

# The Deben



Issue 60  
Spring 2020



*Some of the places you will find mentioned in this issue of the magazine*



Debenham

Brandeston

Kettleburgh

Cretingham

Letheringham

Easton

Wickham Market

Campsea Ashe

# RIVER DEBEN

Loudham

Ufford

Bromeswell

Melton

Woodbridge

Sutton Hoo

Methersgate

Waldringfield

Ramsholt

Kirton Creek

Falkenham Creek

Green Point

Bawdsey

Felixstowe Ferry



# The Deben, Spring 2020

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Cover: *Where the Deben Meets the Sea*, Sara Johnson

Above: Kyson Point



# Editor's Introduction

I'm glad to be standing a watch as editor of *The Deben*. I've been on or around the river since before I was born and, although my land-based home is in Essex, the pull exerted by the river – and particularly *Peter Duck* and *Goldenray* (our family boats) – ensures that I'm never away for long. The pull has become even stronger now that some of my grandchildren have joined Waldringfield Sailing Club. I'm proud to witness what today's youngsters can achieve – exemplified in this issue by Ethan Davey in his home-built Cadet dinghy *Samurai*.



Julia Jones

Julia Jones helming *Peter Duck*, circa 1960

Although I've been a member of the River Deben Association for many years, I've not previously taken an active role. I'm sorry that I've left it so long. It's perhaps too easy to take such a deeply familiar river for granted. Several of the contributions to this issue of the magazine remind us that we need to be alert to possible risks. Sarah Zins, writing as the chair of the RDA, offers an overview of the Association's work. Robin Whittle & Kate Laydon report on particular areas where vigilance may be needed. Richard Verrill (with photographer Sally Westwood) celebrates the variety of birdlife with which this river is blessed. Sue Ryder Richardson offers a lyrical evocation of the beauty of the upper Deben.

For many people the river brings creative inspiration. (I'm particularly grateful to Sara Johnson for her atmospheric watercolour providing this issue's cover and also to Gill Moon & all the photographers who contribute both to the magazine and our social media pages.) For some, the river is a livelihood and it's good to see the boatyards flourishing (News from the Hards); for others, like Claudia Myatt, it's a home. Peter and Wendy Willis and Sue Ryder Richardson walk by the river, Bobby Rusack and Mark Sargentson paddle, Ethan Davey, Ewout Van-Manen and the Felixstowe Ferry SC sail. Stephen Thompson plans to count fish: *Marie* (a former fishing vessel) becomes a floating stage while Robert Simper's fleet of beach boats make a bid for Netflix stardom. In our next issue we hope to hear from the rowers, swimmers and up-standing members of the paddle-board brigade. Whatever your involvement with the Deben, we hope you enjoy our magazine!

*Julia Jones is a writer and lifelong lover of the Deben. She is the literary contributor to Yachting Monthly magazine and has set two volumes of her Strong Winds adventure series (available on her website [golden-duck.co.uk](http://golden-duck.co.uk)) on the river. You can email her at [magazine@riverdeben.org](mailto:magazine@riverdeben.org), or write to: Editor, The Deben c/o Sokens, Pleshey, nr Chelmsford, Essex. CM3 1HT*

*The Deben is the magazine of the River Deben Association ([riverdeben.org](http://riverdeben.org)), who are on Facebook and Instagram @riverdebenassociation.*



Claudia Myatt

## Home is a River

In summer, house dwellers say to me 'How wonderful, I wish I lived on a boat!' In winter, when the weather's nasty they say 'I have a spare room if you need it'. Most of the time I love living on the river. My noisy neighbours are oystercatchers and curlews, my view is the ever changing tideline and the hills of Sutton Hoo. As an artist I take pleasure in the colours of light, a different palette of mud, water and sky every time I look. As for my human neighbours, they are surprisingly diverse; from Ferry Quay to Melton they include artists, musicians, writers (both professional and amateur), several master mariners, teachers, retired professionals, an environmental campaigner or two. My nearest neighbours are an active church-going couple in their seventies who do shifts as street pastors at pub closing time on a Friday night. I'm always careful to walk home in a straight line!



Claudia Myatt

For many of us, living on the river is an affordable way to be independent when you've either fallen off the housing ladder or can't get on it in the first place. Others have the luxury of choice and simply prefer to feel the presence of the river at all times rather than just occasionally. For those of us living alone, the sense of community is invaluable. Several of us meet regularly for craft evenings, exchanging skills. I get to meet all kinds of people whose work or hobby brings them to the water, afloat and ashore.

The downside? There are challenges, especially in bad weather. Trying to carry a box of firewood down a gangplank in a gale is one of them and boat maintenance is of course another especially for those of us with boats of a certain age. My lovely little Dutch tug boat is over a century old and requires regular attention. I little thought that my 60th birthday present to myself

Claudia Myatt



'Planking'

would be a new angle grinder for removing rust! In summer you'll see me sailing my little red dinghy, or kayaking up to Melton on the tide, grateful to have such watery

opportunities outside my door. But when winter returns with its gales and storm surges, keep those offers of a spare room and hot baths open!

Claudia Myyatt



Claudia's home is mobile

*Claudia's studio in Martlesham is open to visitors and she also runs occasional art classes there. Please get in touch for details ([claudiamyatt.co.uk](http://claudiamyatt.co.uk)). On April 1st 2020 she'll be talking about 'Sketching Round Cape Horn' at Robertson's Sprat Shed. She's also involved in the Suffolk Sketch Fest at Maritime Woodbridge, September 5-6th.*

## Ethan Davey

### My Cadet Highlights

I came into Cadets very late at around the age of 11 (most people start at round 7) and so I never had any expectations of doing well when I first started off as a crew. As I progressed from club sailing to racing as a crew on the Cadet circuit, I awakened a competitive side I never thought that I had.

I was determined to do well and in my second year of competitively helming I missed out on qualifying for team GBR by one point and so I became the reserve boat for the team in Germany in 2018. When I finally qualified for team GBR the following year I was ecstatic, so much so to the point of tears. The sense of achievement that Cadets has given me has been amazing, especially as I built my own boat with my grandad. I believe that building *Samurai* 10051 gave me a further understanding of how the Cadet worked and definitely boosted my sailing capability. It's extremely interesting when you are able to question

the measurement team at championships like the world's and join in conversations



Team *Samurai* - Cadet sail number 10051

Ethan Davey





about the build and why the boats and sails are shaped and designed the way that they are.

Sailing my boat in Poland was overwhelming, especially when I received the title of first GBR boat at the world championships 2019. When I first started I never imagined that I would go to places like Germany or Poland and have friends in every part of the world. Friendship is one of the aspects I am most grateful for from the whole experience. I have friends in Australia, Belgium, Argentina, Germany, Poland, Czech Republic and I look forward to seeing them all when the season starts again.

However, I am always happy to return to Waldringfield where it all started. The River Deben is definitely my favourite place and in the competitive sport it is always nice to relax and just sail. This balance is what

Ethan Davey and Alex Enkel sailing *Samurai*  
I enjoy so much about Cadets. You can take the sport as competitively as you like. Whether it is being the winner of the water fight (one of my crew's absolute favourites) or going on to sail at a world championship.

*Ethan Davey is current Cadet Inland National Champion and at the time of writing is leading the 2020 'Frostbite' series. He has opened a sailing account on Instagram @ethan\_davey\_sailing. As if to prove that Waldringfield SC has strength in depth, young sailors Daisy Nunn and Oscar Bush are the current GB National Cadet Champions.*

*Pre-Cadets. Waldringfield Sailing Club has a 'Pirates and Mermaids' group for the youngest children (and their parents) then the confidence-building Junior Sailing Club for children in Year 3 and above. See the club website for details of all their activities: [waldringfieldsc.com](http://waldringfieldsc.com)*

**Richard Verrill**

## **Drifting Down the River Deben**

**(with additional pictures by Sally Westwood)**

For many years I have sailed up and down the River Deben and have been amazed by the number and diversity of birds throughout the seasons. Much has been written about the national and international ornithological importance of our river. In 1991 the Deben was designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest. In 1996 the river became a Ramsar site under the Convention of Wetlands of International importance. Species noted in these designations included Brent geese, shelduck, black tailed godwits, avocets, grey plover and redshank. In addition to the designated species the estuary also supports high numbers of dunlin, curlew and mute swan. Again in 1996 the Deben was designated as a Special Protection area for wintering avocets and in 2012 this designation was changed to include dark-bellied brent geese.

I am by no means an ornithologist but, having read more about our local bird species, I decided that it would be interesting to take my dinghy downstream



Sally Westwood

A black tailed godwit attending to its feathers from Ramsholt Quay to see what species I might see and hopefully identify. On 30th September 2019 armed with a long lens camera I set off. Almost immediately on leaving the quay I was surprised by a large bird flying low over the mudflats. It had a long straight beak a brown head and black and white stripes along the wings. I took a series of hurried pictures as it passed. On getting home with the aid of a bird identification book I identified it as a black tailed godwit.

Further down stream feeding on the mudflats adjacent to Ramsholt marshes I took pictures of more godwits which were sharing their feeding ground with avocets. With their black and white plumage and long upturned beak I did not need my book to identify this very distinctive local bird. It was not until I was reviewing these later at home that I noticed two birds in the background with brown backs, light fronts and long orange legs I realised that I also had redshanks in my picture.

I continued down stream and on the bank

Sally Westwood



Oystercatchers on the Deben





A heron off Green Point

opposite Green Point two seals lazed by the sluice. While I was delighting at the sight of these harbour seals a heron circled above then landed close by. Using my camera lens for magnification, I was rewarded by seeing the heron catch a small fish.

Further downstream, as I approached the many moored boats off Felixstowe Ferry, a number of gulls settled on the water midstream. Continuing across the river to Bawdsey I was watched by a shag perched on the old wreck. The tide had started to come in and I let my boat drift back along the edge of the bank. The birds appeared to appreciate the lack of engine noise and I was able to see more black tailed godwits, avocets and large numbers of herring gulls which took off flying close to me.

As I drifted towards Falkenham Creek I was ignored by two passing swans but approaching the edge of the creek I noticed a flock of small brown birds jostling for space. Using my camera lens I was able to see that they had a grey/brown back and a paler belly, their beak turning down slightly. Later reference



A black-headed gull with a common gull

to my trusty bird book confirmed that these were dunlins. Restarting my outboard I returned to the quay at Ramsholt where I found a little egret standing at the water's edge.

I was amazed. Despite my complete lack of experience as a bird watcher I had in less than two hours been able to spot hundreds of birds and identify at least eight different species, some of which are designated species. I suspect that with better knowledge and a superior camera this number would be much greater... We really do have a very special river on our doorstep.

*Richard Verrill has sailed in Suffolk and Essex for the last 55 years, and on the Deben since 1985. He is an RDA committee member, and was a GP at Framfield House Surgery Woodbridge for 31 years, retiring in 2016. Richard is currently building a wooden dinghy.*

*Dr Sally Westwood is a bird photographer who lives on the Deben in the summer and migrates to warmer climes in winter. You can see more of her work on Twitter @drbirdhead or on Facebook @theladybirders*

Julia Jones

## Fundraising to Save Lives

### The Volunteers of the Felixstowe Coast Patrol

The mouth of the Deben has a special, often exhilarating beauty. For yachtsmen it's a passage point. For others it's an adventure playground. Dinghy-sailors, kite-surfers, kayakers, swimmers respond to its unique atmosphere, that whiff of challenge. It can be hazardous, however and many a sailor or swimmer has been grateful for a vigilant pair of eyes and a helping hand to safety.

John Cresswell used to be a member of the Coastguard service but became alarmed by the scale of government-enforced cut-backs. The crunch came in 1996 when the Felixstowe rescue boat was removed in the middle of the night to avoid opposition. After a long (and sometimes bitter) battle Cresswell was forced to resign from his official position and began working to establish an independent service. 1997 saw the foundation of the Felixstowe Coast Patrol (Charity No. 1082443).

The FCP is one of 61 independent lifeboats operating around the UK. It's active during weekends and bank holidays April to November and works closely with other



Julia Jones

FCP's John Cresswell and Guy Comber, along with two members of HM Coastguards

agencies, including the police, coastguards and RNLI. During 2019 its two boats covered some 3405 miles on routine patrols or rescues; its volunteers gave 1305 hours of direct service (not including training, stand-by flood alerts or safety visits to schools etc). They attended 72 incidents (involving 164 people), assisted 103 casualties and saved 6 lives.

The volunteers buy all their own equipment and depend entirely on local sponsorship and fundraising events to insure, maintain and operate their boats. This is not easy. Felixstowe Ferry Harbourmaster John White has supported them for more than 20 years: 'I support them,' he says, 'because they're local lads trying to make a difference.'

**The FCP welcomes donations.** Meet them at Ipswich Maritime Festival (August 22nd – 23rd) or visit their website to learn more:

<https://www.felixstowecoastpatrol.co.uk/>



Julia Jones

Harbourmaster John White helping fundraise for the FCP on the Bawdsey-Felixstowe Ferry



## Sue Ryder Richardson

### A Tale of Two Rivers

The Deben is a tale of two rivers: the wide tidal estuary and the quiet meandering upstream waters.

The estuary breathes. It inhales and exhales, pulling the sea inland to cover mudflats and marshes, before pushing it back out to sea through narrow channels with rushing currents and eddies. The wide flat landscape is peppered with small craft, edged with creeks that bristle with reeds and marshland plants. Its shores are peopled by avocets, curlews, a multitude of wading birds, and black cormorants which emerge phoenix-like from the waters.

At low tide the air is filled with the brackish scent of mud that sucks at feet and slithers between toes. Its damp brownness reflects the skies to edge the river in soft greys and blues. The tide creeps over the shallows, fills the basins, nudges the reeds and perfumes the air with its sharp saltiness. Easy footpaths traverse the saltings, rise over small hills and mount the uplands that held the treasures of Sutton Hoo.

But press on upstream beyond these tidal reaches to meet another world. One where the Deben meanders through pastures, where paths touch the river but rarely travel its banks. It's an agricultural world of livestock and crops, where the river is rimmed with trees and wild flowers.

The smallest trickle begins this journey near Aspell, reaches Debenham and passes beneath the aptly named Water Lane. It becomes a stream that winds beside the

golf course at Cretingham, along the school fields in Brandeston, where footpaths and bridges cross the river. Walk the shady path to the ford in Brandeston, see the sunlight play on the water and in Spring, find wood anemones carpet the woodland floor.

The Deben now gets bolder; it becomes a river of consequence, of purpose, one that can muster strength to work the many mills scattered along its length. The earliest reference being one at the bridge in Kettleburgh. From here the Deben makes a wide meander and runs below Abbey Farm at Letheringham. Take time to stroll from Easton to visit the remains of this C12th Augustinian Priory, enclosed within sections of a C17th wall, on this working farm. There is a wealth of history scattered amidst the flowers in the ruins of this small remote abbey.



Sue Ryder Richardson

Brandeston Ford

On the outside of the long meander, the Deben is again pressed into use to power the Letheringham Watermill, whilst 'Easton Farm Park', a Victorian Model Farm, lies inside. This family attraction offers the first extended walk along the banks of the Deben. It is a delight: the path is dappled by trees and a myriad of wild flowers grace the banks and water: marsh marigolds, waterlilies, purple loosestrife, not to mention darting dragonflies and the occasional kingfisher.

By the time The Deben flows past Gleveringham Mill and on to power the large C18th Watermill at Wickham Market it has become a sizeable river, one that often throws its weight of water across the floodplain. This growing river meanders through Campsea Ashe and Loudham,

past many ancient ecclesiastical estates and abbeys with their mills and farmland, until it meets the tidal waters near Ufford. And here again I would urge you to take a walk. Ufford is a village with its history firmly rooted as the 'ford' of Anglo Saxon history. It boasts mills, fine houses and an exceptional church. Paths and small lanes follow the river to reach Bromeswell, where crossing over Wilford Bridge will take you back to Ufford along a different route.

Detailed walks will follow in future editions.

*Born in Suffolk, Sue Ryder Richardson has a great love for a county that she has long explored on foot. Sue is married to Bobby Rusack. While she is walking down the upper Deben, he and his friends may be paddling up the tidal river.*

## Bobby Rusack

### The Cargo

We frequently paddle our canoes and kayaks on the river Deben launching at either Waldringfield or Felixstowe Ferry depending on the time of the tides.

This morning we had a rather different trip planned as we launched near the quay at Waldringfield into the flooding tide. It was an hour before high water at Woodbridge and the Tide Mill was our planned lunch stop.

We all felt that we were lucky to be out on the river on this sunny June day. Particularly during the week when it was unusual to have to share the river with more than a couple of sailing boats.



Loading the cargo





We paddled though the moorings at Waldringfield, cutting the corner going into the reach leading up to Methersgate quay. We were making about 2 knots through the water and with another knot from the tide so we should be at the Tide Mill around high water.

The River Deben is very pretty, with a lovely cottage by the old quay at Methersgate and with the sailing yachts slowly swinging on their moorings with the wind over the tide. We had a great view of the small hills on each side of the river. At the top of the river we could see the church tower on the hill behind Woodbridge town and the white slatted wooden walls of the Tide Mill bright in the sunlight.

Soon we were passing a cream coloured yawl moored close under Haddon Hall. Here we did not need to follow the bend in the river but could cut across the marshes on the high tide. The channel is not marked so a small amount of trial and error was needed before we were confident in finding our shortcut. As we paddled past the small boats moored on the edge of the channel leading to Woodbridge, the tide was less help as it was nearly high water.

We were able to moor the canoe by the metal steps cut into the concrete dock at

the Tide Mill. The kayaks had to go to the slipway as they are too unstable to exit by the steps.

Our mission was to collect a 17 kilo bag of whole meal flour from the Tide Mill. This was to be used for baking by one of our group. We could have made the trip by car but the parking can be a problem! The Mill had the flour in one large sack which just fitted into one of our dry bags.

After a sandwich lunch and coffee from the very helpful cafe behind the new boat museum, we loaded the heavy bag of flour into the canoe. The tide had now turned so after a bit of kayak-swapping to give some variety to the paddle home, we set off. As both the wind and tide were now with us we made good speed down river to our starting point at Waldringfield.

We were home before the tide had dropped too far so the beach was not too muddy which made getting our boats onto the roof of the cars quite easy (many hands make light work). After some refreshments in the Maybush, we went our different ways: a great day on the water, simple fun with friends, what more could you need?

*Bobby and Sue are both RDA members. As well as walking, botanising and canoeing (usually separately) they sail together on the River Alde.*

Sarah Zins

## River Deben Association Updates

*Sarah Zins, Chair of the RDA, reflects on the role of the Association and some of the issues with which it is currently engaged:*

Our association exists to represent all who love the River Deben: sailors of course, but also walkers and runners, kayakers and picnickers, fisher-folk, bird-watchers and swimmers.

Whereas a few years ago, we might have just thought it was nice that most RDA members engaged in river-based hobbies, society is now much more aware of the mental and physical health benefits of nature. One of our members recently pointed me in the direction of the writings of Professor Jules Pretty, Professor of Environment & Society at the University of Essex. Pretty coined the expression “Green Exercise” which refers to exercise undertaken in natural environments. He concludes, moreover, that ‘Blue Exercise’ (physical activity undertaken in and around outdoor ‘natural’ aquatic environments such as lakes, rivers, canals and the coast) seems even better for health. I was glad to have my instinctive feelings corroborated by such a distinguished academic!

This research also means that it’s vital we find ways to share the river we love not just with our existing neighbours, but also with visitors and the people who are going to move into the 3000 or so homes being built locally. Achieving the right balance between our human need for access to nature and the pre-existing needs of wildlife, the environment and tranquillity will remain



Richard Verrill

Recent high tides have caused damage to some of the river walls

an on-going challenge. The RDA’s objectives are to encourage proposals to safeguard the river and support appropriate future developments, and to resist proposals having a detrimental impact on the river and its environs.

As such we make comments on various planning applications for developments that will impact the river. Recent issues have all related to Woodbridge, where we raised various concerns about an application for the development of Frank Knights’ workshop on **Ferry Quay** to create a restaurant with inside and outdoor seating, and this has now been withdrawn. We wrote a letter of support for the additional facilities being proposed for the **Sea Scouts’** premises in Tide Mill Way, as we are keen that more young people have the opportunity to enjoy the River Deben. Previous magazines have discussed the future of the Chandlery at **Whisstocks Place** and the controversial plans to build high flats at **Melton Hill** which will intrude on the riverscape, and when any conclusions have been reached there will be an update.

The RDA is a member of the Deben Estuary Partnership (DEP), which looks at the river's defences (both man-made and natural). The river defence work planned by the Environment Agency (EA) at Kirton Creek and Shottisham has been postponed until the spring due to adverse weather. At Waldringfield, the top layer of bricks along the flood defence wall has been replaced and at Woodbridge, the EA have worked on the sluice to prevent silting and allow better drainage. The EA are planning emergency works at Felixstowe Ferry, where a clay wall in front of Victoria Terrace was damaged by Storm Ciara. At Bawdsey, the coastal frontage south of East Lane and below Bawdsey Manor has deteriorated badly. The Knolls are very low, and erosion continues along the Bawdsey side of the estuary mouth.

The DEP is arranging for a specification to be drawn up for agreement with the relevant landowners to effect major repairs to the river wall between Bawdsey and Ramsholt.

If you came to the RDA's autumn talk on pollution in the river, you may recall that our speaker, Jane Herbert from the Essex and Suffolk Rivers Trust, encouraged us all to read the Environment Agency's pertinent consultation document and respond by April 24th - <https://consult.environment-agency.gov.uk/environment-and-business/challenges-and-choices>

Saltmarshes are part of the river's defence system. Thanks to a grant from the Suffolk Coasts & Heaths AONB, RDA volunteers have been able to extend their existing Pilot Study at Waldringfield so that further tests can be made to measure the erosion effects

of crabs on saltmarsh walls. Consent is being sought to allow similar measurements to be taken further down the river towards Hemley. Their protection is also vital, and Natural England are looking in detail at the protection of natural features (as part of a Habitats Regulations Assessment and a Nature Conservation Assessment) in charting the course of the England Coast Path. They are in negotiations with local landowners on the sections of the proposed England Coastal Path at Sutton Hoo and between Waldringfield and Martlesham and Bawdsey and Ramsholt. They currently hope to publish their report by the end of March 2020, and it is possible that work on the route itself could begin around Autumn 2020, with an opening in 2021.

At our autumn meeting we learned that the River Deben has only a moderate quality status, as defined by the Water Framework Directive. It is not rated more highly



Sarah Zins

Sarah Zins, Chair of the RDA



because the fish population is reduced and the level of nitrates too high, which may be due to untreated discharge and farm run-off. Many people were interested to hear more about the situation regarding fish, and we have therefore asked Stephen Thompson from the Eastern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority to our forthcoming AGM on April 30th to tell us more about what is going on with our fish stocks – and how we may be able to assist.

I know we will all continue to benefit from our lovely river over the summer months

but I hope you consider some of the opportunities for involvement mentioned in this magazine – and if you're not already an RDA member, do join us (see p.38 for contact details).

*Sarah Zins has been coming to Suffolk since she was a baby, but only finally saw the light and moved here permanently some 18 years ago. She divides her sailing between the Alde and the Deben, but finds constant pleasure from being near the Deben and enjoys it at every stage of the tide.*

**Kate Laydon**

## Is the River Deben Being Polluted?

### River Deben Association November Meeting

The RDA invited Nic Bury, Professor of Aquatic Toxicology at the University of Suffolk, and Jane Herbert, Project Officer at the Essex and Suffolk Rivers Trust, to speak at the Autumn meeting.

Nic explained current challenges – sewage plants are now struggling to deal with micro and pharmaceutical pollutants which end up in the river; contraceptive chemicals which enter the sewage system are linked to intersex in fish, pollutants lead to a reduction of fish population and more use of insecticides has led to a decrease in mayflies. The disposal of unwanted medicines by flushing them down the toilet adds to the problem of increased toxins.

Microfibres are creating an increasing threat and we are only now beginning to explore the detrimental consequences: 700,000

micro plastic particles are extracted from one fleece jumper alone on its first wash. These micro particles bind together and are ingested by river organisms.



Nic Bury

Nic Bury pond-dipping

## The solution to pollution is dilution

The river is a natural protective agent against pollution. Even so, the chemicals and microfibres end up in the river sediment. Nic encouraged local authorities to analyse mud from dredging and take action. Moreover the benefits of dilution are now being significantly challenged by the reduction in water levels caused by increased siltation of the river, which diminishes the capacity to dilute pollutants.

## Room for improvement: practical steps to improve the Deben

Jane Herbert explored the current status of the river and the practical steps we can take to protect it. The Deben as defined by the EU Water framework Directive has only a **moderate** quality status (further details and criteria available online at: <https://environment.data.gov.uk/catchment-planning>).

The river is not rated more highly because the fish population is not plentiful and the level of phosphates is too high, which may be due to untreated discharge and farm run-off.

Jane Herbert



Sewage fungus growing is a sign that raw sewage has entered a watercourse

## ‘Only rain down the drain’

If the sewage system is overloaded (e.g. after heavy rain) it is designed to overflow into rivers rather than into people’s homes

### What you can do checklist

- Only dirty water down the sink (not oils, fats, food scraps etc.)
- No wipes, cotton buds etc. down the toilet
- No cigarette ends down the drain or dropped in gutter
- Return unwanted medicines to the chemist
- Ensure washing machines and bathrooms are plumbed into the sewerage system, not the rainwater pipes.
- Clear up dog mess to avoid it being washed down the gutter straight into the river
- Use appropriate pesticides and fertilizers and encourage councils to reduce reliance on chemicals in parks
- Wash clothes **less**; polyester has micro plastic fibres too
- Follow the yellow fish campaign active in this area
- Encourage companies to reduce plastic packaging and minimise your use to essential items

*Kate Laydon lives in Woodbridge where she walks and rows on the Deben. She has worked in the public sector and run several charities working with children, pensioners, health and sports development. She is a member of the River Deben Association.*

Emma Dixon and Robin Whittle

## Saltmarshes of the River Deben

(from the Woodbridge Society Newsletter)

James Pullen



Aerial photo over Waldringfield

The beauty of the Deben Estuary includes a landscape that provides a sanctuary and habitat for wild life both in the fresh water arable land and the saltmarshes. The Deben saltmarshes take up about a fifth of the wetlands area of the estuary – 200 hectares of the 980 hectares of wetlands area. This and the intertidal mudflats display the most complete range of saltmarsh plant life in Suffolk.

The saltmarsh is made up of salt-tolerant plants such as herbs, grasses, or low shrubs which are regularly flooded by the tides with saltwater or brackish water. These include varieties such as Cord Grass, Common Reed, Samphire and Sea Aster. These plants are essential to the stability of the saltmarsh in trapping and binding sediments and play a large role in the aquatic food chain and the delivery of nutrients to coastal waters.

The saltmarshes regularly attract large numbers of bird life for both roosting and foraging. They provide a valuable food source for over-wintering waders and wildfowl such as brent geese, avocets, redshanks,

bar-tailed godwits, curlews, oystercatchers, turnstones and dunlins. As well as birds and small mammals, the estuary supports nationally and internationally important flora and fauna.

The saltmarshes play an important role in protecting the river walls, which were built over 500 years ago to create large areas of freshwater grazing marsh and arable land. Figure 1 shows a typical section through a bank of the Deben. Since they were built the sea level has risen and the level of the freshwater land is now over 1m below the present Mean High Water Springs (MHWS) level. However saltmarshes on the riverside of the walls are able to trap silt on every tide and the level rises naturally at the same rate as that of the local sea level rise (certainly up to a rate of 10mm/year).



Emma Dixon

Sea lavender



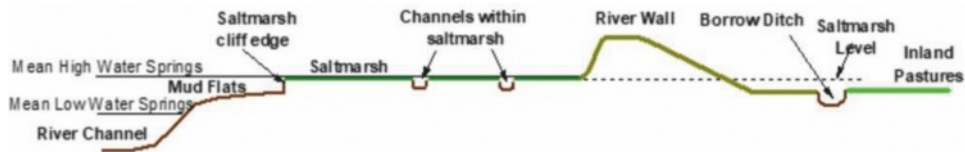


Figure 1

The river walls are subject to weathering and need to be raised to maintain a minimum acceptable level of flood risk protection. A 3m to 5m width of vegetated saltmarsh in front of the river walls provides a wave energy absorber at times of spring tides, surge and storm conditions. Once lost, as in many Essex estuaries, high maintenance unsightly concrete blocks appear to be the only remedy. The advantage of having saltmarsh in front of the walls is that it grows naturally and keeps pace with sea level rise, whereas hard protection is expensive, often unsightly, barren of wild life and eventually gets undermined and fails.

Saltmarshes are a valuable spawning and breeding area for fish and crabs. Shore crab burrows are particularly noticeable along the edges of the Deben saltmarshes. More information is required to determine if they are the main cause of the erosion of the walls in the saltmarsh creeks. The River Deben Association has been carrying out various tests and surveys over the past five years. An important part of this work has been to determine methods to reduce the erosion that is taking place.

Saltmarshes provide a cleaning function by absorbing nutrients, heavy metals and oil from the estuary system. They also store large quantities of carbon (carbon sequestration), essential to plant productivity, by, in essence, breathing in the carbon dioxide and then using it to grow, flourish and increase the height of the soil. Even when the grasses die, the carbon

remains trapped in the sediment. The result is that saltmarshes have a very low emission of greenhouse gases compared with fresh water wetlands.

The value of the Deben saltmarshes is clearly stated in the Deben Estuary Plan. Their condition is continually reviewed by the Suffolk Coast & Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the Deben Estuary Partnership Saltmarsh Group and the Suffolk Saltmarsh Group.

If you are interested in Citizen Science, a UK-wide group of marine scientists are asking interested individuals and groups to investigate the salt marshes which surround our coast. With the aid of The Saltmarsh App, you can carry out an interactive plant and soil survey, the results of which will support ongoing research and management of natural coastal protection by salt marshes, and help us predict the resilience of marshes to environmental change. Visit [www.saltmarshapp.com](http://www.saltmarshapp.com) to find out how you could get involved.

*Robin Whittle is a Civil/Structural engineer and although retired still works several hours a week. He knows the Deben through dinghy racing, cruising in a Cornish Shrimper and picnics along the river. He is a member of the Felixstowe Ferry and Waldringfield Sailing Clubs, and an RDA committee member.*

*Emma Dixon works for the East Suffolk Internal Drainage Board.*

## Wendy and Peter Willis

# Kirton Creek Walk

It's a fact of life that a walk along the lower Deben involves a couple of lengths to and from the river. This five-mile walk takes in both Kirton and Falkenham creeks – they're pleasant in themselves, with broad paths and firm footing, even in winter.

Parking: Park Lane, left off the main road as you enter the village from the north, and where the walk begins, has the odd lay-by, including one near the walk's start.

Parking may also be possible in Kirton Church Hall car park, reached via Rectory Lane (left just past the pub) then left into Church Lane. Near the car park entrance look for a footpath sign on the right. Walk straight across the field and emerge onto Park Lane, turning right.

Continue along Park Lane and turn left at the white palings of Kirton Lodge's driveway. Carry on until you pass cottages on the left and meet a metal gate. Turn right and follow the path between the barns of Sluice Farm. Continue ahead until you find the way forward blocked with a firm No Entry sign. Turn left.

You'll soon reach the edge of Kirton Creek.



Peter Willis

A right turn will lead you around its southern edge. Ramsholt Church comes into view, and eventually the Ramsholt Arms too. The path runs along the top of the river wall until you're about halfway round Falkenham Creek. (Enjoy long views down the river to Felixstowe Ferry.)

A finger post here points inland down the bank, with a pleasant view up the hill towards Falkenham Wood. Our path however bends briefly to the left at the foot of the bank, then right, left, right and left again. Eventually the path, now a broad track, leads up past a copse and a cottage, to Corporation Farm. Pass its barns and turn left at their top, then right past a sort of compound, along a hedgerow and back into the original field. At a crossway in its middle, go left for the Church Hall, right to return to Park Lane.

Total length about five miles, two hours.

Approx Distances in Miles: CH (Church Hall)-A: 0.3; A-B: 0.6; B-C: 0.6; C-D: 1.8; D-E 1.5; E-A: 0.5 (E-CH: 0.5)

Nearby pubs: White Horse, Kirton; Shannon, Bucklesham; Fox, Newbourne

Map: OS Explorer 197



Peter Willis

# Letters to the Editor

*From Robert Simper:* Slight comments from the very good Autumn issue of *The Deben* (no. 59). Between 1952 and 1957 I owned and sailed *Lucky*, Dragonfly 14 and enjoyed it. The number 14 was carved on the inside of the transom, but in the Stephen Cooney piece on Dragonflies number 14 is called *Dinah*. Has there been a name change? I have not heard of this Dragonfly for decades – where did she go? Also, it is worth mentioning that the term Fleet on the East Coast of England means shallow. In the past ploughmen were told to plough ‘fleet’ meaning less deep into the ground. The word Fleet seems to have been used before the term Creek came into general use. There are Fleets which are still tidal ie Pyefleet, Thorn Fleet and Mersea Fleet.

*Steve Cooney responds:* In our records Dragonfly 14 is shown as having had both names. Owned from new in 1949 by JS Alderton, then Robert. The last recorded owner was Dr Pritchard 1968.

*From Anne Moore:* In addition to the tribute to David Bucknell published in the last issue of *The Deben* (no 59, Autumn 2019) I would like to draw attention to David’s many interests including photography, film making and audio recording. He recorded the stories and histories of many people connected with the Deben and he had planned to offer these to local history organisations. If anyone is interested in this material please contact the Editor (in the first instance).

*From Joan Freeman:* For the record I observed, following a night of heavy rain, at breakfast time the 20th December 2019



Life on the Deben

Hill House Farm Lake dug by Peter and Joan Freeman to help protect downstream Debenham from floods

the lower end of Dairy Farm Road, Aspall – historically a ford – was in flood and the Aspall Deben tributary from Dairy Farm was brimming over near Red House Farm & Hill House Drive, Aspall, but by early afternoon the levels had dropped dramatically. The water was almost up to the bridge arch in Debenham and Low Road, Debenham was flooded. The tide times at Woodbridge were High Water 05.56 am & Low Water at 12.20 p.m. I am told on authority tides cannot affect us this far up the catchment but we old locals have frequently had different experience in times of high precipitation when the tides turn and water levels in the tributaries and river visibly dramatically drop.

*Editor comment:* This intriguing observation was made in the course of a longer report on the Holistic Water Management Project at Debenham which we hope to cover more fully in our next issue.

*Email the editor:* [magazine@riverdeben.org](mailto:magazine@riverdeben.org)

*Or write to:* Editor, *The Deben* c/o Sokens, Pleshey, nr Chelmsford, Essex. CM3 1HT



Sarah Zins

## News from the Hards

The **Felixstowe Ferry Harbourmaster**, John White, confirms that Trinity House will do a survey at around the end of March to decide where the entrance buoys need to be positioned. The Knoll Spit buoy is certainly out of position. If you are going out to sea, look at his website [debenestuarypilot.co.uk](http://debenestuarypilot.co.uk) for the latest information.

**Felixstowe Ferry Boatyard** is busy servicing moorings. The Ferry will go back in the water for Easter and will operate on Good Friday, Easter Saturday, Sunday and Monday. Thereafter it will be working weekends until 1st May, when daily service resumes from 10 am to 6 pm.

The winter weather was kind to the **Waldringfield Boatyard** and the lift out season went well. This winter, their trip boat *Jahan* is having an engine rebuild so that she's ready for another decade of taking passengers up and down the Deben. Emma and Mark Barton are proud that their boys look to be following in the family footsteps, with their eldest son, Tom, working as an



Robertsons

Robertsons: *Minola* in the shed engineer for Sailing Holidays in Greece and his younger brother George set to join him in the summer after completing his Marine Technology Degree.

**Woodbridge Boatyard** is busy with Deben Cherubs – 17 were built by between 1924 and 1937. Its restoration of *Ariel* has been shortlisted for Classic Boat Magazine's Restoration of the Year Award (under 40ft). It is doing a major overhaul on *Fortuna*, CC6 (built 1931) taking off the cabin and decks. The boatyard has purchased *Jubilee* (also 1931) after her owner of 37 years died recently. The Boatyard has hired 3 additional members of staff.

**Robertsons** are currently doing plenty of classic boat restoration including post-survey remedial work on *Minola*, built at Whisstocks in 1964. A very sleek speed boat from Felixstowe Ferry has just been re-sprayed in Jotun Mega-gloss, causing nightmares about getting the shed to a temperature in the winter where the paint would harden. They are in the middle of

Larkmans



Larkmans: Yachts covered up for winter



Woodbridge Boatyard: Ariel's launch celebration

building a new spar store and have now installed a large sewage treatment plant for the boatyard, next-door buildings, adjacent cottages and able to take the discharge from their pump out station.

**Larkmans** are working on the boats at their yard ready for the season ahead, including re-rigging and painting and, when the weather warms up, they will be re-vernishing. They expect to launch around 150 boats this summer, with the hardy going into the water from the end of March.

**Melton Boatyard** is the only yard on the river which can lift Thames and canal barges with its travel hoist, and it has worked on re-spraying and repairing at least 3 barges over the winter. The Deben Café on HMS *Vale*, moored just next to the Melton Boatyard, is now open from Fridays to Mondays and will extend its hours in the summer months. For information on opening hours and menus, see their Facebook page.

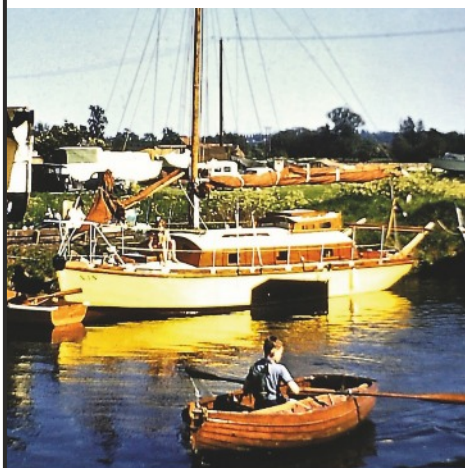
**The Tide Mill Yacht Harbour** has been busy over the winter replacing the wood on some of their pontoons with non-slip decking, as well as dredging. They have around 180 berths and can accommodate boats from 6 metres in length to about 17 metres, but once the 120 boats on their hardstanding for the winter are re-launched, they will not have any space available.

*Nan* was a barge yacht, designed by E.B. Tredwen and built for him at Robertsons yard in 1904. Nick Imber was 10 when his parents bought her in 1959. Here he tells the story of three generations of family sailing on this much-loved, if somewhat idiosyncratic yacht. For a while the Imbers also owned Arthur Ransome's postwar *Swallow* (from West Mersea, not the Lakes) and there's an appealing Ransomey flavour to many of their expeditions.

### Travels with My Nan

Nick Imber

£14, Lodestar Books



ONE FAMILY'S LIFE WITH A BARGE YACHT

## TRAVELS *with my* NAN

Nick Imber

## Mark Sargeantson

### Bent Willow

#### A Coracle Chronicle

If you think about coracles at all, which you probably don't, what comes to mind? A funny little circular craft woven like a large basket, covered with some sort of canvas, very unstable and with a tendency to go round in circles, if you haven't already fallen out!

In fact that sums it up pretty well but it didn't deter me from going on a coracle building course run by the Field Studies Council at Flatford Mill last August. I had three wonderful hard-working days taught by Richard King, our excellent teacher, and staying in the Mill in that gorgeous setting.

As you will see from the photographs I did come away with my own coracle and it is River Deben worthy!

According to The Coracle Society this craft is likely to be the first form of water transport. It has a history dating back thousands of years as evidenced by cave paintings from the early Bronze Age. They are still used to a limited degree for fishing in Wales and are in regular use for fishing or transportation in the Middle and Far East. Their manoeuvrability, shallow draft, light weight and low build cost make them very attractive for use in shallow rivers and coastal areas.

The method of construction has remained largely unchanged over the centuries. The basketwork frame is made from whatever suitable wood is available locally, lashed together with rope or strips or bark and covered, originally with cattle hide, and now canvas or other fabric treated with waterproofing pitch or bitumen. Shape and size can vary but they are usually designed to be fairly easily carried by one person on their back.

Returning to Flatford Mill: I started by sharpening the ends of twenty long pieces of willow and sticking them into the ground. These were going to form the entire frame of my coracle. Thin pieces of willow were then woven round these to form the basket work and shape of the craft. The really tricky bit was bending the long



Mark beginning to build the coracle





pieces right over ninety degrees to form the hull without snapping them in half. Ideally they should be soaked in water first but we were short of time. When bent over these were tied in place with strips of willow bark and the surplus ends cut off.

Remember that at this stage the upturned coracle was still anchored to the ground by those long pieces which I stuck in the earth to start with. Easing those ends out of the ground was nerve-wracking. Was my coracle going to ping off in all directions leaving me with a pile of assorted willow? In fact it all worked beautifully; I weaved the gunwhale, trimmed the pieces sticking up but leaving two for rowlocks and tied in the seat to pull it all together.

The last stage was to cut a piece of canvas, stitch it into place around the craft and cover it with two coats of bitumastic paint. I ran out of time so, while I was finishing off, our ever patient teacher shaped a couple of little oars and a paddle for me.

We left the finished coracles overnight for the paint to dry so they would be ready for launching in the River Stour the following morning. The morning dawned warm and

Mark paddling his coracle by the Tide Mill sunny so we carried our craft up to a nice launching spot on the river bank. I eased myself aboard very gently and with some trepidation. It floated beautifully with no leaks and I paddled slowly downstream accompanied by a swan and her cygnets.

Two weeks later I launched my coracle onto the Deben at Bromeswell and paddled downstream under Wilford Bridge, past The Tidemill and disembarked at Deben Rowing Club as part of the Deben Macmillan Challenge. For the winter my coracle is stored in a dry barn but I hope to have her on the Deben again in the spring and rather fancy exploring the upper reaches. Watch this space!

*Mark is a member of the Deben Rowing Club and was one of the organisers of the 2019 Deben Macmillan Challenge.*



The completed coracle

Ewout Van-Manen

## Love Affair with the Deben

‘Life always takes its course...’ my mother used to say. After a life full of excitement and ups and downs I would say that it is certainly true for me.

How is it that I, who started life as a Dutch boy, end up in my mature years spending as much of my spare time as I can on or along the lovely Deben?

My usual modes of exploration are by bike or in my little Devon Yawl Dayboat which I keep moored at the wonderful Woodbridge Boatyard. My health and loss of job and home near Faversham in Kent left me virtually no option but to initially move to my little vintage caravan which was ‘moored’ in my ladyfriend’s garden near Woodbridge.

I rediscovered the River Deben and enjoyed meeting the inhabitants of the river of animal as well as human kind as I cycled along. I enjoyed talking to the various people and admiring their boats, many of which are of Dutch origin. I have noticed a certain delightful common free spirit and maybe eccentricity in the people the Deben attracts. More about Deben people and boats another time.

I said ‘rediscovered’ the River Deben... Yes. My love of the river goes way back into my youth.

I spent much of my teenage years crewing various yachts all over Europe and especially the Netherlands, England, Germany and the French Brittany Coast. I had a particular favourite type of vessel which was designed



Ewout Van-Manen

*Spurwing*

by naval architect Max Gunning (also well-known for vane self-steering gear design). He researched the best of Dutch traditional boat designs and used all the best of Dutch design aspects to create a more modern vessel which really was a ‘go anywhere’ boat. A yacht that could (and did) circumnavigate the globe and cruise up the shallowest creeks or Dutch waters.

One of my favourite owners and skippers of one of these vessels was Sir Percy Wyn-Harris (known as P-Wyn to his friends). A mountaineer, yachtsman and explorer he had a career in the colonial service and, prior to retirement, was governor of The Gambia in West Africa.



'P-Wyn' with *Spurwing* in Woodbridge

It is of course quite unusual to see an 11+ meter Dutch flat-bottomed boat in Africa but when he saw one, owned by a colleague in what is now Ghana, he fell in love with the vessel and contacted the boatyard in the heart of the Netherlands where Max Gunning's boats were being built and ordered one for himself.

After retirement he settled in Woodbridge and his yacht, *Spurwing* became a familiar sight on the Deben. The vessel was ideal for the East Coast as it had a centre plate and a huge rudder on a skeg which also could be lifted and, drawing only 3ft, could go almost anywhere along the East Coast.

It is interesting to note that Sir Percy isn't the only connection between the River Deben and the Gambia River.... Local musician Clarissa Vincent sailed single handed to the Gambia more recently. I can recommend the books about her adventures.

Partly in order to visit his son in New Zealand, but also because he was a great adventurer, Sir Percy took *Spurwing* on a 6 year wander around the world resulting in a circumnavigation.

It was after his circumnavigation that I met him and started crewing for him. One of my first trips was from the Netherlands back to Woodbridge. We crossed from Flushing to Ramsgate (racing a sister ship helmed by my mother who was not pleased that we just beat her!) and then across the Thames estuary to the tricky entrance to the River Deben. Once across the bar I was really taken by the stunning beauty of the river, and of mainly traditional vessels sailing on her. There were very few moorings in those days – compared to now. For me it was love at first sight! But it took nearly 50 years before I found myself once again sailing on the Deben.

*Ewout Van-Manen was born in The Netherlands and developed his love of sailing from a very early age. He had his own traditional tiny Dutch boat at age 9. Sailing (and life) took him to the UK where he has been since 1967. After a career in education he puts his creative energy into art.*





## Jenni Jepson

### Profile: Sara Johnson

Landscape painter Sara Johnson's strong connection with water and the sea stretches back to childhood but grew deeper when she moved Suffolk and took up painting as a career.

'I've always been drawn to estuaries and tidal rivers...I love the reflective qualities of light, especially the breath-taking effects it has on calm, still water.'

Playing fast and loose with her paints, Sara finds watercolours ideal for portraying those peak moments...her trademark 'wet on wet' technique is especially effective in dramatic landscapes which highlight early morning light or the golden hour before sunset. 'I like to let the flow of the paint dictate the outcome...I'm literally going with the flow!'

By skilfully guiding the paint, Sara treads a fine line between control and freedom, realism and abstraction. 'The ebb and flow of the tidal waters on the Deben around Woodbridge really suit this loose approach,' she added.

Sara Johnson



Moorings at Woodbridge



Sara Johnson

Minsmere (one of Sara's newer style acrylics)

Inspired by the ever-changing light and tides, as well as the seasons and weather, Sara's evocative paintings have built up a large following, with collectors responding to her atmospheric, expressive work in ever increasing numbers.

Her highly-individual style has attracted praise from fellow artists and admirers alike. '...so diverse and prolific...never sacrificing quality for quantity...very uplifting and inspiring,' are just a few of the positive comments she has received

After gaining a degree in textile design from Loughborough College of Art & Design in the 1970s, Sara became a self-employed craft weaver of landscape tapestries before moving on to retrain as a garden designer. Around this time she started painting in watercolours, inspired by the late John Blockley.





Sunrise at Bawdsey

Originally from Hampshire, Sara has developed a strong connection with the watery margins, reed beds and big skies. Her association with the Deben has grown since she started exhibiting watercolours and acrylic paintings in Woodbridge at Gallery East and Artspace.

'My love of the natural world derived from happy childhood memories,' said Sara. 'I enjoy walking and birdwatching, and I gather information and inspiration as I go along, sketchbook and camera at the ready.'

'I'm constantly alert to the spectacular shifts in light that we see here in East Anglia... trying to depict the different moods, unique atmosphere and strong sense of place, which I aim to interpret and re-capture back in my studio on the Norfolk/Suffolk border.'

Using these experiences, notes and photos as a starting point, Sara added: 'I'm not interested in representing literal detail but expressing my feelings and the mood of a place.'

'I begin creating by allowing the paint to freely express itself, guiding the process through to a completed, satisfactory painting.'

'It's a risky way to paint with a potentially

high failure rate, but with years of experience behind me, thankfully this is no longer a major issue.

'More recently I have wanted to explore the use of texture and have started experimenting with acrylic paints and mixed media,' she added. 'This different approach to painting is allowing me to produce landscapes in a contemporary, semi abstract style.'

'I'm finding these new exciting possibilities and techniques are keeping my work fresh and lively. This medium will give me more scope in future to scale up and paint larger,' she added.

*Sara will be exhibiting her latest series of watercolour and mixed media paintings at Artspace, The Thoroughfare, Woodbridge, IP12 1AL, from April 16-22. She will be exhibiting more new work at the Maltings Gallery, Snape, in September, produced in response to her art residency there last November. Visit her website [sarajohnson-art.co.uk](http://sarajohnson-art.co.uk) or follow her on Instagram: [sarajohnson\\_artist](https://www.instagram.com/sarajohnson_artist)*

*Jenni is a former journalist who has retired to live in the Waveney Valley.*



Sara Johnson

Sara Johnson at work in her studio

Peter Willis

## Review: *Life on the Deben*

### Book of the Film

*Life on the Deben* has already been through several iterations since its launch two and a bit years ago: the original film of course, in cinema and DVD options, as well as HD stream, a CD of its music, followed by a memorable concert in St Mary's Church, Woodbridge. Even a Twitter account.

And now we have the book of the film, a handsome, landscape-format production running to 158 pages on heavy gloss paper which makes it a pleasure to handle, though a problem when it comes to finding bookshelf space. As a result it tends to wander around coffee tables and the like being picked up by guests (and residents) for a quick random browse.

Unlike the film, which carries you along – rather like the river itself – at its own chosen pace, the book allows you to linger, to dip in or to step ashore for a visit here and there. It does though, follow the format of the film, starting upriver with the source, which could in fact be in a lane, 'the longest

ford in the country'. Or any one of several tributaries around Debenham. All this of course is in the upper Deben, the relatively secret non-tidal part above Wilford Bridge, best explored by foot or canoe.

Once we reach the more familiar navigable, tidal Deben we find ourselves amongst old friends – some very old, like the Anglo-Saxons who came to Sutton Hoo in the sixth century, others more current such as Deben author Robert Simper, or Peter Wain, expert on the lost port of Goesford.

And, as Heraclitus (was it?) so wisely said, "You never fall into the same river twice." Time moves on, things have continued to happen since the film was finished, and the book reflects many of them: Everson's boatyard has come under new and dynamic ownership. The Longshed has come into its own and building of the full-sized replica of Raedwald's burial ship has got under way. Further upriver, at the Melton Boatyard the 120ft HMS *Vale* has arrived, and become a floating café while the enigmatic *Ginger-Dot* has finally departed to continue her restoration.

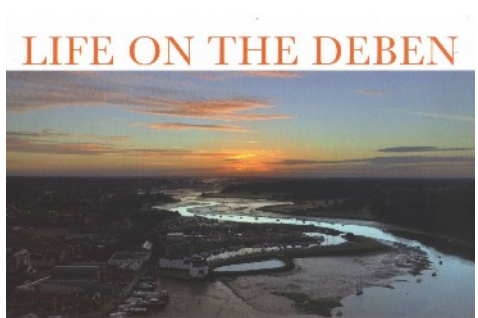
*Nick Cottam will talk about Life on the Deben at the Felixstowe Book Festival, June 28th.*

*Peter Willis is a RDA member and president of the Nancy Blackett Trust.*

**Life on the Deben**

**Nick Cottam & Tim Curtis**

**£20 (inc. p&p), [lifeonthedeben.com](http://lifeonthedeben.com)**



THE STORY OF A SUFFOLK RIVER  
Nick Cottam and Tim Curtis

Robert Simper

## The Dig on the Deben

### Film of the Book

The first film I remember being made around the Deben was a children's adventure story made at Ramsholt in the mid-1950s, but in the past twenty five years an increasing number of films have been shot on the Deben. It is an obvious area for period dramas and nautical yarns because the woods and fields beside the river look timeless. Long may it stay that way.

The Sutton Hoo Ship burial site is full of mystery and there must have more camera crews walking across its tough drought-resistant grass than it has had archaeologists. The 1939 excavation of a pagan king's ship burial is one of the very few glimpses we get of early English history. The true version about the background of how Mrs Edith Pretty recruited Basil Brown, a Suffolk man good at interpreting the soil, to dig in burial mounds on her estate is intriguing. London journalist, John Preston, went a step further and turned the event into his novel *The Dig* (2007). Preston simplified events, two summers became one, and he embellished the whole story into easy reading.

In 1939 the first archaeologist to start to unearth the Sutton Hoo treasure was Peggy Piggott (played in the film by Lily James). She was Preston's great aunt and his portrayal of her may be revealing snippets of personal information which historians had not picked up on. What did go on that night in the wood? Sutton Hoo is a place where mysteries are bound to happen.

Netflix commissioned SHF Production to make a film of Preston's novel. They made it clear that they were making a film to entertain the public; not a total historical account of what happened in 1939. When Director Simon Stone came down to Suffolk, he must have found that Sutton Hoo is a totally different place now that it is under the management of the National Trust. However, he was greatly taken with the whole area and decided to film at Aldeburgh, Snape Maltings, Gedgrave, Shingle Street and Ramsholt.

Ipswich-born actor Ralph Fiennes is cast as Basil Brown while Carey Mulligan is Mrs Pretty. This is a major feature film and will focus public interest on our corner of Suffolk.

Actual boats did not come into the original story, but in the Netflix version they do. Ian Welsh was commissioned to find 'period' boats. He remembered that my



The Simper beach boats at Thorpeness



Tranmer House, Mrs Pretty's former home

son Jonathan's bawley *Mary Amelia* had taken part in a race up the Thames with a token cargo of oysters to take 'the first of the season's oysters' to the London market. (In fact all the boats were carrying consignments of gigas oysters, which can be eaten all the year round. We have tried to introduce Native European oysters to the Deben, but so far they have not been very successful.)

The Director required several open traditional boats and Jonathan and I realised we had a collection. The restoration of my 13'6" 1949 barge boat *Atlas* had just been completed. The production company took one look and said she was far too smart. They were delighted to find, at the back of a barn, our 12ft Tollesbury smack boat *Mussett* with throle pins for rowing, and looking 'authentically' scruffy. She was hired to be a ferry. They also wanted a shot of Suffolk fishing boats on a beach so were thrilled to discover we had three genuine Thorpeness beach boats. These were the 18' herring boat *Three Sisters* (1888), the 15' lobster boat *Pet* (1922) and the 16' *Shady Nook* (1947).

It had been a personal dream of mine to get these boats back to Thorpeness so, when the production company asked us to put them on the beach, it was a dream come

true. Jonathan and grandson Harry loaded them on to trailers and off they went. I have no doubt the film 'The Dig' will catch the atmosphere and beauty of our area; we'll wait to see whether our boats make the cut.

I hope the film includes Mrs Pretty's extraordinary generous gift of donating all the Sutton Hoo treasure to the nation. Winston Churchill wrote to ask her what honour she would like for such a gift. She replied that she didn't need anything.

I once asked my mother if she ever met Mrs Pretty. Mother said 'You met her!' I have no recollection of this. However I do clearly remember her grand entrances into Footman and Pretty's restaurant in Waterloo House, Ipswich.

Every Tuesday we used to go to Ipswich; my father to the Cattle Market and Corn Exchange while my mother went shopping. We met my grandparents for lunch in Footman and Pretty's restaurant. There would be a sudden hush when Mrs Pretty entered. The glass doors were opened wide and in swept a tallish lady in a tweed suit and wearing a hat. There was usually a senior member of staff walking beside her. She was shown to the best table beside a quartet of ladies playing refined music. The whole room would be watching to see whom Mrs Pretty had with her. There was no doubting everyone recognised her and that she was a celebrity, but not for giving the treasure to the nation. It was because she was a major shareholder in Footman and Pretty.

*Robert Simper is president of the RDA and an eminent local historian. He was born in Suffolk and has lived here all his life. Visit his website: [robertsimper.co.uk](http://robertsimper.co.uk)*



Peter Clay

## Deben Landmarks

### Loder's Cut

There are various stories about the river short-cut immediately below Woodbridge that enables avoidance of the aptly named 'Troublesome Reach'. Some pronounce it 'loader' and others 'lodder' – the fact is one doesn't much care about its pronunciation when sailing or rowing in that part of the river, especially if the tide is against you. But who would have guessed that the man whose money made this possible was a bookseller, supported by a poet?

This is the story as related by Frank Hussey in *Old Fitz: Edward Fitzgerald and East Coast Sailing* (Boydell 1974):

'[In 1877 Fitzgerald wrote to his friend John Loder, the Woodbridge bookseller.] He sent his condolences for what he considered to be a most unjust decision against Loder in a libel action and he offered and pressed his friend to accept financial help. Many local people felt the same way about the case and, nine days later, the *Ipswich Journal* had this to say: 'The inhabitants of Woodbridge have retried this case. Their verdict will be a presentation of the costs, damages etc. His neighbours, feeling that his character for honour and truthfulness is unimpeached, have raised a fund.' The collection raised £250 with enough in addition to purchase an inscribed silver tankard for presentation to John Loder. Fitz, it is said, was a leading subscriber. Loder, having his honour vindicated, was then happy to pay the damages and costs



Ted Evans

*Twinkler aground*

out of his own money because he wanted to use the fund for the benefit of the townsfolk in general. Troublesome Reach about three quarters of a mile below the town, had for centuries caused innumerable groundings and many a delayed homecoming but a channel through from Kyson Reach to the top of Methergate Reach would avoid such difficulties. Accordingly men were set to work to shorten the river journey and "Loder's Cut" was dug.'

Loder's Cut remains a great asset to river users. However, be warned, it is a very public place to run aground and little sympathy can be expected from the cautious mariners who take the long route via Kyson Point. They may not appear to notice; but you can be sure your mistake will be the first topic of conversation in the pub that evening!

*Peter Clay is a RDA committee member. He was founding chairman of the Woodbridge Riverside Trust and is now joint leader of the team responsible for historic ships and boat-building on the waterfront. Visit: [woodbridgeriversidetrust.org](http://woodbridgeriversidetrust.org)*

Jane Haviland

## Review: *Take Only Photos, Leave Only Footprints*

My first thoughts were 'oh no another guide to Suffolk – the secret is out'!

When I read it, however, I was taken on a delightful journey through the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the Suffolk Coast and Heaths, from south to north.

As well as being peppered with beautiful photos and details of how they were taken – camera type, exposure, lens, aperture and film ISO – Gill provides a helpful guide to those who may not be so 'photographically driven'. The scenes she presents include woodland, seascapes, churches, boats, rivers and wrecks, all taken at different seasons and times of day. Although I used to use a Single Lens Reflex (SLR) I now, for better or worse, mainly use the camera

on my smart phone, in which I discovered more technical detail than I thought.

Gill doesn't try to teach us how to take photos, she simply informs us what she did to achieve her shots. She also discusses times of day and seasons with regard to light and desired effects.

She takes us to typical tourist locations, such as Aldeburgh and Southwold. But Gill also take us to places less well known such as Covehithe with a church within a ruined church, dating back to medieval times – a place for solitude and contemplation. In addition, we are taken to mystical ancient woodlands such as Captains Wood and Staverton Thicks, and the eerie coast at Sizewell where ghostly photos of cooling water inlet and outlet pipes erupt from the sea in misty mornings.

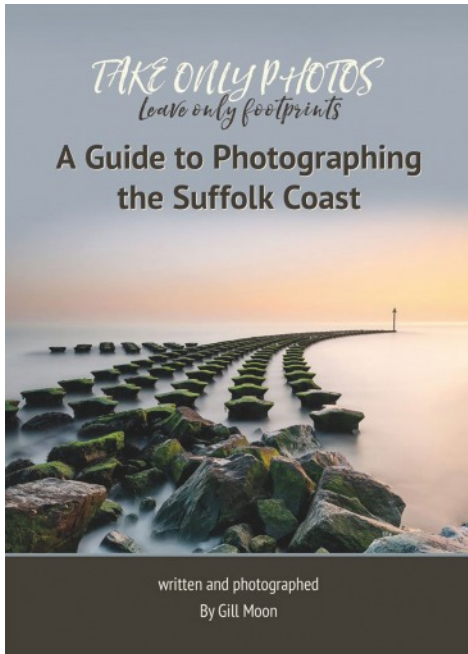
The book tells us how to get to each location, local facilities and what to look out for in a carefully presented, easy to use spiral bound book which is a pleasure to use whether or not you are a 'photography buff'.

For me, an important aspect of this book is the power of observation and how we as beholders of a scene, bird, icicle, capture what we believe is worth remembering.

*Gill publishes a monthly photojournal 'Shoot for the Moon' on her website & runs workshops.*

*Jane Haviland is an RDA committee member.*

**Take Only Photos, Leave Only Footprints**  
**Gill Moon**  
**£8 (+p&p), [gillmoon.com](http://gillmoon.com)**



# Getting Involved: On the Water

## Felixstowe Ferry Sailing Club

*As well as welcoming new members, many of the different clubs and groups who use the River Deben run events that are open to all. We're hoping to highlight some of these in each issue of the magazine. Please get in touch if your club has events you'd like to share. Here we focus on public events run by the Felixstowe Ferry Sailing Club.*

*The FFSC 3rd annual 'Art at the Ferry' takes place April 10th-11th, with 25 artists and craftspeople showing their recent work.*

*June 21st 'Suffolk Day' is Club Open Day when volunteers will take novices sailing (30 minutes free) and on power boats (£5). This is part of a national RYA scheme.*

*July 25th-26th the club is hosting a Cat Open Day. They have 5 Dart 16s available for hire.*

**Felixstowe Ferry Sailing Club (FFSC)** was established in 1931. The membership for FFSC has grown over the years and continues to increase due to more and more people and families wanting to sail and get out on the water.

**Felixstowe Ferry Youth Sailing (FFYS)** is part of the FFSC. There are over 60 junior members of FFSC and over 30 of them sail

regularly throughout the year. This is a great and affordable chance for any family in the area to start their children sailing. FFYS have expert instructors, safety cover and safe dinghies.

FFSC offers many facilities that may help you to get involved. They include:

- **Dinghy sailing** with club racing on a Wednesday night throughout the summer months (starting just after Easter) and many Sunday morning trophy races. Great for all the family.
- **'Sailing in Company'** where club members can sail with other members for fun. It's designed for the more leisurely sailor and families. Sailing the beautiful river Deben, sometimes out along the coast and sometimes we have a BBQ or visit a public house along the Deben. We have full safety cover with trained powerboat drivers.
- **'Hire a Dinghy'** FFSC own a number of sailing dinghies that members can hire out on a case by case basis. Rates are affordable and you can use the dinghies for race or social sailing.
- Lively **Social calendar** of themed dinner nights and regular events for club members and their friends and family throughout the year.

Email FFSC on [enquiries@ffsc.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@ffsc.co.uk) or visit [ffsc.co.uk](http://ffsc.co.uk) for more information.

FFSC welcomes visitors at any time the club is open. So why not drop in sometime?



Felixstowe Ferry SC clubhouse

# Getting Involved: Environment

## Fish Surveys and Deben Estuary Plan

Stephen Thompson



Measuring mullet in the mud

Stephen Thompson asks: Do you like mucking about beside (and in!) the water? Do you want to make a real contribution to understanding and management of local natural resources?

If so – we might have an opportunity for you! **Eastern IFCA (Inshore Fisheries & Conservation Authority)** manage fisheries and conservation in the inshore waters of Lincolnshire, Norfolk and Suffolk. To do so effectively, we need to understand what is happening in those waters. One of the most important aspects of Suffolk is the highly productive estuaries. However, we don't have as good a picture of what is happening where, as we would like. To address this, we're planning fish surveys in several estuaries, including the Deben. These surveys are quite low tech – basically, we wade around in the shallow water and use various types of net to catch the fish. We then identify and measure these, and from that can work out which areas are important for which species, when the young fish arrive in the estuaries, and if there are any particularly rare or important species in the area. This provides great opportunities for

citizen science to make a real contribution to better managing our natural resources. If you're happy working in shallow water, getting muddy and pulling ropes, you can help. Specialists will be involved in the fish identification and measuring, but you'll have the chance to get involved with that as well.

*There will be more information at the RDA AGM (April 30th) and via the Facebook page.*

*Make contact with IFCA via our website: [eastern-ifca.gov.uk](http://eastern-ifca.gov.uk)*

The **Deben Estuary Partnership** are setting about the task of revising the Deben Estuary Plan – a key document for this area. The first stage of this process will begin with a series of workshops running from April 2020 at The Longshed, Woodbridge. Artists, scientists and anyone with an informed interest in the area are invited to participate. The overall aim is to explore and debate aspects of the river and its systems that will contribute to the development of an authoritative management plan. The priority for the first workshop will be to give an introduction to the current Estuary Plan and the reasons for revising it. This will be followed by a break out session and interactive workshop to sound out opinions and concerns over the future management of the river. Subsequent workshops are expected to run on a monthly or bi-monthly basis through Spring and Summer 2020.

*Dates and locations can be ascertained via their website [debensoundings.wordpress.com](http://debensoundings.wordpress.com)*



# Getting Involved: Events

## Maritime Woodbridge, Beowulf Festival & Seafolk Arts

**Maritime Woodbridge** returns this year on September 5th-6th with Smugglers and Pirates as its theme. It will be based mainly in Whisstocks Place and the adjoining quays, and as always it will be a free festival, organised by and for the community.

The mix of attractions will be both serious, with lectures and exhibits etc., and fun, with shows, competitions and traditional boats. This year it will also be enhanced by Art Safari's Suffolk Sketch Fest.

Look for updates on the [maritimewoodbridge.org](http://maritimewoodbridge.org) website, which is set to grow into an online resource which like the festival itself will reflect both the town's marine heritage and its continuing and vibrant maritime activity.

The 2020 **Beowulf Festival** runs over 4 days from 1-4 May with free admission and opportunities to take part in many of the events. It is being organised through a collaboration between Woodbridge Riverside Trust, The Sutton Hoo Ship's Company, Woodbridge Museum and The



Peter Willis

Maritime Woodbridge

Tide Mill Living Museum, and the Ferry Quay Company.

Set on the banks of the River Deben, the festival weaves along the waterfront, uplifting and inspiring with music, poetry, art, dance, storytelling, Anglo-Saxon enactors, local food, drink and history, and two specially commissioned theatre performances. It's produced by Claire Perkins and Jan Pulsford. Visit the website: [beowulfestival.co.uk/#beowulf-2020](http://beowulfestival.co.uk/#beowulf-2020)

**Marie** was built in 1963 by Nobles of Girvan as a herring trawler, decommissioned in 2005 and travelled from Troon to Woodbridge, where she has berthed since. After a few trips around the UK south coast, Holland and Brittany she has found a new occupation acting as a maritime festival music stage making appearances from Scarborough and Hull to Ipswich and the local Beowulf festival in Woodbridge. This year *Marie* will make another appearance as a music stage at Beowulf as well as far afield as Brest Fetes Maritimes Internationales. To learn more, visit [seafolkarts.co.uk](http://seafolkarts.co.uk)

Art Buttlar



*Marie* functioning as a floating stage

# The River Deben Association

All of the officers and committee members of the RDA are volunteers who give their time to the Association because they care about the river. While everyone is involved in all the committee decisions, some members take particular responsibility for areas which interest them or in which they are involved, and these are listed below:

Robert Simper	Honorary President
Sarah Zins	Chair
James Goldsworthy	Treasurer and Membership Secretary
Jane Alexander	Secretary
Peter Clay	Woodbridge Riverside Trust
Jane Haviland	Saltmarshes
Michael Holland	Planning
Sam Jennings	Sea Scouts
Kate Laydon	Publicity
Moray MacPhail *	Maritime Woodbridge
Matt Lis *	River Businesses / Social Media
Richard Verrill	Wildlife
Robin Whittle	Saltmarshes

\* Co-opted until 2020 AGM

Membership:  
[riverdebenmembers@gmail.com](mailto:riverdebenmembers@gmail.com)

Magazine:  
[magazine@riverdeben.org](mailto:magazine@riverdeben.org)

All other matters:  
[chair@riverdeben.org](mailto:chair@riverdeben.org)

Kate Laydon is retiring at the 2020 AGM and we are grateful for her important contribution to the committee. She has helped to raise the profile of the Association by ensuring that details of our activities are more widely disseminated and by forging links with other river-based organisations.

From April 2020 the new subscriptions will be £6 for single members and £10 for couples. If you pay by standing order, please contact your bank to increase the payment.

There are more than 150 members for whom we do not have a current email, and so miss out on RDA updates. Please send your details to our membership secretary, giving consent to be contacted by email.

We are glad to report that our membership is inching upwards. Even with slightly higher subs, membership is a great bargain - two issues of the magazine per year, posted to your address, entry to our two meetings (always interesting, we hope) and the satisfaction of adding your name to a group dedicated to such a worthwhile cause.

You can join by completing the form on our website at [www.riverdeben.org](http://www.riverdeben.org) or by emailing the membership secretary.



James Skellorn

James Skellorn's mother (centre) enjoying a Deben summer cruise in July 1939. This and more nostalgia in our next issue!

# Dates for the Diary

These are intended as a handy reminder of events mentioned in this magazine.

- **April 1st:** Claudia Myatt, Robertson's, Woodbridge 1500-1700 ([robertsons-boatyard.co.uk/free-boat-clinics](http://robertsons-boatyard.co.uk/free-boat-clinics)) (p. 6)
- **April 4th:** New opening hours, HMS Vale, Melton 0900-1700 Thursdays-Mondays through the summer ([debencafe.co.uk](http://debencafe.co.uk)) (p. 23)
- **April 10th-11th:** 'Art at the Ferry', Felixstowe Ferry SC 1000-1600 ([ffsc.co.uk](http://ffsc.co.uk)) (p. 35)
- **April 16th-22nd:** Sara Johnson exhibition Artspace, Woodbridge ([artw.co.uk](http://artw.co.uk)) (p. 29)
- **April 24th:** Last date to return Environment Agency consultation document (p. 15)
- **April 30th:** River Deben Association AGM (members only, join at the door), Woodbridge Community Hall 1830 (doors open 1800) (p. 38)
- **May 1st:** Felixstowe-Bawdsey Ferry resumes daily summer service 1000-1800 (p. 22)
- **May 1st-4th:** Beowulf Festival ([beowulffestival.co.uk/#beowulf-2020](http://beowulffestival.co.uk/#beowulf-2020)) (p. 37)
- **May 14th:** 'Swords of Kingdoms: The Staffordshire Hoard at Sutton Hoo' (until November 29th) (p. 31)
- **May 24th:** Woodbridge Regatta and Riverside Fair, River Wall, Woodbridge 1100-1900 (visit the RDA stall)
- **June 6th:** River Deben photography, Gill Moon ([landscapephotographytuition.co.uk](http://landscapephotographytuition.co.uk))
- **June 21st:** 'Club open days' Felixstowe Ferry SC open day 1000-1600 (p. 35)
- **June 27th-28th:** Felixstowe Book Festival ([felixstowebookfestival.co.uk](http://felixstowebookfestival.co.uk)) (p. 30)
- **July 25th-26th:** Cat open, Felixstowe Ferry ([ffsc.co.uk](http://ffsc.co.uk)) (p. 35)
- **August 19th-23rd:** Waldringfield Cadet Week ([waldringfieldsc.com](http://waldringfieldsc.com)) (p. 7)
- **August 22nd-23rd:** Ipswich Maritime Festival (p. 10)
- **September 5th-6th:** Maritime Woodbridge & Suffolk Sketch Fest (pp. 37 & 6)

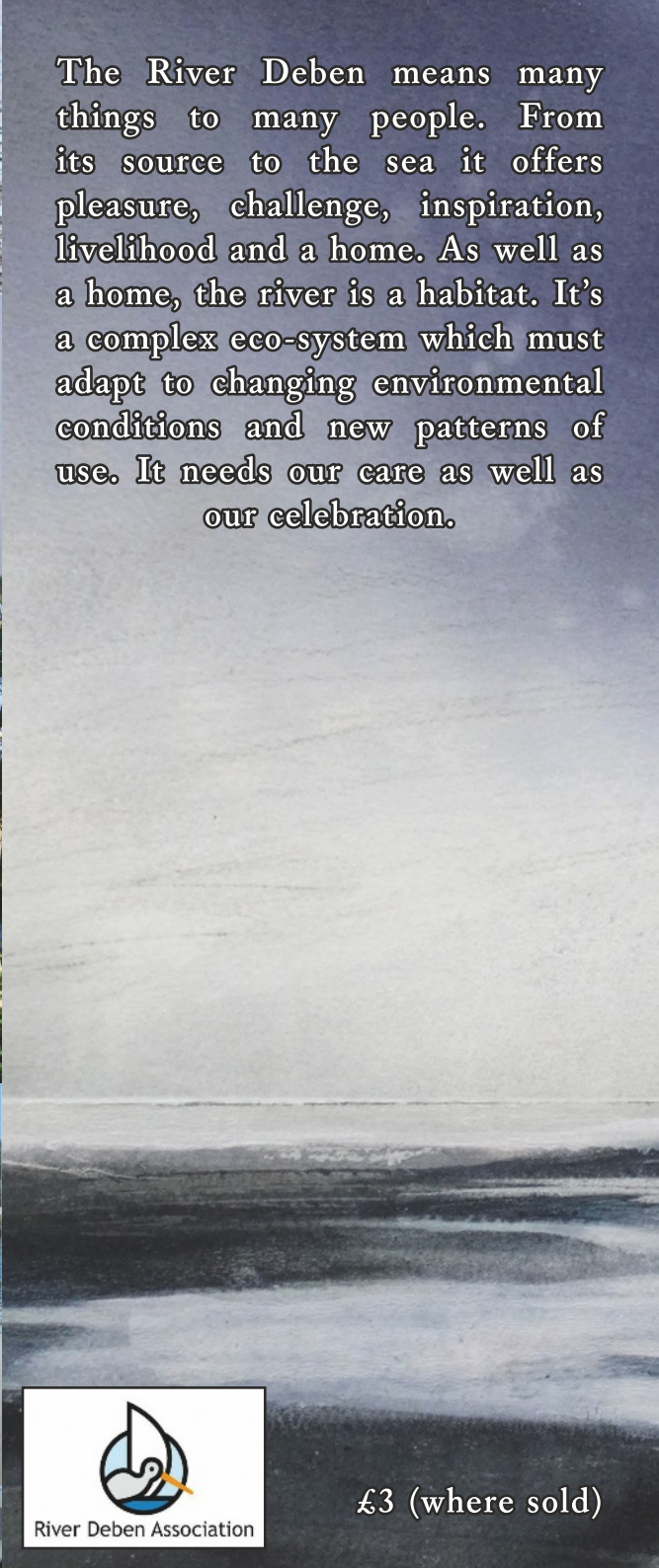


Gill Moon





The River Deben means many things to many people. From its source to the sea it offers pleasure, challenge, inspiration, livelihood and a home. As well as a home, the river is a habitat. It's a complex eco-system which must adapt to changing environmental conditions and new patterns of use. It needs our care as well as our celebration.



River Deben Association

£3 (where sold)