



**RIVER DEBEN
ASSOCIATION**

**Spring 2006
NEWSLETTER**

No: 32

RIVER DEBEN ASSOCIATION OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE

February 2006

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Editorial

This editorial comes at that time of year when the weather-



forecasts are full of pronouncements about cold spells "to continue" and about the "don't-expect-too-much-of-it" sun. The newspaper headlines tell us that Iraq is in flames, breast cancers are up 45%, and the NHS is on its last legs.

But never fear, dear members, spring and summer are on their way. Jenny James' summer migrant birds are flocking towards us: all with their distinctive cries and plumage, beautifully and imaginatively described in the pages of your Newsletter. Simon Read has a plan for the river-defences on the Sutton shore which will, at least in one small section of our river bank, hold the swirling ebb-tide at bay and create a habitat for some of those adventurous birds. Might it even create a safe landing for a revived Sutton Hoo ferry and a connection between the much-frequented paths and walkways of the Woodbridge shore with the neglected rights of way which radiate tantalisingly from the opposite bank? And . . . talking of adventurous and migratory birds (as I was) . . . Lily Ledward announces, in these very pages, her arrival in New Zealand on board Amadis: a voyage which took her from the River Deben's Tide Mill to the Bay of Islands, across two of the world's great oceans. The magic of radio waves has made it possible for your editor to track her progress, and to communicate with her by e-mail, even when she was hundreds of miles from the nearest land . . . and to meet her, almost by accident, in Whangerei (NZ), a couple of months ago.

My message to the membership, therefore, is that, despite the rising mud-level in the Deben and despite the ravages of the North Sea on our crumbling coastline; despite the speeding jet-boats and the irascible yachtsmen shaking their heads at the folly of it all; despite the great gin-palace power-boats growling-by, we still have a beautiful river which continues to run towards, and back from, the sea, more or less as it has always done. Ron Wragg's short piece on the Deben, from an Ipswich city-boy's point of view, is a reminder of its continuing charm. We are more familiar with Ron's artistic, than with his literary, contributions, but he's obviously a man of many parts.

Most who use the river in boats are careful and competent, and most of those who walk its banks are decent people who don't feel the need to push a supermarket trolley into it. Vast flocks of birds still love it well enough to return, year after year. Your committee is still working hard with a multitude of bureaucracies (I suspect a double-meaning to Simon Read's title, "Building Walls") to preserve the best of it for the new generation . . . and it is preparing, once again, to meet you at the AGM (on 7th April in the Woodbridge Community Hall).

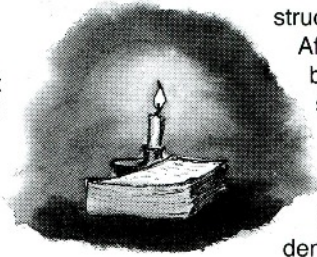
Nothing really changes very much, at least until the next committee-meeting, and your Newsletter editor, while still enormously grateful to his regular writers, is . . .

. . . looking for more contributions.

Nick Wright

Chairman's Notes

We have had a very busy six months since last November and, if anything, our activity-level seems likely to rise even further over the next six months.



We have embarked on a large project (large for us, that is) to see whether we can stabilise the salt-marsh on the Sutton Shore, opposite the Tide Mill. Simon Read has done an enormous amount of work on this and has summarised our position, and our reasons for it, elsewhere in this Newsletter. What the project has underlined is just how many authorities need to be consulted before such a project can be got off the ground. These include the farmer whose land we would need to cross to get access to the site; the National Trust who actually own the salt marsh; and English Nature which can veto any such project if it is not thought to be environmentally acceptable. In addition, the Environment Agency and Suffolk Coasts and Heaths also have to be consulted. When we have got the project fully defined we are hopeful that Suffolk Coasts and Heaths will support us with the necessary funding.

Erosion of one sort or another continues to be a main preoccupation. We hope to include in this Newsletter some spectacular photographs taken by Simon Read showing waves breaking over the concrete structure at East Lane. These demonstrate the destructive power of a high tide when combined with a strong east wind. On 20 February, I went to East Lane to see the effects of another high tide/strong wind combination. It was worrying to see the waves breaking on the rock armour between the concrete

structure and the Martello Tower. After each wave and its wind-blown spray, there was a steady trickle of earth down the face of the sea-wall which seems to be no more than 2-3 metres across the top at this point. East Lane demonstrates that rock armour

needs careful positioning and regular maintenance with support from a geotextile backing if it is to do its job. The Environment Agency tells me that it has a study going on at the moment to decide what best to do at East Lane. Certainly, there is a real danger of a breach if unfavourable wind/tide combinations appear during the next few months. The experts tell us how important East Lane is to the mouth of the Deben, so what goes on there is of great interest to us.

Talking of rock armour, you may have seen that some additional rock armour has been put in place at the Ferry to extend the line of what was already there. In total, 9000 tons of new rock was put into position, having been brought ashore by barge. Some members of your committee attended a presentation by the Environment Agency at the Ferry in late-February on the subject of the erosion of the river mouth. It is surprising how little is known in detail about these processes. One thing we did learn is that putting rock armour down as a defensive measure costs around £5000 per linear metre.

I attended a lecture by the National Trust in November on its approach to coastal erosion (in general it is not very keen on defence) and learned a wonderful new technical term. Terminal Groyne Stress is not just something which affects ageing soccer players, but refers also to the fact that, if you build a hard defensive structure, the sea will immediately attack

the points at which the defensive work ends. East Lane is a good example of this, especially beyond the Martello Tower, and it is one of the reasons why the extra rock armour was required at the Ferry.

You may have seen references to an organisation called SCAR (Suffolk Coastal Against Retreat) which was set up by Mr Selwyn Gummer to draw attention to the problems facing our coastline. One issue which has aroused considerable controversy has to do with the effects of off-shore dredging. Mr Gummer has organised a discussion-group, under the title "Effects of Dredging on the East Anglian Coast" for the 24th March. Its main speakers will be from English Nature, Marinert (a lobbying group) and Marine Aggregates. This is an invitation-only event, but Simon Read will be there on our behalf and will present a short report to us at the AGM.

You may be wondering where the Estuarine Strategy Plan for the Deben has got to (see pages 3, 5 & 6 of last Newsletter). The answer is that the whole thing has been deferred and the reason is to be found in the plan for the River Blyth. The Environment Agency put forward its Preferred Options for the Blyth, after initial consultations, and ran into a storm of protest from local people who felt that their views and detailed knowledge of the river had not been properly taken into account. Walberswick Parish Council, for example, disagreed fundamentally with a proposal to build a weir in the vicinity of the Bailey Bridge in order to keep more water in Reydon Marshes, to realign certain marsh-boundaries, and so on. As a result, the Environment Agency and its consultants are having to undertake further consultations. This situation underlines for everyone the importance of making sure that your views are clearly

stated when you attend exhibitions which set out the Agency's thinking. If you don't take such an opportunity, it's a bit hard on the Agency to make a fuss after they've prepared their Options Strategy. Equally, if they don't listen, or make their evidence fully available, then they've only got themselves to blame if their plans blow up in their face. The problem now is whether, because of the delay, any funding will be available for other-than-emergency work.

Further on the planning front, we are advised that the question of Ramsholt footpath from the pub to the old ferry-landing is with the Planning Inspectorate in Bristol and that no progress can be anticipated for two or three months. As I write, the Foxburrow Farm enquiry at Waldringfield is concluding and a decision can be expected in the early-summer.

Those members with an Internet connection may already have typed-in www.debenestuary.com, a website run by Mr Chris Woods. We are working with him to put a lot of information on the Deben on the website: information which we hope will be of interest to members and visitors alike. The site should be up and running by the time you receive this newsletter and members of the Committee will be glad to receive your comments on the website and any suggestions for amendments or additions.

Finally, I want to say a word about the Committee. There has been a lot of work done over the past few months and I am very grateful for it. Simon Read's name has come up more than once in this report but there are others.

I hope to see many members at the AGM on 7 April but, if you are not able to make it, than I hope that you have an enjoyable summer on, in, or by, the river.

Ed Stanford

RIVER DEBEN ASSOCIATION ANNUAL ACCOUNTS FOR YEAR ENDING
DECEMBER 31ST 2005

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE

	2005		2004	
	£	£	£	£
Income				
Subscriptions	2,541		3,277	
Donations	336		562	
Gift From Swimmers	-		366	
Gift from Walkers	664		-	
Bank interest	220		166	
Other	3		10	
Dividend	30			
		3,794		4,381
Expenditure				
Postage	294		396	
Offices services/stationary	107		123	
Newsletters	841		924	
Other Printing	10		156	
Hire of hall/meeting room	107		123	
Meeting costs	30		20	
Insurance	190		190	
Civic Trust	175		175	
Other	76		72	
Tide Mill Trust	-		400	
Support for Ramsholt Access	1,062		-	
Bank Charges	13		-	
		2,905		2,579
Excess of income over expenditure		<u>£ 889</u>		<u>£ 1,802</u>

BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2005

Assets				
Bank	11,232		10,697	
Cash	48	11,280	31	10,728
Less Liabilities				
Creditors				
Advance Subscriptions	66		104	
Tide Mill Trust	-		400	
General Creditors	151		50	
PABA Account	150	367	150	704
Net Assets		<u>£ 10,913</u>		<u>£ 10,024</u>
Representing				
Balance brought forward	10,024		8,222	
Excess of Income	889		1,802	
Balance carried forward		<u>£ 10,913</u>		<u>£ 10,024</u>

C J L Brown (Hon Treasurer)

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

T. J. Moorby

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

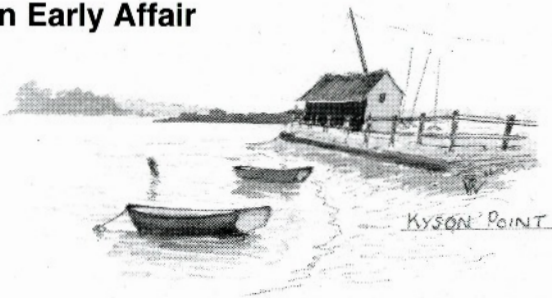
28th Feb 2006

RIVER DEBEN ASSOCIATION ANNUAL ACCOUNTS FOR YEAR ENDING DECEMBER 31ST 2005

Notes to the accounts:

1. The Association has 2 shares of £500 each in the Felixstowe Ferry Foreshore Trust. They were purchased in 1992. The value is unknown and is not reflected in the balance sheet.
2. Subscriptions: The subscription income in 2005 was £2541. This was less than last year. Many members are still not paying the increased subscriptions approved for 2004.
3. The subscription income that the membership represents was £3073. The Association is grateful for the generous donations paid by some supporters.
4. Statements will again be sent to members this year in April. These will show how the last subscription was paid so that any action to ensure the correct payment in April this year should be clear. I will be happy to advise if there is any problem.
5. Please remember that subscriptions are due each year at the beginning of April. Would those paying by Bankers Order please check and if necessary change the date on which it is paid as well as the amount paid if that is not correct. The subscription rates due in 2006 are: Single member £4, Couple £6 and Association £15.

An Early Affair



My affair with the River Deben began in the mid 1950's. I was a teenager and a pal of mine suggested a jaunt. I rode pillion on his motorbike and we went, for the first time, to Felixstowe Ferry. I was a town boy, brought up near the busy Ipswich Docks, full of majestic Thames Barges. By contrast, Felixstowe Ferry with its little fishing boats looked quaint and old-fashioned, and pleasantly scruffy. I recognised the hulls of half a dozen old flying boats, wingless and propped up on the shore where now the house-boats are moored. I still found them exciting

because I loved aeroplanes. We wandered round, lost in a world that seemed slow and comfortable, governed by tides and not clocks.

Since then, I have, at various times, walked almost all the West Bank, and quite a bit of the East Bank, from Ufford down to the sea. I've swum in it and sailed on it. As an amateur photographer I have taken many thousands of photographs of the Deben, in all its moods and tides, and used many of the photographs as material for paintings. My wife, waiting in the cold for me to take yet another shot, claims that I have already taken that picture on a previous occasion, but it is not true – every time I see the Deben there is something new to see – the light, the tide, the weather, the season. I think my wife is going to get cold on many other

occasions, because I don't think I will ever tire of taking photographs of this lovely river.

It is reassuring to think that the River Deben Association is striving to ensure that future generations will be able to enjoy the Deben as much as I have done in the past. I was honoured when I was "stitched up" to do some illustrations for several recent issues of the Newsletter.

Ron Wragg

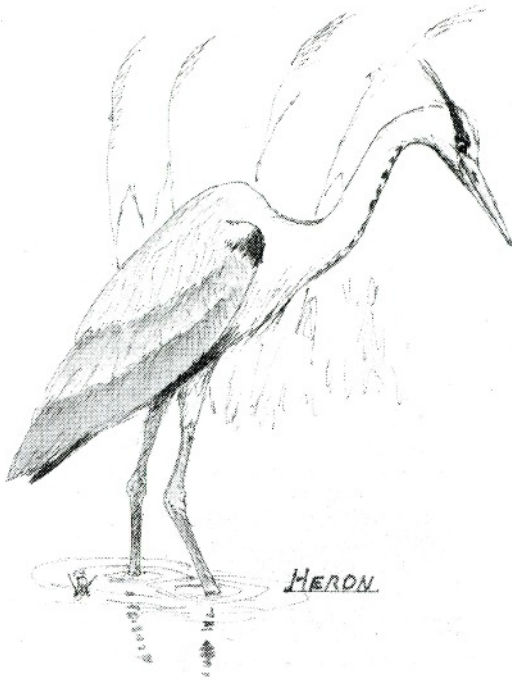
Editor's Note: Those who "stitched Ron up" to illustrate our newsletter – and I may have been one of them – should never stop congratulating themselves!

Birds of the River Deben - summer birds and passage migrants

Spring comes gradually on the Deben Estuary, stopping and starting, matching the uncertainties of the weather. As the days lengthen and become warmer, we begin to notice larger numbers of some of the waders - black-tailed godwits, curlews, grey plovers and dunlins for example. Our winter residents have been joined by birds from further south which are already on their journey north. There may be flocks of others, with whom we are less familiar, such as golden plovers, giving us transient pleasure with their calls and dancing flight as they roost and feed on the water meadows. These flocks move on quickly as, together with many of the other birds such as avocets, redshanks and oyster catchers, they leave for their summer quarters. Their departure makes the river start to look rather empty. It would be a mistake though to think that the boats will have the river to themselves as there will be new arrivals to take their place.

A sign of the changing season is the appearance, among the remaining groups of feeding waders, of a ghostly looking bird, pale grey with long green legs and a long bill, the aptly named greenshank. These are birds in a hurry: they leave their winter feeding grounds with the lengthening days and are on their way to nest on uplands further north. A lovely moment on the river is to see a small group of fifteen or so in flight and hear their soft 'tew' call. You can recognise them by their white rump and lack of wing bar. Individual birds may only stay briefly to feed but they can be seen during most of April and early May. As with some other species of passage migrants, we may be confused by the sighting of a greenshank on the foreshore in late June. Are these straggling spring migrants from the south? They are in fact most likely to be early autumn passage migrants from the north, immature birds and those who failed to find a mate or nesting site. These individuals are not hurrying on, they linger for long periods and are progressively joined by the successful breeders and their young. The autumn migration is therefore more prolonged but by the end of October most greenshanks will have departed leaving just a few in the more sheltered creeks to stay into the winter months.

Another bird that we always expect to see as a passage migrant in spring and again in autumn is the common sandpiper. Much smaller than the greenshank, with a shrill call and darting flight it will fly ahead of you as you walk along the river wall, perhaps where the river is at its narrowest, above Wilford Bridge. These charming birds commonly breed near rivers in northern England and move south in the winter. Like the greenshanks, we are fortunate that, from time to time,



some birds linger here through the winter if the conditions are right for them.

The whimbrel is for me an elusive bird. It is a small curlew, with a striped crown and with a rather different call: a most distinctive soft musical twittering. Frequently this haunting cry is all you detect of the birds as they fly north in small flocks often at night but also by day. If you are lucky they can be seen on migration in spring and autumn in some of the more sheltered creeks and water meadows.

If you are in the right place at the right time during the spring or autumn there are other less common waders that you might see or hear. For example, from the river wall, you could see a familiar looking small plover with a black and white collar scurrying around pools of fresh water in

the adjacent water meadows. If you can see a dark beak, flesh coloured legs, yellow eye ring and, when in flight, the lack of wing bar, this will be a little ringed plover rather than the more commonly seen ringed plover. These lovely little birds nest in small numbers further inland on islands in gravel pits.

Another interesting passage migrant of the water meadows is the green sandpiper, looking like a large house martin with white rump and dark back, it darts low over the edges of the freshwater pools and borrow dykes for a few brief weeks in spring and for somewhat longer from June onwards for the autumn migration. This is another bird that seems to be responding to global warming and individuals can increasingly be seen during the winter months. Very occasionally, another sand-piper with a white rump but a paler appearance, the wood sandpiper, can be seen in similar places.

At the same time, on the mud and foreshore, there is another bird to deceive you: the spotted redshank. It has red legs, but they are darker and longer than the common redshank, the beak is longer, the back darker in summer but lighter in winter and in flight it lacks the white wing bar. Its repeated single note call will also warn you that this is a bird to examine more carefully. A few of these spotted redshanks linger, well into November and it is possible that, instead of continuing their southward journey, they too may spend the winter here. The familiar black-tailed godwit's near relative, the bar-tailed godwit, is also out to confuse you when they arrive in the estuary on their spring or autumn migration. In their winter plumage they are a little less elegant, but still hard to distinguish from their cousins, except in flight when you can see the lack of the white wing bar. You may be surprised, in

either spring or autumn, to see standing out among the godwit flocks some bright, brick-red individuals. These are the male birds in their breeding plumage. Other waders, such as male knots and ruffs, also have bright red or chestnut feathers in the breeding season, but these are only occasionally seen on the Deben.

Many birds of prey are migrants or partial migrants, as described in previous articles. They tend to follow land-marks such as coastlines, river estuaries and valleys and the Deben is potentially one of these. Most simply follow the coast, so we are passed by; but an occasional thrilling sight in spring or autumn can be that of an osprey. Sometimes, as happened last autumn, one may stay for several weeks and then there is always a chance that you might see one of these birds fishing as it plunges, talons first, into the water.

One of the glories of the Deben during the brief summer months is the arrival and nesting of the migratory song-birds. Intensive farming and management of the land close to the river have reduced the numbers of possible breeding sites, but there are still plenty of reed-beds, borrow dykes, copses, woodland, scrub, hedgerows and rough grassland for the summer air to be filled with sight and sound of birds.

The first repetitive notes of the chiff-chaff, heard on a warm March day in scrubby woodland close to the water, give us confidence that summer is near. A few weeks later in a similar place, we might pick out from the background of bird song, the fluid notes of the nightingale with its slow whistle. Early in the season, we can be amazed by the number of individual birds we can hear as we walk along a short stretch of beach or river wall. These are recent arrivals and a few weeks later many of these will have moved on to

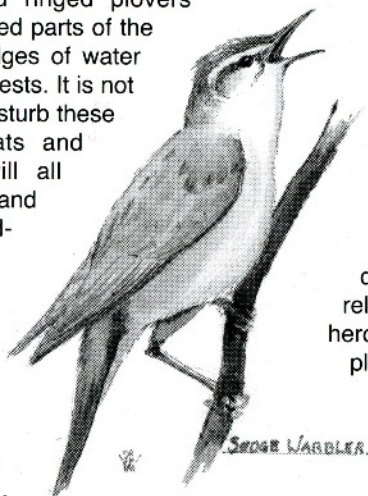
favourable nesting sites further inland or further north. But there will always be a few nightingales which do establish territories by the Deben. The song is heard most easily in the silence of the evenings and early mornings when the notes travel far across the water in the clear spring air.

Other warblers; blackcaps, garden warblers and willow warblers compete with the nightingales, their cascading notes adding to the orchestra of sound in the spring woodland. We tend to take the non-migrant birds for granted, but the resident song thrushes, blackbirds, robins, chaffinches, wrens and many others will be there also, establishing their nesting sites and adding to the rich sounds of the dawn chorus. In areas where reeds, willow and alder grow in the dykes and water meadows, the first sound to attract our attention may be the continuous and persistent song of the sedge warbler, its bold eye stripe and lack of fear making it an easy bird to see on the tops of the reeds or bushes. The more secretive reed warbler is less conspicuous. From the top of a small tree among the reeds the fluttering, dancing flight and chattering scale of the white throat's song is hard to miss. These migrants join a more familiar bird, the reed bunting, the male of which has a black head and white collar and scolding call. Together with the streaky brown females they are a common sight in the reed beds along the borrow dykes where they build their nests.

Although many of the species of water birds that we see on the Deben at different times of the year breed elsewhere, a good number do in fact breed on or near the estuary. However, as they nest on the ground, their breeding success will depend very much on being

left alone. Redshanks and lapwings prefer the old-fashioned un-improved pasture of the water meadows, with its tufts and hollows where they build their nests. It is difficult to ensure that these birds will remain undisturbed by grazing cattle, dogs or people walking nearby. Similar difficulties are experienced by oystercatchers and ringed plovers which prefer secluded parts of the river wall or the edges of water meadows for their nests. It is not only humans that disturb these birds. Foxes, stoats and rapacious gulls will all prey on the young and eggs of ground-nesting birds.

Mallards, tufted ducks, coots and moorhens fare better than the birds which nest in the open as the reed-filled dykes provide plenty of seclusion for nests and the calls of the young can be heard as the summer progresses. Shelducks also benefit from not nesting in the open. They leave the river and nest in field banks and scrubby woodland, often in old rabbit burrows. Like mallards they can be seen parading their fluffy youngsters back to the water as soon as they are old enough. The size of mute swans, Canada and greylag geese, is their best defence as they build often highly visible, untidy nests of vegetation on the edges of reed-beds and drainage ditches. Swans particularly, will defend their nests and young with vigour if approached. Another bird that is able to breed successfully in full view of the world is the black-headed gull. There is safety in numbers and the screeching sounds and whirling flight must act as a



deterrent to any potential predator. Even humans find them intimidating. There is a gullery somewhere on the banks of the Deben in most years, often looking rather precarious on the edge of the tidal salt marshes.

Even water birds can find safety in the tree-tops. Among the most striking of our resident birds which breed locally is the grey heron. The heronry at the Tips has long been visible from the water: the snake-like heads of the adults and young rearing up from the tree-top nests in the Scots pine trees. We are hoping that one day little egrets will join their near relatives the grey herons in their heronry as they have done in other places.

The reassuring cycle of the seasons as so many different species of birds come and go must be constantly valued and treasured. We might be tempted to think that there are no national or international problems with the environment, no effects of global warming, no decline in numbers of key species of birds. We still see lapwing, sky larks, song thrushes and starlings on and around the River Deben. So you might wonder whether there's a problem. In fact, although the numbers of all these species are in steep decline we are here providing a haven of unspoilt countryside where they can flourish. So, we must be alert to potential encroachments on this wild and beautiful estuary so that we can conserve this wealth and richness of wild life for the generations yet to come.

Jenny James

News from Amadis: February 2006.

Amadis has reached New Zealand! We arrived into Opua in the Bay of Islands on the 4th of December, welcomed by frantically waving family and friends, after an eleven day, rather tedious, passage from Tonga. After the meticulous NZ customs and immigration formalities, some well-needed cold beers and a great dinner in town, it began to sink-in that I had done it: sailed from the UK half-way round the world and managed to fit in a load of coral reef research and education along the way.

In my last article in the RDA newsletter (August 2005) we were just setting out for Rarotonga in the Southern Cook Islands. In all, we spent one month in this area of the Pacific, continuing our dive surveys to monitor coral reef health and conducting workshops and talks in local schools about the importance of coral reefs.

The majority of our survey work was conducted in Aitutaki. This triangular-shaped, almost-atoll (it still retains a small volcanic peak in the center), is located 250 km north of the main island of Rarotonga and is starting to become popular as a tourist destination. The west and east sides of the island have different characteristics (the southern side is purely reef and uninhabited). The main town to the west is fairly quiet and rural, and to the east are low-key tourist resorts. These resorts fringe a lagoon which is said to be one of the most beautiful in the South Pacific with its turquoise water and palm-topped motu (small islands) stretching as far as the eye can see. The reality-tv series 'Shipwrecked' was being filmed on a couple of the more distant motu at the time as we found out when we

hitched a lift with the production manager who unwittingly revealed the location. Rik and Tav, two of my crew, decided they just had to kayak out there and gate-crash the filming and succeeded in panicking the sleepy security guards!

The only way to enter the Aitutaki lagoon by boat is through a very narrow, shallow and twisty channel through the reef on the west coast which can only be passed at high water. The channel leads into a small space between the reef heads with wharf. We became quite practised at navigating this pass as we alternated between anchorage's here and on the ocean side of the reef depending on the weather. All of our surveying was conducted on the west coast which is more sheltered from the prevailing SE trade winds and after 16 days, 18 surveys and 8 transits of the pass, we got to know this 23 km stretch of coastline very well! The reefs here were in reasonable shape, considering the effect of five consecutive cyclones at the beginning of 2005, and we were also treated to the sight of humpback whales jumping and splashing most days.

The local people here are fantastically warm and generous. We joined the Sunday church service, a couple of times, digging out our best clothes but still feeling rather shabby next to the immaculately dressed Cook Islanders. The services are conducted both in Maori and in English with frequent, enthusiastic, singing when the men and women sing in harmonies together. Christianity was first brought to these islands by missionaries in the 1820s and church is still very important. Its good, also, to see that the old culture is not entirely lost with the frequent traditional dance events which see the stiff, formal dresses replaced by a couple of coconut halves and a few

leaves! After the church services, we would be invited to a great buffet spread and would leave with very full bellies plus armfuls of left-over food.

The remoteness of this island means that supplies from Rarotonga only arrive by ship once every three weeks. We woke up one morning while anchored outside the reef pass to see the ship unloading nearby. It was a rather choppy sea and it was amazing to see the skill of these people craning off huge containers from a rolly ship to an even more rolly barge and then repeatedly driving through the small standing waves at the entrance to the pass to unload at the town wharf. It took a couple of days to completely off-load the barge.

Back here in NZ things are much more civilised. I've very quickly got accustomed to having all the shops and services I need, a mere two minute walk from the boat. It certainly makes life so much easier when you are trying to get things done, such as boat maintenance. I won't let myself get too used to it however. Come May it will be time to head back out into the Pacific Islands and tropical paradise.

For more information on Amadis' voyage please visit my website: www.theamadisproject.co.uk
Lily will be having an exhibition of her photographs, from the voyage at the Maddermarket Theatre, Norwich. 27th Feb – 17th March. Phone Elisabeth: (01493) 700008 for details.

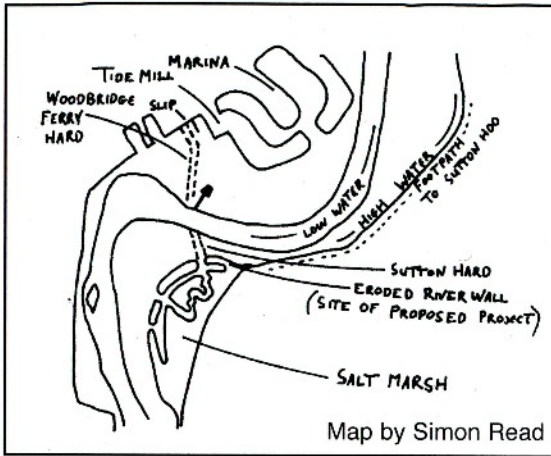
Lily Kozmian-Ledward

Building Walls

From the time we started to be actively involved in the debate about what to do with our beleaguered flood defence system, the River Deben Association has been considering suitable projects on our river that could contribute to the debate, raise the level of awareness within the community of the issues at stake and generate an amenity for both the local community and visitors alike.

As our members are well aware by now, we are quite obsessed by mud, crumbling river walls and disappearing salt marsh; not particularly glamorous stuff in anyone's estimation, but we are working on it! By way of taking the initiative, we have been in consultation with the Environment Agency and with English Nature over sites where depleted salt marsh habitat, with a little remedial attention may be saved and stabilised. As a part of the European Habitats Directive, it has become incumbent upon the Environment Agency to absorb into its plans the necessity to create new salt marsh to replace what is being put under threat by all manner of conditions including sea level rise. This has become a justification within the "managed realignment" argument where that which is deemed economically unviable to protect may be considered habitat in the making.

It is not my intention to weary you yet again with the arguments for and against the fundamental position of the Environment Agency as it develops Estuarine and Coastal Strategies within impossible constraints determined by Government. Rather I prefer to discuss thoughts we have had over how we might take an initiative and use it as a way of reinforcing the position of the community as stakeholder.



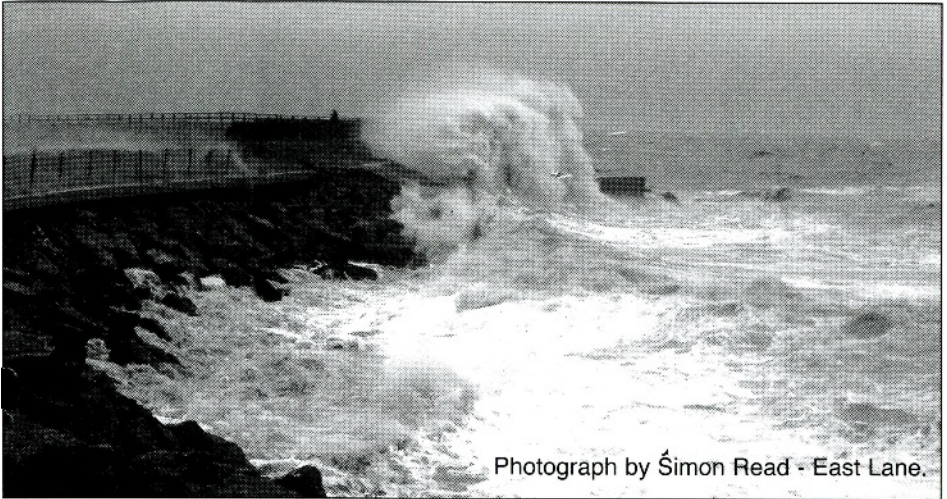
Opposite the Tide Mill on the east bank of the river there is a ferry landing, used regularly until the 1960s it has now fallen out of use. Joining this landing to the fields behind, was a river wall reinforced with a timber revetment. Unfortunately this has decayed to such an extent that that it is now impassable and the tide flows freely through it on the ebb. Quite probably this wall was originally built on the fringe of the existing salt marsh and since that time its presence has ensured the immunity of the salt marsh from erosion. With the decay of the wall the marsh has become unstable and is likely in a very short time to go the way in which the flooded field opposite Melton has gone. This could be seen as an unavoidable cycle; a wall is breached, a salt marsh is created and in time as the breach widens and more holes appear the salt marsh turns into, what could be termed, "intertidal habitat" or less delicately, "mud flat". As our response to the strategy of habitat creation through managed realignment, we would like to propose a parallel policy of habitat maintenance and consider the small salt marsh at the ferry landing to be a suitable candidate for an experiment.

This was the landing for the Woodbridge Ferry and could well be so again once the river wall is repaired. Interestingly Suffolk County Council has already renewed the bridleway sign at the point where the original access from the ferry passed into the field behind. At present it goes nowhere, but with renewed access from the river, it is a link to the Suffolk Coastal Path and the footpath to Sutton Hoo.

If we undertook to repair the wall we would indeed save the salt marsh from further deterioration,

but we also have something else in mind, which is that issue of mud and what can be done about it. The upper reaches of the river are silting up to the extent that it is a common sight to see the dredger at work dragging mud out into the tideway. Obviously this cannot carry on for ever and a more suitable destination for dredging spoil must eventually be agreed upon. As a part of our proposal to restore the river wall and protect the salt marsh, we would like to suggest that solid spoil might be used as a means of recharging depleted salt marsh, and that this site would be as good a place as any to conduct an experiment. This is not without precedent. Similar projects are being conducted on the River Orwell and Rive, Blackwater.

This project was discussed by us a few years ago but was discouraged by the Environment Agency pending the outcome of the most recent river survey and publication of the new Estuarine Strategy. Although as yet the report has not been made public, we have had sufficient assurance that what we propose would neither detrimentally affect or be affected by the upcoming strategy. Combined with the recent availability of



Photograph by Simon Read - East Lane.

the Sustainable Development Fund for projects within the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, this has given us the incentive to revive our plans and see if we can apply for support.

Even for a modest proposal of this order it is stupefying how many public and private bodies must be informed and how many permissions sought.

Firstly we had to ascertain what was the ownership of the site. It turns out that where as the adjacent landowner may well own the salt marsh, the wall and ferry access is another matter. These appear in the deeds of the Pretty Estate at Sutton Hoo and therefore now belong to the National Trust. Custom has it that the Crown Estates should own the bed of the river . . . but apparently not. The National Trust does own this as well, possibly in consideration that the ferry landing stops at low water mark, which effectively is the riverbed.

Agreement has to be sought from both the Environment Agency regarding the relationship to the overarching flood

defence strategy and English Nature over the SSSI designation and whether our proposal is in conflict with it. The Suffolk Coast and Heaths Project have to be consulted as guardians of the AONB and Suffolk County Council over footpaths and rights of way. Add to this the Land Drainage Board and that is about all for the time being.

This must of course all happen before we can commit ourselves to the logistics of the job. On this matter, suffice it to say that the solutions we have been exploring are emphatically low-tech and hands-on. They range from duplicating the original timber shuttering solution through the use of geotextile material to a recycled tyre structure. We are at present at the stage of seeking a professional engineering consultant to advise us, carry out a basic feasibility study and give an idea of cost. Then, with the approval of all of the other parties, we will know whether it is practical to carry it forward to the next stage and make an application.

Simon Read

RIVER DEBEN ASSOCIATION
ANNUAL
GENERAL MEETING

On 7th April 2006

Woodbridge Community Hall
at 7.30pm

The AGM will be followed by

A talk given by

Mr. Nick Mason

Entitled - 'Wildlife of the River Deben'