

RIVER DEBEN ASSOCIATION NEWS LETTER SPRING 1998



Number 16

Editor : Michael Atkins

Assistant Editor : Dennis Hawes

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CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS

Over Christmas, I had my attention drawn to the fact that the Association's brief includes not only the immediate flood-plain of the Deben above Wilford Bridge but also the meandering river valley right up to the source. That led to a most enjoyable country walk far from the yachting interests which some members may think are taking up too much of the General Committee's time. With about 300 fisherman active in this part of the Deben valley, not too many affairs should go unreported. However none has been raised, so I have to assume that there are no problems. My apologies go to members who consider that the Newsletter or my own notes have neglected our non-tidal waters.

There is one development under discussion which will undoubtedly bring river users of all persuasions out in strength - the proposed international (?) airport at Bentwaters. Aircraft noise, access roads and airport infrastructure would alter radically the delightful countryside between the Deben and the Alde. We are short of facts at the moment but when the time comes, I am sure members will wish to resist such a development or at least to ensure that the airport is planned with fair consideration

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and compensation for all interests likely to be affected. current problems that we share with our neighbouring Association for the Alde and Ore. Others include overcrowded anchorages, water jet skiers and rubbish....as well as the bi-annual task of finding interesting speakers for AGMs and Open Meetings. The possibility of a joint Open meeting has been mooted, perhaps in October 1998. The evening could take the form of an airing of public reactions to the common problems, followed by a quiz of local knowledge and lore between representatives of Association teams. Let me know what you think about this. Some innovation in the annual round may be a good thing. The Deben litter clearance:-the rubbish situation on the river has improved but there is still work to be done. David Cavey and Jo Masters will be in communication with section leaders in the summer, but I would also like to ask them or any member to report undesirable or unsightly objects which we may be able to clear using a more specialized task force than Section Leaders are able to muster each October. A typical item I have in mind is the collapsed drum, deck and ties of a raft dating back to a regatta of a few years ago which sits wedged between mud on a river bank above Woodbridge. It would be very useful if we could map your reports of abandoned craft, tractor tyres and other heavy awkward objects for future attention.

We need to react to the changing rubbish problem and Committee members will welcome your ideas.

It is my view that the recreational pressures on the Deben valley, now seen in its entirety, will be no less in 1998 than in 1997. There will be more fishermen, more walkers, more rowing dinghies, more motor-boats, more sailing craft (many of them bigger), more visitors, more crabbers, more swimmers, more cyclists, more cars and more chances of one person's pleasure falling foul of another's. I have not yet heard of an act of river-rage, but it cannot be far away. Let us hope that it does not occur on the River Deben. This is a good time of year to wish readers a very enjoyable summer season, and to express the hope that no day is marred by thoughtless or selfish behaviour. Really reprehensible acts need reporting....to the Coastguard, to Clubs or any responsible authority. We want to continue to be able to say that we are lucky to live in this unspoilt part of Suffolk and to enjoy the leisure pursuits of the Deben valley with many others.

Denzil Cowdrey
Chairman

EDITORIAL

In the last Newsletter, I put out a plea for someone to take over the task of Assistant Editor, with the imminent departure of Tim and Vivienne Midwinter. Imagine my delight when shortly after publication, I had a telephone call from Dennis Hawes

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offering his services. We both belong to the same Probus (as does our Chairman), and the other day a small sub-Committee met at Probus to hammer out final details of this Newsletter. Apparently the transition from my word processor to his computer presents no difficulty (!Asst Ed.), and as I write, the next edition of the Newsletter is almost ready. I am very grateful to Dennis for coming forward and providing some very necessary instance,

it was said once before that the Associations work was almost entirely stimulated by member's contributions, be it on planning applications, water safeguards or whatever. In this context, I welcome Tim Pryke's article on the upper reaches of the Deben. It is true that they haven't figured significantly at our meetings, although I did do a survey of them for the pamphlet on the river which, in the event, was never published. Tim raises some interesting points, and I have no doubt that he will have encouraged some of our members to investigate some of these waters. The actual lane in Debenham which is the source is well worth a visit sometime.

In my last Editorial, I stated that we had had two reports from Fairway Committees on the Deben, and expressed a hope that we would be able to complete the picture with the other Fairway Committees. Sadly, although I have been in touch, I have had no copy. It is a pity that these bodies, which have enormous influence over our river,

should be unwilling to submit to public scrutiny.

Michael Atkins.

Report

LITTER CLEARANCE DAY

Despite the very regular annual River Deben Litter Clearance Day, we still managed in October last year to fill four skips with 3½ tons of rubbish and collect 65 plastic sacks full. So it is clear that the need to continue the event is as important as ever and that all those who help deserve our heartfelt thanks. Our Editor gave an excellent tip for the day, and I pass it on to you. We now have 19 separate areas, each with a leader, and by moving from group to group each year, you gradually see more of the river from a different angle. Jo Masters who coordinates worker participation can help by putting you in touch with areas which are short of helpers.

And in connection with our continuing need for helpers, if anyone knows of any organization (scouts, walking groups and the like) who might take on an area, would they please give me a call on 01394387099.

David Cavey

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WHO'S WHO OFFICERS

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| Chairman | Denzil Cowdry. St.Edmundsbury, 10 Ipswich Road,Woodbridge, IP12 4BU. | Tel.01394 383625 |
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Association Business

Forthcoming Events

Friday, April 17th RDA .AGM

Mr Mark Dickson
of the Environment Agency
will speak on "Coastal Erosion"

Sunday July 1998

Woodbridge Regatta

Saturday August 8th-Sunday

Deben Week

16th Sunday August 9th

Yachtsman's
Service

Articles

The Upper Deben-What Role for the Association.

Here's a question for you- why did you join the RDA ? After a pause for thought I suspect that most of us are muttering something along the lines of wanting to protect and preserve the delicate beauty of our (I use the word deliberately) river and its environs. We are lucky indeed to live where we do, a fact that was brought home to me when just before Christmas a visiting friend and I strolled into Woodbridge from Melton via the river path. It was a bright, clear day but with the temperature only just overing above freezing point-a perfect day in fact for walking a river bank. As he lives in a city and barely sees countryside from one month to the next it was hardly a surprise when my friend commented upon my good fortune in living in such beautiful surroundings. It was impossible to argue the point (not that I would have tried) as we stood in silence watching the water slowly

ebbed seawards leaving in its wake patches of shining mud upon which the sun's rays danced in delight. Gulls wheeled above our heads and our lungs were filled with that wonderfully pungent smell of the estuary. Almost as an afterthought, he wistfully commented that the best things in life are invariably free. Well, yes, there's much to be said for that observation but the trouble with things that are free is that we tend to take them for granted which, in turn, brings me back to my reference to the Deben being "ours" - if we feel a sense of ownership, then surely we have a corresponding duty of responsibility.

How about another question: hands up those who are familiar with the river at Kettleburgh, or Easton, or Clevering or Loudham ? I guess that the vast majority will have their hands firmly planted in their pockets. Aren't those places upstream of Woodbridge? Yes, look, they're here on the map - good grief!-they're even upstream of Wilford Bridge! Yes, it is all intended to be

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tongue in cheek, but I think that there is a serious point to be made here. We are all members of the River Deben Association, not the River Deben Estuary Association. I haven't checked the official data but a glance at my map of the Deben valley suggests that there is a greater length of river above Wilford Bridge than below it. What's my point? Put simply, the Association rarely involves itself in issues connected with the upper river and, in my opinion, is less effective for not doing so.

Surely the upper reaches are the very life blood of the river and where would you expect to find clear, pure, fast flowing water? That was certainly the case thirty odd years ago when school friends and I would catch an Eastern Counties bus from Ipswich every Saturday morning and take what seemed like an epic journey through the villages of East Suffolk before eventually scrambling off as the bus reached Clevering Bridge. We would then spend the day catching good nets of roach, dace and perch from the pool just below the bridge itself. Sometimes we sat on the parapet and lowered our baits in front of the large specimens that always inhabited the deep hole close to where some old stumps protruded from the left hand bank. If you hooked one, the rod had to be passed down from the bridge to a friend waiting on the bank in order that the fish could be safely landed. Roach weighing a pound were common place as were dace of up to twelve ounces. The river flowed at a steady walking

pace through streams of weed that drifted seductively from side to side in the current. Now I accept that we all have a tendency to look back through rose tinted spectacles, but this is genuinely how I remembered it.

Today that same stretch of river would be described rather differently. At first glance it still looks a very pretty rural scene as the river bends away to the left about fifty yards downstream from the bridge. The water is clear and you can see the bottom wherever you look. However, there is for most of the year virtually no flow at all and in the summer the surface is choked by huge rafts of bright green weed which stretch from bank to bank. At one point last summer this green carpet stretched almost unbroken for several miles between Easton and Wickham Market Mill. The effect? Well, I am not a scientist and officials at the Environment Agency will be able to explain it in rather more detailed terms but the weed prevents sunlight from penetrating below the surface with the result that the river bed is plunged into permanent darkness. There is an accompanying lack of oxygen and the result is an ecological disaster. Last summer many thousands of fish died and it is logical to assume that many of the other aquatic animals and insects which are the very life of the river died also.

In a sense this incident sums up my concern for the upper river. Last summer's disaster was not helped by the drought conditions that prevailed but

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neither was it caused by those conditions either. It seems to me that the flow has been progressively decreasing year on year on for the past decade or so. In fact, the stretch of the river upstream of Wickham Market mill would be more accurately described as a canal - the only time that a reasonable flow is induced is when the mill gate is operated. Furthermore an enormous volume of water is abstracted from the river each day during the spring and summer months and sprayed on the surrounding land for irrigation purposes. I am not sure whether the amounts abstracted under licence have increased over the last decade or not, but it certainly appears that the river can no longer cope with the current levels. Neither am I accusing the farming community of anything illegal - they are entitled to abstract as much as their licences permit and after all it is for the most part applied to produce the crops that we all need to survive. No, what I am suggesting is that we must recognise that the river, our river, needs to be managed more carefully as we enter the new

millennium or else further disaster will undoubtedly occur. All is not lost. To their credit, the Environment Agency commissioned a report specifically detailing a number of schemes to help alleviate the low flow problems and work on these should commence soon. There is also on-going research into these issues; perhaps overdue but welcome nevertheless. Modifications are being made to their weed cutting

programme and ways of reducing the impact of abstraction are being promoted. Many of these very issues are addressed in the Local Environment Agency Plan (LEAP) for East Suffolk which was published and circulated for public consultation last June and referred to in the "Chairman's Comments" made in the last Newsletter - which brings me back to the point I made at the start. If we really care for the river, don't we have a responsibility to get involved in these issues; to take part in the debate and have our say? Isn't that what this Association is for?

Tim Pryke

Woodbridge Regatta

Woodbridge Regatta is back! Thanks to the persistence and determination of Ken Wilding and of Christine and Frank Knights the Regatta is back on the Woodbridge calendar and will take place on Sunday 26th July 1998.

A new strong Committee has been formed, chaired by myself, Sonya Pollock, Commodore of the Woodbridge Cruising Club and with members of the three Clubs on the River wall, from the business community and the Woodbridge Lions.

Stephen Alexander, Commodore of the Deben Yacht Club has undertaken to co-ordinate all the events on the river - dinghy races, races by the Deben Rowing Club in their light shells, the Sea Scouts in their heavier boats, the

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outboard motor races and demonstrations by those in their canoes. Frank Knights will run River Trips for the benefit of the RNLI, and the East Coast Sailing Trust barge, Thalatta, will be moored on the quay ready to welcome visitors. The Greasy Pole will, as always provide entertainment for all.

On shore there will be brass band music teas and refreshments in various venues and in the Yacht Pond Field there will be stalls of all sorts and also games for the children as well as the Tug of War. We expect there will be various displays and activities in the Yacht Pond itself.

The Regatta Yacht Race will be held on Saturday 25th July and the Swimming Events will take place in the Deben Pool on that evening.

The plans are made, the setting of the River Wall with the town rising behind is incomparable, the tide will be high, we have asked for good weather and all we now need is YOU!

SONYA POLLOCK

Deben Jottings

It is good to see a strong reformed Regatta under the guidance of Sonya Pollock. Note the dates and wish them well now for the Millenium and the next Century as once again there will be rowing races for the enthusiasts as in 1908 (See the Regatta and Rowing Club Articles)

In his article Don Smith, Chairman of the Rowing Club gives details of their

history and rapid success. They are affiliated to the Amateur Rowing Association (ARA) who are giving their enthusiastic support. From their point of view there has been a serious "gulf" between Norfolk and Essex with no affiliated club, which the Deben now fills. Energy and enthusiasm are in excellent supply. I have a vision that given full local support and a bit of luck they could be successfully "rehoused" and take their proper place alongside enthusiasts of dinghy sailing and cruising of the DYC and WCC, and be going strong through the next Century.

Continuing the Coastal Protection theme from the last edition and getting the detail for those who sail offshore or walk between Brackenbury Cliff, Cobolds Pt. and Spa Pavilion, there is an article by Ray Stoddart, a planner in Suffolk Coastal District giving details of a scheme due to start this summer.

Finally Felixstowe Ferry and the Inn saga rambles on. Whether the application for its significant development goes through or not I do know it will result in inevitable change. The key I suggest lies in the control of the car for all those who visit the Ferry. Once it is full with the authorised quota of vehicles the rest should be sent back to Felixstowe or wherever. Simplistic, yet effective!

Ian Battye.

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WALDRINGFIELD JOTTINGS

Several happenings in Waldringfield over the winter may be of interest to our readers. Firstly we were delighted to welcome Louise and Steve Lomas, our new landlords at The Maybush. They quickly struck a popular note when they invited the whole of the village to a party at the pub shortly after their arrival.. With beer at a pound a pint, and some superb food, the evening was bound to be a success. Word of the party had clearly gone further afield, and the pub was crowded with several non-Waldringfield partygoers to such an extent that one was tempted to remain at the bar rather than undertake the difficult and hazardous journey to find food. Our thanks go to Louise and Steve for a great evening, and our best wishes to them and their family for a happy stay in Waldringfield.

Pubmasters have appealed against the decision to refuse planning permission for the restaurant which they wanted on the river side of the pub. The Inspector came down on December 22nd to see the site, and we are still awaiting her report. Meanwhile the Planning Authority have not given permission for the patio heaters which Pubmasters wanted, and this has had no noticeable effect this winter on the numbers drinking on the patio during the evening. But no doubt, Pubmasters will still appeal.

The sad news is that the village shop is closing. Jackie and David Beaton have run the shop for 34 years, and have established as happy a village shop as one could wish to find anywhere. Many members for the village are distraught at the loss of a social centre, and an easy source for all their requirements. We all slowly realised how hard David and Jacky had worked on our behalf over all the years, and the limited rewards once Tescos had opened in Martlesham. A moving ceremony and presentation was held in the village hall to express our thanks at which we were joined by several yachtsman with moorings on the river, who have made good use of the shop over the years. Not only will the inhabitants of the village miss Jackie and David, but also the yachtsmen from overseas who have been used to stocking up after their passage across the North Sea. We will all miss them.

The additional loss of the Post Office was something which caused much distress until Mrs. Molero (R.D.A. member) undertook to reopen the Post Office in her house (aptly named The Old Post Office), which is situated at the corner of Cliff Road and Sandy Lane. The opening hours are 0900 - 1300, Monday to Friday. We are all grateful to her, and wish her all success.

Jim Turner, on behalf of the Parish Council, has done great work with various bodies to strengthen the sea wall outside the Sailing Clubhouse.

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Apparently gabions are to be installed behind the timber wall, and this, the experts say, should do the trick, Suffolk Coastal Engineers for Sea Defence have given valuable practical help, and most of the work is being paid for by the Diocese (who own the land) with contributions from the Sailing Club. We are grateful to them all for their help, and particularly to Jim Turner for masterminding the work.

Michael Atkins.

Deben Rowing Club

The Deben Rowing Club was thriving in the late nineteenth century, and until the beginning of the first World War rowing on the river at Woodbridge was very popular. Rowing at Regattas was a familiar sight. The Club is believed to have had a membership of about 100 at the turn of the century, but it appears that the loss of a generation of young men in the horror of war had a severe effect on British society and so the town of Woodbridge could no longer support a rowing club, and sadly in spite of many rescue attempts, in 1936 the boats were burned. Another world war has been fought, post war austerity was endured, and now, almost at the end of this eventful century, the Deben Rowing Club has been revived, and is now flourishing.

The Club now has approximately 50 members and continues to grow, attracting people from all walks of life, ages ranging from 20+ to 60+ year olds

and more recently, a Woodbridge school has shown interest, and now row regularly each week .

The club provides training, sport, recreation, friendship, and opportunities to get afloat to any person, regardless of their means, age, or state of fitness. The club has also been fortunate with help from other clubs, in particular, the use of the Deben Yacht Club's slipway, the use of the Woodbridge Cruising Club's facilities for social events and the loan of a training boat from Felixstowe Sailing Club, but we have now reached the stage when it is vital to have the right facilities and competitive kit.

In ascending order we now have a clinker built four, a fibreglass coxed four, a very fast quad scull, and two training boats, which can be rigged either for rowing or sculling. One of the training boats bears the logo of SCDC (Suffolk Coastal District Council), having received a generous grant from them, which helped with its funding. The same boat is called "Frank Knights" in recognition of the great help and encouragement we received from Woodbridge's respected waterman.

One or two of our members have acquired their own single scull, which is a reflection of the enthusiasm which prevails. Rowing for recreation receives as much encouragement and club resources as training for races.

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Since the club's revival, recreational oarsmen from the Deben Rowing Club have completed the following touring expeditions:-

The length of the Thames, from its source to Greenwich.

The Severn from Worcester to Tewksbury.

The Avon from Tewksbury to Evesham.

The Great Ouse from Bedford to the Wash, and of course all our East Anglian Rivers

As well as a strong interest in recreational rowing, Deben Rowing Club is represented at racing regattas, including our local one on the River Deben.

We are now seriously looking at our next phase of expansion, since our present accommodation lease expires in just over two year's time. With the remarkable Olympic achievements of Steve Redgrave, and the present huge interest in keeping fit, we feel that the sport of rowing is about to take a giant leap forward into the next Millenium. We want to be part of this, and, it is our aim to provide training facilities for all aspiring Redgraves throughout the local area, with the emphasis on the younger generation, which would include schools and youth organisations.

Don Smith.
Chairman.

Cobolds Point Coast Protection Scheme

The latest phase in the Suffolk Coastal District Council's Coast Protection Programme will be known as the Cobolds Point Coast Protection Scheme and it is due to start in early 1998, subject to approval from the Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food.

The Ministry is the regulating authority for Coastal Protection and Sea Defence, Coast Protection is the protection of land against erosion and is undertaken by District Councils whilst Sea Defence is the protection of land against flooding and is undertaken by the Environment Agency.

Works schemes for both purposes have to be submitted to the Ministry for technical and environmental approval as well as meeting a test for cost effectiveness. Approved Coast Protection Schemes are financed largely by the Ministry but with smaller contributions from the District and County Council. Tenders have been received for the Cobolds Point Scheme and the District Council currently awaits final financial approval from the Ministry before work may start.

The need for the scheme arises from the varying beach levels around and to the South of Cobolds Point, the deteriorating concrete groynes and sea walls and the unstable cliffs at Brackenbury.

The solution chosen includes the construction of four fishtail shaped groynes built by using natural rock and precast concrete blocks extending some

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100m from the sea wall. These groynes will not only deflect tidal currents off the shore, but destroy damaging wave energy before it reaches the sea wall. Between the new groynes the old ones will be removed and a new beach will be built using sand and shingle obtained from routine navigation dredging in the River Stour by arrangement with the Harwich Haven Authority.

Along the Brackenbury frontage the cliff will be regraded to a gentler, safer slope with spaces provided for beach huts and new access paths leading to a coastal walkway which will be built on top of the refurbished and strengthened sea wall. Some of the excavated material will be used on the green open space to enhance the sea views, but the sea views from Golf Road and Cliff Road will not be obstructed. Some limited planting, management of the small woodland and replanting of the grass will enhance this favourite open space.

The coastal walkway will link the promenade at the Dip to the private frontage boundary where a ramp will allow access to the beach. Removal of the old concrete groynes and the new higher beach will allow pedestrian access around Cobolds Point to Maybush Lane where a further ramp will lead back onto the promenade in Undercliff Road East. Surfaced ramps over the new fishtail groynes will thus allow uninterrupted pedestrian access by the sea from Manor End to Felixstowe Ferry. Some modification will be necessary to the timber groynes built in

1992 but the timber will be reclaimed and recycled for use in retaining walls, seats and other features on the Brackenbury Cliffs.

It is hoped that this outline of the scheme will reassure readers of the Suffolk Coastal District Council's efforts to work with the sea in an environmentally acceptable way to serve the needs of the people of Felixstowe.

Roy Stoddard.
Planning Staff SCDC.

DEBEN REMINISCENCES

I was posted to Felixstowe in 1946, and the first problem was to find out where it was, nobody seemed to know. Eventually I was told it was near Trimley, which was well known because it was a radar station.

On arrival at the Marine Aircraft Experimental Establishment, I encountered Sunderlands, Seafords, Walrus and Sea Otters for the first time. There were also Air Sea Rescue boats in the Dock Basin, and a couple of German seaplanes. At week-ends, I would walk along the seafront, inside the sti existing barbed wire fortifications to attend the dances at the old Pier Pavilion where I met my wife Mary. After demobilization, I was employed by the Ministry of Supply at the Blind Landing Experimental Unit at Martlesham. I moved in with Mary's family (as was usual in those days if one could not afford a house) at Capel Hall Farm Trimley. I was skinny (9st. 10lb.) when I

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moved in but after a year of Suffolk farmhouse food, where anything left on the plate was regarded as an insult to the cook, my weight escalated to 14st. 7lb.

My first intimate contact with the River Deben was on the 1st of February 1953.

I had been playing the accordion the night before in the Felixstowe drill hall, and had been warned that the sea was washing over the promenade. We took very little notice, it often happened, and

we were more concerned about getting home in the raging gale, sleet and snow.

We lived in a three storey, wattle and daub farmhouse, with a view across meadows and marshes to Bawdsey, three miles distant. We slept in the top bedroom, and that night it was swaying alarmingly. (No heating, of course, just Mary and her hot water bottle). My breath used to freeze solid on the sheets. The next morning I looked from the window in amazement tinged with fear.

The meadows had been replaced by sea, miles of it, complete with waves. The water was in the field below the garden; if it could come that far, how much further would it rise? After breakfast, an emergency call was received. Every available man was required to help

repair the sea wall before the next high tide. We climbed on to tractors and trailers and drove to Falkenham wood, where men were already cutting trees to make stakes. Fortunately there was an old river wall from the wood to the banks of the Deben, with most of its top above water. It was a long walk with the gale blowing sleet in our faces as we

shouldered empty sandbags and towed a dinghy loaded with stakes. We were dismayed by the occasional dead farm animal floating by, and at one point we passed a very tall barn and were told that four horses were swimming in the roof. (Later enquiries revealed that after many rescue attempts, the horses had to be shot).

We hammered in stakes and filled sandbags all day, and were joined by a party of high spirited boys from H.M.S.Ganges, kept under control with clouts from the officer in charge. This did not seem to worry the boys. When darkness approached, we made our way home having noted that the river walls were working in the wrong manner, preventing the high water on the marshes escaping into the then much lower river.

Mary and I walked along the edge of the floodwater later in the week on both the Deben and the Orwell and marvelled how much the Felixstowe peninsula had shrunk. We knew by then that it had been a national disaster, not just Felixstowe, and that 39 people had died in the Langer Road area.

Two years later, I changed jobs and worked on Orfordness with A.W.R.E for fifteen happy years. During this period, I was introduced to sailing - mainly crewing for colleagues on the river Ore and Alde. I started sailing on the beautiful Deben in the late sixties and caught the racing bug. My mooring cost 83p and dinghy on the beach 25p. Now my boat and I are both old, I just cruise three days a week from March to

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November, and have time to admire the wild life and the lovely Suffolk skies. I convince myself that I am doing youthful athletic leaps every time I go about, in spite of Father Sam producing videos of a Wayfarer just like mine with an old man staggering about.

Charlie Taylor

WILLIAM MAXWELL BLAKE

The name of W.M. Blake will either evoke the romance of wooden yachts and inshore working boats, or it will mean nothing at all. Those of you who do recognise his name are probably far more knowledgeable than I of his designs; such yachts as Marlin, Mirelle, Florence Edith - later to become Gypsy Moth II, the Ranzos and the Deben 4 tonners that are still in use and are, I am happy to say, so beautifully maintained and loved by their owners. You will also be aware of the legacy left to those interested in our historic working boats, and to the nation generally when Yachting Monthly commissioned W.M.B. to take the lines of wherries, smacks, barges, shrimpers, etc. that were fast disappearing from our shores. But perhaps I can say a few words about the man himself, mostly gleaned from my mother, his only child, as I barely knew him and then only when young.

William Maxwell Blake the eldest son of William Aston Blake of Bramerton Hall,

near Norwich was born in 1874, and it was on the appointment of his father as Rector to a benefice in the Woodbridge area that he first encountered the charms of the Deben, and his life long love of boats began. He and his three brothers went to Woodbridge School and he decided on a career as a Naval Architect. He was apprenticed at the age of 16 to Robertsons yard, finally serving a three year premium apprenticeship as a ship's draughtsman at the engineering yard (Forrestt & Son, Wivenhoe in Essex. There he met and married my grandmother, and having eventually secured a job in Singapore with Riley Hargreaves as ship yard manager, they left for the far east in 1906.

The yard built and maintained steamers and small cargo vessels, as well as native craft which plied the Malayan archipelago. The yard was situated some distance from Singapore on a muddy tidal isthmus - he never seemed to get away from mud - called Tanjon Rhu. The only means of communication being by launch, and the only company consisted of the yard workforce and the local Malays in their Campongs. When not supervising the yard or racing, he never missed an opportunity to take the lines of the graceful praus, samoans and junks, sometimes going up country to record a local design. Here, in the only 'house' - a rambling wooden bungalow raised on stilts (a precaution against high tides and snakes) my mother was born

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and raised until she was eleven, when she was sent back to England to school. In 1919, WMB with his sailing interests, and the growing needs of like minded enthusiasts, started a yacht club based at the shipyard, where he designed several boats based on those he had seen in his youth on the Norfolk Broads - flat bottomed shallow hulls with centre board and large sail area, carrying a crew of six to keep them upright in a blow. Gradually this exciting but unstable class was replaced by six metres, one of the first of which WMB had built and shipped over to England. Her name was Monsoon which he raced at Cowes, and because she was of teak construction, I am told that her hull is still around to this day - again no doubt in some mud flat!

With the growing membership, the club was moved to a site near Singapore harbour, and in due course it became known as the Royal Singapore Yacht Club, and it is from this background that the trophy, called the Singapore Challenge Cup, was presented by the Club to the Deben Yacht Club in 1930.

After the war, the Club was moved yet again, and is now known as the Republic of Singapore Yacht Club - I leave it to your imagination !

In 1929, came the slump. Tin and rubber were reduced to 6 pence a pound, and many Europeans decided (and some were forced) to retire - among them my grandparents who came back to Woodbridge where, once again, WMB

became involved with Robertsons and also Claude Whisstock, the latter having just come back from the war, with whom he helped to re-establish the boatyard by the Tide Mill, introducing many of his own designs such as the Deben 4 tonner and Mirelle (see last year's Newsletter - Ed).

Then in 1938, they moved to Felixstowe on the insistence of my grandmother who started to suffer from depression and complained that Woodbridge was too dull. I hardly think she found Felixstowe full of Eastern promise, but nevertheless my long suffering grandfather complied and immersed himself afresh in new interests such as the Newson Brothers of Felixstowe Ferry, designing among other commissions, two pleasure boats - 'The Deben Viking' and 'The Orwell Viking'. In winter, their superstructures were removed, and the craft used for fishing. He also took the lines of the old Harwich Crane, and became official measurer for 12 ft dinghies in East Anglia.

Only a year after the move, WMB became ill with cancer, and died on 19th June, 1939. His last wish was to be buried in his beloved Woodbridge.

The partnership of Claud Whisstock and WMB produced a number of interesting and successful designs, notably the Deben 4 Tonner Purchase price £200 in 1929 and Mirelle.

Frances Matheson

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

Thank you for another issue of your terrific (sic) News Letter, the Association is doing a tremendous job. However there are a couple of issues that worry me as a lover and user of the river that I would like to air.

One is concern over a possibly over-zealous attitude to tidiness over river wrecks. While I am delighted by the clearance of abandoned glassfibre cruisers, I do hope that this enthusiasm will not extend to the removal of the wrecks of old working boats. The ribs of these vessels add a sense of poetry and mystery to a half-tide journey on the river - indeed one is, I believe, the remains of the barge Mystery. I hope that they will be left to moulder in peace, they will certainly disappear eventually. I am sure that all these vessels are known to Robert Simper by name and I personally would welcome a short article in the News Letter by him identifying each one and recalling what its working life was, when built, and when abandoned. I think we might all then come to love them and see them as noble relics. I also feel that invoking "litter" to attack the keeping of dinghies on the beach at Woodbridge is unfair. This is virtually the only public access for a dinghy onto the river at Woodbridge, creates no real nuisance and is entirely in keeping with a town that lives partly on

the river. I very much doubt if this muddy area appeals any more for swimming or paddling and I have never seen anyone attempting it there.

On a different subject, I noted last summer for the first time a growing encroachment of water skiers and jet skis upstream from the designated area into the Ramsholt moorings. I think this should be resolutely resisted as should any attempt to increase or remove the speed limit. The peace and character of the river would be utterly destroyed for sailors, walkers, fisherman, birdwatchers and other nature-lovers if high-powered boats are allowed to stray upstream.

By contrast, sailing is supposed to be a peaceful sport but during dinghy races we also face a nuisance from the club rescue boats which are too numerous and too officious, particularly at Waldringfield and often relieve the boredom of races by roaring up and down. They also sometimes travel rather further between the villages and landings on the river and are reluctant to do this at the speed limit.

Kind regards,

Andrew Nahum,
74 New Street,
Woodbridge.

RIVER DEBEN ASSOCIATION
Annual General Meeting
at 7.30 p.M. on Friday, April 17th,1998
at
The Woodbridge community Hall.

Everyone Welcome

Agenda

- 1. Apologies for absence.**
- 2. Minutes of the last A.G.M.**
- 3. Matters Arising.**
- 3. Chairmans Report.**
- 5. Treasurer's Report,**
- 6. Millenium Projects.**
- 7. Joint Meeting with Alde and Ore.**

During the year, we have co-opted Dennis Hawes (Assistant Editor), and we would like to see him confirmed.

The following members of the Committee retire this year by rotation,but have indicated that they are willing to stand again:-

Robert Simper Ann Moore

Steve James David Cavey

- 8. Any Other Business.**

Interval

Tea ,coffee and biscuits will be available

After the interval there will be 4 short presentations by members of the Association