinner.

Nothing. Not a single duck to be seen. Word must have got about because the entire duck community had decamped. Claude was not best pleased and his dog was a bit browned off too. After all, you did not get up at heaven knows what hour to wander about a river bank, half frozen. When it became obvious that dinner was going to have to be bought not shot, Claude hustled his dog back into the boat, tossed his gun after him ... and that is when the tone of the morning changed, suddenly and dramatically.

At this point Claude paused in the narrative. "Little old Belgian gun, it was", he said "thin in the barrel and light on the hammer. But there it is." Well there it was indeed, for you can see it coming, can't



you?" The gun went off and blasted a hole the size of your fist in the starboard garboard strake. Now most of you who have boats have plastic boats which do not have garboard strakes, either port or starboard, but that does not stop you knowing that, on a wooden boat, the garboard strakes are the planks on either side of the keel which form with it, so to speak, the backbone of the boat. Claude had now a two-fold problem. The first was the fact that he had neglected to ask Ted's permission to borrow his boat. Not good that, but he thought he could get back to fix it before Ted got in to work. The second was finding his dog who, having come down river for a bit of wildfowling, not to get shot, had gone for cover, convinced that his boss was a closet, if inept, spaniel murderer. Much cajoling and apology got the dog back into the boat; then Claude, despite the cold, took off his jacket, stuffed it into the hole in the boat, and rowed her like mad back up to the yard. Once there, he repaired the hole and had it tarred before Ted arrived for work.

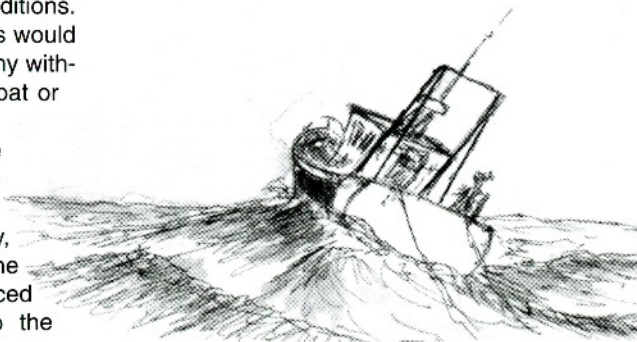
Claude got a bit of a wiggling from Ted on the general refrain of borrowing without asking but in due time the jury repair that Claude had made was replaced by a new garboard strake, and that was that. The dog, however, was less forgiving and it was many a month before he regained his enthusiasm for wildfowling expeditions. Nobody could tell him that his boss would never again toss a gun into a dinghy without unloading it first, dog in the boat or not.

But guns that were "light on the hammer" do not seem to have been all that rare in the old days. Charlie Brinkley, down at the Ferry, had, as you may know, only one hand, the other having been replaced by a hook. This modification to the

arrangement God initially intended had also at its source a gun which was light on the hammer. When he was out shooting one day, it blew one of his hands off and he, Brinkley that is, not the Almighty, sculled back home over the river, light one hand. You blow off your hand with a shotgun and instead of lying down and bleeding to death as I and maybe even you may have done, you row back home for help. Incidentally, in the early radar sets, there was a circuit breaker or something, known as a Brinkley hook. It was not named after its inventor, as most people thought. Charlie Brinkley was the ferryman who carried the designers of those first radar sets to and fro across the river and this component was named after Charlie's hook which, in appearance, it closely resembled.

But back to Claude. We all of us know that the late twenties and early thirties were not an easy time for the working man. The concept of "Master and Man" was much more prominent then than it is today, that is for sure. Claude was "Master", Ted Marsh was "Man". I wonder how much, as he desperately rowed back up the river to repair the boat before Ted came in to work, Claude thought about this. Not a lot I think!

Tom Ellaway



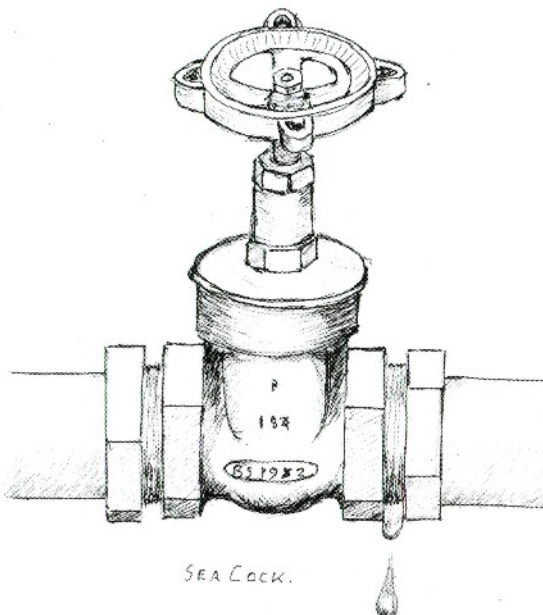
## WHAT WOULD BIGGLES HAVE DONE?

After a glorious sunny and windy sail on board Tregenna recently, we took a visitor's mooring for a short rest at Bawdsey. The stop was regrettably short because we had to get back to Woodbridge for a dinner engagement. It was also regrettably early in the incoming tide for we went aground within sight of our mooring near Kyson and had an enforced rest.

Having finally recovered our mooring, we were already late and had to make a quick departure for the shore in our dinghy. A feeling of smugness about our superb day's sail gave way to a sudden anxiety when we reached our friend's house. Had I closed the toilet seacocks? On a previous sail, the toilet had, for some reason, syphoned a lot of the Deben before nearly overflowing into the bilges. Quite how, I do not know, as it had never happened before, and could not be repeated under controlled conditions. I had planned to fit anti-siphon valves ... I had meant to check the seacock.

Throughout the first course of the dinner, the main course, the cheese and coffee, visions of a sinking Tregenna intruded, such that at midnight I found myself preparing the dinghy, outboard motor, oars, lifejacket and spotlight and preparing to set off to my sinking ship, on the south side of The Cut. It was a dark and moonless night, and there was a chill wind. Constant swearing warmed me a little.

With the outboard motor buzzing happily and an empty river ahead, I was alarmed to see a fast, inflatable RIB, approaching rapidly from the stern with full navigation



lights blazing. He noticed my torch just in time to steer clear and storm past me. I wondered what his business was at such an hour, and at such a speed, but I had a sinking boat to attend-to.

As I approached Tregenna, I shone my spotlight on her and was convinced – such is the power of a panicky imagination – that she was low in the water. I came alongside, switched off the motor, and climbed aboard. I closed the seacocks (which were indeed open) and all was well. Feeling like Shackleton with his mission accomplished, I climbed back into the dinghy and attempted to start the engine. Not a peep nor a cough from it, and now I was faced with a new crisis. No engine, a moonless night, crew tucked up in bed, a nasty falling tide with sticky mud everywhere. At that moment I started to lose my presence of mind. “Steady”, I thought. Have you ever tried to change a spark-plug in pitch darkness, with a little torch,

and everything dangling over the stern of a dinghy? I changed the plug for a new one. I then turned over the motor but there was no response from it, not even a little back-fire.

With silence and darkness around, apart from the gurgling of a rapidly receding tide, I thought what would Biggles, or Dick Barton, or Mike Beeton do? It was then that I thought of the oars and why I take them with me everywhere. I blessed that day, fourteen years ago, when I had paid three pounds for them at the dump. I rowed long and hard for the Deben Yacht Club. Due to the cold and my age, I had on a vest, woollen long-sleeved shirt, sweater, off-shore sailing jacket – all very well for a cold trip with the outboard: not good for a long row against the tide. I soon boiled over, but every time I tried to stop and strip, I went backwards. It was a zig-zag course because my glasses were constantly steaming up, but eventually my guardian angel got me to the pontoon. Oh, what a relief!

The morals I drew from this tale are as follows:

1. Fit anti-siphon valves to your toilet
2. Never leave your boat without checking the seacocks
3. Don't even think of a trip in the dinghy without oars
4. Equip the dinghy with lights if you are silly enough to travel the Deben at night
5. Don't accept dinner invitations when you'd much rather spend the time on board
6. If you don't feel strongly in favour of (5) above, then sell the boat!

Darrell Smith-Lyte

## A FEW DAYS ON PATIENT GRISELDA

Wind S to S/W – Force 4, increasing to 5 – rain showers. More low pressure systems coming in from the Atlantic. How often we have heard such a forecast this year during May, June and most of July! My brother and I had pencilled in the diary a few days sailing, so on a dull grey morning in June, despite the unpromising forecast, we left our mooring and motored down the Deben with the last of the ebb and against the increasing Southerly breeze. There is one consolation for sailing when the weather is poor: one has the whole river to oneself, and how lucky we are to sail on such a lovely estuary! By the time we had passed Ramsholt, the flood tide was well against us but Patient Griselda has a trusty Lister diesel and we were soon at the mouth, with the incoming turbulent water all around us. What an ever-changing, and sometimes exciting, entrance to a river, especially with an on-shore breeze! I always respect its dangers. But we were over the bar and with the headsails pulling well, headed along the coast for Harwich.

Patient Griselda has a long keel and only draws 3'3". She was built at Wivenhoe, on the River Colne, in 1960. Strongly built of pitch-pine, she is ideal for the shallow waters of the East Coast. No "round the cans" racer but she is a comfortable little ship in a blow. Although only 24'6" long without bowsprit, she has sailed twice around Britain including the Hebrides with her previous owner and also several North Sea passages.

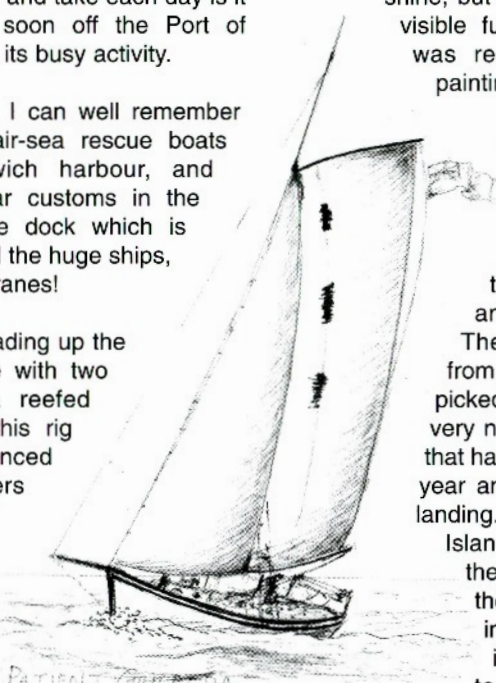
We have owned her for nearly 17 years and have cruised the area from Southwold to Rye, with a few crossings

over the North Sea. She now has an auto-helm, a GPS and an echo-sounder, but just in case we still carry a lead line together with good charts, pencils and dividers.

With such a poor forecast, we decided to make for the Stour and take each day as it came and were soon off the Port of Felixstowe with all its busy activity.

To show my age, I can well remember sea-planes and air-sea rescue boats moored in Harwich harbour, and yachts could clear customs in the original Felixstowe dock which is now dwarfed by all the huge ships, quays and giant cranes!

Soon we were heading up the Stour in sunshine with two headsails and a reefed mainsail. Under this rig she is well balanced and nearly steers herself. Several rain showers were visible further inland and again there were very few other boats enjoying what had turned out to be a glorious afternoon. With a smart breeze, we sailed upstream until well in sight of Maningtree. By then it was high water, so turned and headed down river, finding a mooring for the night at Wrabness. We both remarked how quiet it was, with not a soul on the shore or on any of the other boats. We enjoyed a good supper on board with a stunning sunset, but again the forecast was very poor. "More wind and more rain."



The next morning, however, was calm, so we slipped our mooring and decided to make for Mersea and were soon off the Naze with its fine tower which of course on a clear day can be seen for miles. By the time Clacton was abeam, we were tramping along with the Force Five in sunshine, but again with rain squalls visible further inland. The sky was reminiscent of a huge painting by Edward Seago.

Inside the Eagle Sand; over the Colne Bar and the Beach Head sands, taking advantage of the tide; so to Mersea and Besom Creek. There, with permission from a local fisherman, we picked up a stout mooring very near the steep-to beach that has been growing year by year and makes a very good landing. (I was born on Mersea Island and learned to sail there as a young boy.) By the evening the wind had increased and it blew up into a good storm with torrential rain, thunder and lightning, so we closed the hatch and turned-in to the wild chorus outside.

Awakening in the morning to wind in the rigging, we were obviously in for a windy day. But keen to keep sailing, we decided to beat up to Maldon with the flood tide. We reefed mainsail, one headsail, and with the wind against tide Patient Griselda had a good punch up the River Blackwater. Showers inland but we were in occasional sunshine and so we came to Maldon. What an attractive town it is, par-



ticularly as one approaches by water (as indeed is the case with so many towns). The houses, pubs, the lovely old church with its solid square tower; the Thames barges, smack and other craft alongside the quay: one can see why so many artists work here.

We tied up alongside a Thames barge and after a short walk into the town for fresh milk and other supplies, cast off at high water for an evening sail down stream. Past Osea Island and Thirslet spit, with the wind still fresh, we had a wonderful run down river and worked our way into Bradwell Creek and the marina, mooring up on the visitors' pontoon. "Not many people out today," said the harbour-master. "Blowing a good six."

Morning dawned with sun and a good breeze. The forecast was for more rain so, after breakfast, we were off again down the Blackwater, bound for the Deben. Like many old boats, Patient Griselda enjoys a good breeze aft of the beam so, with one other gaff-rigged boat a mile off as company, we sailed down the coast, managing to run between Clacton and Walton piers in the hour which many will know as six knots.

Going below to make a hot drink or snack, so enjoy the noise of a boat underway, especially a wooden one with the creak of the gaff on the mast, the water going by and all the other noises. It's music to my ears!

Across the shipping channel, we closed into the Felixstowe shore to cheat the start of the flood tide. And so to Woodbridge Haven and the bar buoy. To hear the sound of waves on the shingle banks and entering calm water; the sudden change and the feeling of nearing home safely, is

always marvellous. I often think of all those other ships in times past that have entered the Deben under sail. They too must have felt relieved at the sudden calmness all around.

The temperature rose as we made our way upstream. Sweaters were removed and we enjoyed the river at its best. Having had such a wet early summer, we were struck by how green the trees and fields appeared. And so with another sky as a backdrop that an artist would die for, we sailed up to our mooring ... with yet another mug of tea! On the mooring, the mainsail cover went on, headsails were unhanked and stowed (we have no roller headsails), bags were loaded into the dinghy and we rowed ashore.

By evening time it had started to rain! It then rained hard all night and well into the next day. How lucky we were to have picked four dry days during our very wet June!

John Symes





**THE RIVER DEBEN ASSOCIATION**

**AUTUMN MEETING**

To be held at

Waldringfield Village Hall

On

Friday 26th October 2007 at 7.30pm

The speaker

***Mr. John Gummer MP***

*on*

*The Politics of Coastal Erosion*