

# The Deben

The background is a watercolor illustration of a sunset or sunrise. The sky is filled with soft, blended colors of blue, purple, and orange. The bottom of the image shows dark silhouettes of trees and land reflected in a body of water.

**Issue 62**  
**Spring 2021**

Places featured in this issue  
of The Deben magazine:

# RIVER DEBEN



Letheringham Easton

Ufford

Melton

Wilford Bridge

Woodbridge

Sutton Hoo

Kyson Point

Martlesham

Waldringfield

Ramsholt

Hollesley

Bawdsey

Felixstowe Ferry

Deben Bar



# The Deben, Spring 2021

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John Ranson

# Editor's Introduction

After such a restricted winter I hope this edition of the magazine is both welcome and welcoming. I am delighted by the quality of contributions; writers such as Martin Waller, Shona Norman, Sue Ryder Richardson express their appreciation of our surroundings with such eloquence. Alan Turner's characteristic response to the Deben is to fling himself in, then emerge and dash off a sketch. I defy you to read his article without feeling invigorated. Alexis Smith, in the WSC rescue boat, captures moments of triumph, disaster and intense effort. Sally Westwood and Stephanie Perks persuade us to look more precisely at the beauty of the natural world while Liz Hattan and Robin Whittle remind us that we cannot forget our stewardship responsibilities.

Mary-Anne Bartlett, Claudia Myatt and Gill Moon achieve creative connections and encourage others to do the same. Thanks to Francis Wheen and Peter Willis for finding the words to help us appreciate their achievement. The toughest assignment may have gone to James Skellorn, volunteered into reviewing *The Dig* on the slightly tenuous basis that his mother, visiting the Deben as a child in August 1939 (*The Deben* #60), retained the memory of the buzz around the Sutton Hoo discovery into her old age. Peter Willis' Harbourmaster series

brings us safely into the river past the annually shifting shingle of the Deben bar and Emily Casson reminds us what we owe to the WAAFs as well as the boffins of Bawdsey Manor.

I was fascinated by Bev Rogers' account of *Tijdstroom's* history and Sarah Zins' News from the Hards seems more varied and interesting than ever. It's not been an easy period for Clubs. Ollie Jennings tells us what he's been missing at 5th Woodbridge Sea Scouts and reminds us of the impact lockdown has had on fundraising. Generally the river organisations have shown their resilience. In this issue we hear from the Deben Rowing Club, Waldringfield History Group and Felixstowe Ferry SC. Please remember we're always ready to share news from other Deben groups on our Facebook page, where we also include environmental updates, *RDA Journal* articles and many wonderful photos. And if, by any chance, you're still feeling a bit jaded by the difficulties of the last six months, I suggest you turn immediately to back page and allow the River Rats to divert yourself with an icicle hitch.

*Editor Julia Jones is a writer and lifelong lover of the River Deben. You can email her at [magazine@riverdeben.org](mailto:magazine@riverdeben.org).*

Julia Jones



This sequence shows the Priestman crane lifting *Peter Duck* into the river for the season in 2016. (Since then the Woodbridge Boatyard have introduced safety barriers.)

Martin Waller

## Not Just a Pretty Crane

*Martin Waller, who moved to the area in October 2019, shares his first impressions of the River Deben.*

Priestman Brothers was founded in 1870 in Hull by Samuel and William Dent Priestman, one of the engineering firms that powered Victorian industry. Priestman made dredging equipment, excavators, engines – and that large, rust-red crane on caterpillar tracks that sits on Everson's Wharf outside Woodbridge Boat Yard, one of several dotted across the foreshore.

When I first walked past the crane, shortly after moving here, I nodded approvingly. How appropriate to keep, as a piece of industrial archaeology, a memento of the times when the boatbuilding industry in Woodbridge and its surrounds was at its height.

When next I walked past Priestman's crane, it was pulling a boat out of the water. This was not industrial archaeology but a still functioning if elderly part of the boatyard.

My misconception goes to the heart of why I have come to know and love the River Deben, or at least the stretch from the top of Martlesham Creek to Wilford Bridge at Melton that I know best. This is a proper working environment where boats are built, repaired, careened and whatever else is commonly done to water craft. (As I will explain later, my ignorance will one day be corrected.)

It is not a chocolate box pretty marina full of rich people's yachts and cabin cruisers but an industry centred around the river that continues to be an important provider of employment and income to the area. I find the industrial and economic history of my adopted home fascinating. The

River Deben is central to this too.

The river is one of the more compelling of the half dozen reasons why we chose to move to the area. Some find the mud flats, reed beds and bleak horizons typical of the Deben at low tide sombre and menacing – there are certainly shades of MR James, and one almost expects to find Magwitch emerging onto the shore, 'soaked in water, and smothered in mud.'

I find the bleakness calming, its emptiness encouraging a restful mind. And when the river is at its full, threatening to spill over the marina's edge, it is a dramatic sight. The Deben, on first acquaintance, seemed astonishingly tidal to someone more used to the River Thames, and that transformation means I am never sure, when I make one of my favourite walks to Kyson Point or round the creek to Martlesham, what I will be met with.

I also love those wide, open skies, and the horizon that seems to stretch all the way to Holland. My favourite view, on emerging from our house, can take in the tips of the masts just visible above the roofs of the town right across the river to Sutton Hoo.

Studies have shown that living on or near water is good for our psychological wellbeing, lowering levels of stress and tension. Scientists have suggested that at some point in our species' history we must have spent some time by or in water, whether riverine or coastal – our relatively hairless bodies, by comparison with other great apes, suggests an evolutionary adaptation to a part-aquatic lifestyle. That relaxation induced today by the nearness of water, including the Deben, must be a hangover from that time.

A confession: after we spent the first few months here unpacking, the subsequent and understandable restraints on our movements meant we have had little chance to explore the Deben much upstream from Wilford Bridge. We did manage, during one of the hiatuses to lockdown, to make it to Ramsholt, and another endless vista down the estuary towards the sea. And to Felixstowe, where the river meets its end.

All this ignorance will be put right when it can, and we embark on our next big project, the boat. Purists among RDA members may object, but my ideal boat has a large engine at the blunt end, a bar at the other, more pointed end, and none

of that flappy stuff and ropes you have to pull on in between.

This summer looks a fair if optimistic bet. Should you be on the Deben and come across a motor cruiser, clearly driven by a couple of townies, veering dangerously from side to side, take my advice. Give it a wide berth. If that is indeed the appropriate nautical expression.

*Martin Waller was an award-winning journalist and columnist on The Times for 30 years, writing for the business pages. Most recently he wrote a daily column on investment and finance. He retired in May 2018.*

Peter Willis

## Profile: John White

If ever a harbour and its harbourmaster were made for each other, it has to be John White and Felixstowe Ferry. Born in the village, he's lived there all his life, apart from the war years when his father served in the merchant navy and his mother moved the family into Felixstowe. 'My father returned in about 1944 and bought No 3 Harbour Villas (the distinctive long terrace overlooking the Bar) and started fishing again.' About 1955 his parents took over the Ferryboat Inn and the family moved in there.

John went to Felixstowe Grammar School, but left after taking his O-Levels – 'I'm not much of a scholar' – and started an apprenticeship in the Felixstowe Ferry Boatyard with CH Fox and Sons (same family as Fox's on the Orwell, he tells me).

And there, becoming a qualified shipwright, he stayed, for 42 years, 'building wooden boats – mostly fishing, a few yachts, some Folkboats.' Eventually the yard changed hands and John became a director, with Trevor Moore. ('His son runs the yard still')

'I retired at 60,' he continues, 'and took over the ferry in 1998 or 9 – I'd run it at odd times when Mr Brinkley had it, and with the previous ferryman, Maurice Read – in fact I'd been doing it since I was still at school.' The ferryboat, *Ellen*, was one he'd built himself, and when he left the ferry service after about five years, he retained it to run river trips in the summer, and for his work as harbourmaster – something else he took over from Charlie Brinkley, about 25 years ago. The main job is looking after the mooring buoys – 230 of them – going round in the spring, making sure they are laid in the correct position and their tackle is big enough.

However, what John is best known for is his annual chartlet, showing the current positions of the shifting knolls that make up the notorious Deben Bar. It's another springtime job. 'We like to get it done before Easter. Trinity House move the buoys, and do a survey of their own to plot the positions, but last year, what with Covid, they didn't send anybody down to do the



Felixstowe Ferry Harbourmaster John White.

survey. Stephen (Read, his assistant) and I did the survey, and Trinity House used a contractor – the boatyard – to move the buoys.’

Many of us who live along the Deben reckon the river owes much of its quiet, traditional character to the Bar, and its ability to frighten off less capable sailors. John agrees that it does, though not as much as he’d like. ‘Old school sailors used to do their chartwork. Now some don’t even check the tides. I never charge for talking people in over the phone – some will say thank you very much, and give me a good drink. But some want talking in all the way round from Levington – just “phone the harbourmaster”.

‘Mind you,’ he adds with evident relief, ‘half the people in Levington just won’t come in the Deben at all.’

Which is perhaps as well. He reckons about once a fortnight someone gets stuck on the bar. ‘If it’s a flood tide they’ll get off on their own, if it’s an ebb, I’ll try to get them off, but a deep-keel yacht can get dug in.’ Worse is in a NE or SE wind. ‘Gets up a good bit of swell even on a flood tide. They quite often drift onto the west shore, and once you hit – particularly if you’re a deep-keel – you can’t get off because the swells just keep knocking you further up the beach.’

*Peter Willis is President of the Nancy Blackett Trust and a former Deputy Editor of Classic Boat magazine.*

*You can download (and, we’d recommend, print and either laminate or put in a plastic sleeve) John’s annual chartlets from the Deben Estuary Pilot website ([debenestuarypilot.co.uk](http://debenestuarypilot.co.uk)), where you can also find lots of useful information, including tide times, forecasts, and contact details.*

## Emily Casson

# Radar at Bawdsey

The Hamlet of Felixstowe Ferry



A group of RAF personnel in jolly mood posing on the ferry for ferryman Maurice Read (father of Felixstowe Ferry Deputy Harbourmaster Stephen Read), who was a very keen photographer.

At the mouth of the River Deben sits Bawdsey Manor. Once home to the Quilter family, by the mid 1930s the Manor would undergo a transformation from home to secret, scientific headquarters. The team leading the development of Chain Home, the early warning system which helped win the Battle of Britain, moved in. It was where many members of the Women's Auxiliary Air Force, known as the WAAF would find themselves stationed during the Second World War.

After the First World War, ways to protect Britain from attack were discussed at length. On the 10th November 1932, Stanley Baldwin warned that the bomber will always get through.

Two years later, summer air exercises proved this to be true when the Air Ministry itself was 'destroyed'.

In October 1934 Harry Wimperis, Air Ministry Director of Scientific Research sought to learn more about a potential defence measure – the death-ray. The first proposal for such a measure came in 1924 and a prize of £1000 was soon offered to the person that could offer a successful hours test. With no death-ray on the horizon, in January 1935, Wimperis called Robert Watson-Watt, who had begun his career at the Met Office attempting to track thunderstorms using radio waves.

Wimperis asked Watson-Watt for his advice





A post-war Deben Week Regatta with National 12s and Fireflies getting ready for their start, with a view of the radar masts beyond.

on a death-ray which would use radio waves. Watson-Watt and his assistant Arnold 'Skip' Wilkins calculated that a death-ray would be impossible but they did wonder how they could help.

By 1935, a few scientists already knew that aircraft could, under certain circumstances, be detected by the reflection of radio waves and with the Daventry Experiment in 1935, the Air Ministry saw the advantage that radar could bring to the country's defence.

In May 1935, Watson-Watt, Wilkins and a small team of scientists began work at Orfordness but the team quickly outgrew the space. Bawdsey Manor Estate was purchased for £24,000. Soon, 360-foot-tall steel transmitter towers and 240-foot-tall wooden receiver towers were erected on the estate and Bawdsey became the home to the first operational Chain Home radar station in the world.

But who would operate the system?

While male operators may have been the first choice, Watson-Watt was not entirely happy with what he saw believing that perhaps women may be better suited to the role, having lower

liability to boredom in an unchanging routine amongst other reasons. Watson-Watt concluded that a test was needed and offered his three secretaries; Miss H. Brooker, Miss Nellie Boyce and Miss Mary Agnes Girdlestone for the task.

Following a five-day trial at Dover Chain Home Station, Watson-Watt declared that after one week of training they

were all excellent operators; one of them was the third best in the world.

Soon members of the WAAF were being trained as radar operators or 'Clerk, Special Duties'. The WAAF was officially formed on June 28th 1939 and like the other women's services – the Women's Royal Naval Service and the Auxiliary Territorial Service – it would become integral to the war effort. By 1946, the WAAF had expanded to many times its original size and 95% of WAAF personnel were directly replacing airmen, 70% The work on the Chain Home stations was highly secretive and while many of the women kept the secret of their work even after the war, we are lucky that many of them told their stories later in their lives.

The stories of some of these women are showcased in the Women on the Front Lines exhibition at Bawdsey Radar in 2021.

For more information visit their website ([BawdseyRadar.org.uk](http://BawdseyRadar.org.uk)).

*Emily Casson had a National Heritage Lottery Funded internship at Bawdsey Radar from which she has produced four podcasts. She runs Books and Crannies, a second hand bookshop in Beccles as well as [sagasofshe.co.uk](http://sagasofshe.co.uk), a blog and podcast dedicated to uncovering the hidden histories of women.*

Bev Rogers

## Living aboard *Tijdstroom*

Bev Rogers



*Tijdstroom* moored in the Netherlands.

*Tijdstroom* is the beautiful (yes I'm biased!) Luxemotor, Dutch Barge, with the two large silver anchors on the bow – moored opposite the Long Shop Museum. She became our family home in 2007 but being built in 1926 witnessed a lot of history before the Rogers family came along.

*Tijdstroom* or 'Time Stream' in English is 23m long with a beam of 4.5m and 1.2m draft. Originally used as a cargo vessel to transport potatoes and other goods she was later converted for fishing on the IJsselmeer. The side decks were dropped 18" and the hull plated to 9mm to allow for ice breaking.

Our family had been living on a small Dutch Barge in the UK for a number of years. The barge was perfect for many of the UK inland waters and we were reliably informed was the largest vessel to cross the full length of the Leeds Liverpool canal. However, we were keen to see the waterways of mainland Europe while our two children were still young, so our hunt for a larger barge took us to the Netherlands. We found *Tijdstroom* in a state of disrepair, having been converted to a live aboard but abandoned for a number of years. Immediately after moving in our first stop was a boatyard in Franeker. We

Bev Rogers



A bullethole courtesy of a WW2 British aircraft.

lived there for 3 months rebuilding the back cabin and wheelhouse, eating Stroopwafels and teaching the kids to cycle so they could keep up with the locals! As soon we were ship shape our travels began.

The engine was a Detroit 6 cylinder 160HP 2 stroke diesel, scavenged from a World War II tank that was stripped before being dumped at sea. It was so noisy that you had to wear ear defenders when cruising. The gear box was aptly nick named by the army 'The Pig'. I had to jump on the clutch pedal with both feet in order to hopefully change gear! The tank engine was not the only war memorabilia, the decks were peppered with holes presumably from British aircraft strafe. The picture above shows a side puncture through the 6mm roof and 6mm angle iron, the bullet continued after ripping through over 20mm of steel.

We spent an eventful three years cruising the Netherlands, Belgium and France before returning to the UK and setting up home on the Deben. The two-stroke tank engine was costing a fortune to run as the valves were worn down to the stems. Looking for spares took us to a



*Tijdstroom*, at her present mooring, in the snow.

Belgian field full of buried world war engines which were hidden from the enemy. In the end we decided to fit a refurbished much quieter DAF 615.

I missed cruising enormously when we first arrived. Having lived on a boat since I was 20 being moored in once place was really difficult to get used to. We planned to stay put until our children left school – only 2 terms to go now until our youngest leaves!



The view from the stern of *Tijdstroom*.

Strange though, after living on the Deben for 10 years, I'm not sure I want to move on. Having travelled through so many places in my life, I think I have found home. We have a wonderful community, great friends and view to die for!

*Bev Rogers and her family live on Tijdstroom, opposite the Long Shop Museum. She makes and sells 'Bev's Eco Products' (centered around 'Zero Waste, Plastic Free Living'), with a focus on (but not limited to) beeswax food wraps as an alternative to cling film and/or tin foil. You can buy these from her website (bevsecoproducts.co.uk). Her husband, with a similar philosophy, sells battery packs, LED lighting and solar panels for boats.*

## For the Love of the Sea

### Jenny Jefferies

A new cookbook produced on behalf of British fishing industry. Jenny Jefferies has collected 41 expert contributors to share their passion

for British seafood, its local heritage and sustainability. Recipes range from the exotic to the basic and are gleaned from enthusiasts from around the UK. The Deben's contribution comes from Mike Warner photographed at Felixstowe Ferry, recommending Baked Autumn Herring with Lemon and Tomato.

£22, Meze Publishing

[mezepublishing.co.uk](http://mezepublishing.co.uk)

(Part of the profits will be donated to RNLI.)



# Sally Westwood

## January Birding

At break of dawn, crows flew over the boat masts, from their woodland roost across the River Deben, chattering, concealed by the fog. The pebbles on the boatyard were unusually compact and silent. The song of a bird, came out of the near freezing fog along the river bank, from high up. Its song projected, loud and clear, carried some distance. 'Teacher, teacher, teacher, che... teacher, teacher, teacher, che' perhaps singing for a mate, or defending a territory. The Great Tit's metallic song is also a song of spring. Like many song birds, it sings during the breeding season. Two Starlings tore away from a fir tree, one chasing the other, weaving in small circles.



Lapwings crossing the River Deben.

Lapwings flew across from the river, inland, intermingled with Black-headed Gulls. The plovers showed broad wings, that flapped constantly with rounded wing tips, unlike the straight-edged wings of the Black-headed Gulls. They circled round and flew back over the river. When feeding on arable fields in the winter, they can often be seen taking off and circling round, in a large group, before returning to feed. A Curlew was calling 'Curluuw, curluuw'. I could not see it. It was in flight, calling as it flew.

A Blue Tit clung to the underneath of a branch, devoid of leaves searching tiny crevices for insects. It called 'ssss, sssss ssss'. Occasionally it changed its call, to a light 'pink, pink' as it went about the

branches. It hunted for food amongst the scrub and trees along the river bank, frequently in the foliage of bushes, low down, close by. It was not alone. The group of Blue Tits were accompanied by Long-tailed Tits and Great Tits. Long-tailed Tits make a gentle ringing call, like the peel of tiny bells. They also make a light trilling call. Their delicate movements were overhead with their calls and sounds. The bare branches made it easier to see them. In the summer time they are seen briefly as they fly from the leafy foliage of one tree to another, when several follow each other in procession, across a pathway or over the tops of bushes and trees.



Blue Tit from an earlier sunny day.

Visibility improved, as the tide rapidly ebbed. The dark green firs across the water, were a straight line, like a green wall, slightly curving here and there, below the murky greyness. An agile Greenshank ran straight along the tideline, against the ebbing tide, head down, with open bill, pointing forwards, in the shallow water taking in small fish, going out with the tide. They also eat insects and worms. It stopped occasionally to swallow food, then rushed along, passing by quickly, a small moving speck in the distance. A Magpie swooped down onto the fence, on the central muddy bank, dividing

the river from flooded fields behind. The river burst its bank in the 1950s, and is permanently flooded, despite efforts to dam it. Hundreds of waders overwinter on these mudflats, without human disturbance. Five Crows, cawed loudly, bombed the Magpie. One dropped down directly above it, wings extended, in a shroud, neck down, beak squawking. The Magpie watched the squawking beak, flew away, outnumbered, towards the woodland, across the river. Jackdaws arrived late to the battleground, their metallic 'tchacks', were pinging shots over the water. They looked sleek and smart, with black forehead and beak, and a gentle, light grey covering back of head and upper chest. The greyness of those areas enhanced feather details. These crows are shorter and stockier than the completely black combatants.

The Robin had his back towards me, its tail flicked up, almost upright, its outer flight feathers protruded, longer than the length of its body. It turned its head, saw me, flew up, and landed on a flower basket, hanging from the side of a gang plank, to a moored ex-RAF

Air Sea Rescue vessel. It jumped over a clutch of yellow, winter flowering pansies, its body hidden, except for its eyes.

A solitary Starling landed on the arrow end of a wind vane, attached to a boat mast, the arrow spun round several times. It waited for it to settle and sang to attract a female, usually near the location of a new or familiar nest. He gave a short ascending whistle, followed by squeaks and clicks. Two Cormorants, black silhouettes in the fading light, were perched, tall and thin, on separate branches of a leafless tree, a favourite haunt, on the opposite bank. Another had wings fully extended, drying, showing white juvenile chest markings. A large flock of Canada Geese flew over to the river to roost, honking loudly, in the early evening blackness, masking the sound of biting, frozen rain, louder than their calls on recent nights.

*Sally Westwood is a birdwatcher and photographer. She usually spends her winter travelling around Spain and Portugal, birdwatching. Follow her on Twitter @drbirdhead / @theladybirders. Facebook: Grand Iberian Birdwatching Tour.*



Sally Westwood

Crows on the mudflats.

Liz Hattan

## Water Quality on the River Deben

The Environment Agency published a report on water quality last Autumn. The river Deben, along with the vast majority of rivers in England, was classified as only having 'moderate' ecological health, which is the same rating that it received in the two previous reports in 2013 and 2016. Sadly, only 14% of rivers across the country were deemed to have 'good' ecological status, showing no improvement on the 2016 results.

On the face of it the more worrying result was the fact that all rivers in the country failed to meet the required chemical standards in 2019 – in comparison the vast majority met the standard in 2016. Defra and the Environment Agency say this is not necessarily because of a reduction in standards but because of more sophisticated chemical monitoring techniques, for example testing for chemicals that have never been tested for before. Even so, the results are not good.

So what's the cause of these poor results? Major contributors continue to be sewage releases from waste water treatment works, especially from storm water overflows, and run off from agriculture. The Environment Minister recognised the generally disappointing results

and accepted that urgent action is needed, not least because of the commitment in the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan to 'improve at least three quarters of our waters to be close to their natural state as soon as possible.'

For the Deben, agricultural issues including poor nutrient management was one of the major causes of the river retaining its 'moderate' status, with sewage releases from the water treatment plants being the other major factor. For further information see [essex.suffolkrivertrust.org](http://essex.suffolkrivertrust.org).

So although our cherished river and its environs continues to be home to a wide variety of bird and other wildlife, there is clearly room for improvement in its water quality. The River Deben Association has recently set up a sub-committee on conservation bringing together its interests in water quality and nature – if you have any suggestions on our terms of reference then please let us know.

*Liz Hattan is an environmental lawyer at DEFRA and is a member of the RDA Committee. Any comments in this article are personal, and do not represent those of Defra.*



Barry Cross

Meltwater in the Deben. (Of course, this doesn't signify an issue with water quality... except for swimmers.)

## Recent Research Work on the Deben Saltmarshes

A recent research report about the River Deben saltmarshes has been written for the Saltmarsh Research Group of the RDA. The work, which has received a grant from the AONB, Suffolk Coast & Heaths, has been carried out in three different areas of the saltmarsh of the river Deben: the first at Loder's Cut Island, starting in 2014; the second, to the north of Waldringfield, starting in 2016; the third, to the south of Waldringfield, starting in 2019. The report is accessible on the RDA Website.

The purpose of the work has been to measure:

- Changes in saltmarsh level.
- Changes in mud level in the drainage channels.
- The effect of ragworm exclusion plates on mud levels in the drainage channels.
- The effect of shore crab exclusion cages on mud levels in the drainage channels.
- The erosion rate at the edges of the saltmarsh.
- The effect of creating an impermeable sill in two of the drainage channels.
- The effect of placing crab exclusion netting along the edge of the saltmarsh.

Special equipment has been developed to measure the mud level in the saltmarsh channels and lagoons. Work is ongoing at the time of this report (Jan 2021). So far, the results confirm that:

- The saltmarsh is rising at a similar rate to that of Mean High Water Springs (MHWS) sea level rise (about 3.5mm/year).
- In addition to the erosion of the saltmarsh taking place along the river edges of 0.6ha/year measurements show that 0.83ha/year erosion is taking place within the heart of the saltmarsh (increasing the size of channels and lagoons).
- The rate of accretion in an artificially trapped lagoon area of the saltmarsh has resulted in a rise of the mud level of 15mm/year.
- New saltmarsh can be created from the use of dredgings.
- Ragworms may help to prevent mud loss in the saltmarsh drainage channels and lagoons.

*Robin Whittle is a Civil/Structural engineer and although retired still works several hours a week. He is a member of FFSC and WSC, cruises in a Cornish Shrimper and picnics along the river.*



Positioning a sheet piling sill.



Measuring saltmarsh level.

## Alexis Smith

# Water, Camera, Action!

Alexis Smith



John and Alexis Smith on the safety boat.

I have always enjoyed taking photos as a hobby, so I joined my husband John who is the 'safety officer' for Waldringfield Sailing Club on the safety boats with my camera, on the understanding that if there was a rescue to do the camera got put down immediately.

At times when there was hardly any wind the photos were really boring, but on the windy days they were interesting to say the least, but proved to be a challenge. One moment I would be lining up a shot as a boat came towards us and the next moment John would say 'camera down – hold on' and we would shoot forward to assist a capsized boat or backwards to get out of its way. Of course the greatest shots would always be seen when we were on the move, this meant going up and down as well as forward which



An RS200 showing its speed.

proved very challenging when trying to take a photo!

On one occasion we were near a mark getting the dinghies coming straight at us. A RS200 was rounding the mark perfectly so I got a few good shots of it, then looked towards the next boat when John shouted 'camera down – rescue.' I looked behind me to see the RS in trouble with a broken boom – how did that happen! Their crew was in the water, as we came along side she was waving her arm and handed me her bar of chocolate to be rescued first! We then hauled her onboard.

Alexis Smith



Alexis Smith

WSC racing, still high-octane after 100 years!





When WSC holds an 'Open' event I go out both days and take anything from 500-800 pics.

Its not till I get home and look at all the pics do I find out if I have been successful. I then spend hours sorting them all out. I try and post a pic on the WSC Facebook page of every boat out racing, especially the ones with colourful spinnakers flying (my favourites).

I now have so many pics that John had to get me an additional hard drive to store them on.

Being married to John and also able to helm the safety ribs and the support boats laying marks has proved invaluable this year, as I have been able to go out and assist him on every occasion that the club has been racing this year.

*Alexis Smith moved to Waldringfield in 1982. When she was first introduced to sailing by her husband John she wasn't over keen. But since lockdown last year she has been sailing regularly with John in his Wayfarer and learning how to helm as well as crew. It's given her new admiration*

Past the mark... and the point of capsizing.



An attempt to flatten, rather than round, the buoy.

*for the split second decisions and great team work of racing sailors. Currently she and John are digging a wildlife pond and rubbing down boats' bottoms.*

Alexis Smith

Alexis Smith



A sedater sort of sailing.



A spectacle of spinnakers.

Alexis Smith

## Vice Chairs' Report

In January of this year our Chair, Joeske van Walsum, resigned and as vice chairs we have taken on the role of leading the RDA for the time being while a new chair is found. The film shown at our autumn Zoom AGM gave you a sense of Joeske's love for the river, his energy and his enthusiasm. We thank him for all his commitment during the unprecedented times of lock-down and we aim to continue the work that he started to actively encourage more young people to discover the delights of the river. We hope that the photographic competition which we are running again this year will be part of that process.

A number of committee members have left during the course of the year and we would like to thank them for their contributions – Pauline Bloomfield, Gary Doggett and Oliver Houchell have all helped us to get through this difficult period. Kathryn Cooper built on Jim Goldsworthy's work for the 19/20 financial year and finalised the accounts which will be presented at the AGM, as well as preparing a budget for the organisation. Jane Alexander was our meticulous secretary for more than three years and applied her knowledge of the river to making sense of some somewhat discursive committee meetings! Sam Jennings brought to bear his interest in the sea scouts and his knowledge as the owner of a riverside business. Michael Holland kept a close watch on planning applications that affected the river and left an important legacy in his highly analytical approach to commenting on them. Richard Verrill will be remembered for his wonderful magazine articles on wildlife and despite his protestations that he was no expert, his love for the natural world shone out in his clear prose and

delightful photos. Peter Clay has been a member of the RDA for a number of years and wore many hats – he co-founded the Riverside Trust, is a founder member of The Ship's Company and is a keen sailor. Robin Whittle, a past Chair, has stepped down from the committee but will continue to share his wisdom about saltmarshes by joining the Conservation sub-committee. Peter and Robin's articles on the journeys of Nirvana and Bumble Chugger respectively have long inspired those of us who rarely venture out of the Deben's mouth and we hope that they too will continue to make us marvel.

We are delighted to welcome Sue Orme to the committee – Sue will take the lead on planning matters. We hope that by the time of the AGM we may have recruited a new Treasurer and do please contact us if you could be interested in the role of Chair.

In the last few months, the RDA has been looking at various planning matters which affect the Deben and also considering whether a ferry might be viable. We hope that you are enjoying the fascinating journal publications which come out every two weeks, and that those of you who took part in the quiz were duly challenged. Our congratulations go to Carol Raffe, whose long-standing family connections with Waldringfield stood her in good stead to be our winner. After the difficulties of conducting all interactions remotely over the last year, the RDA hopes to engage more fully with other river organisations as lock-down is lifted.

We very much look forward to seeing you at our Zoom AGM on 28th April, when we will be asking you all some questions about what you would like from your Association.

# Photo Competition

After the success of last year's inaugural competition, the RDA is holding a second photographic competition for 2021. The Theme is: The River Deben. The age groups categories are 11-14 and 15-18.



Jane Haviland

Entries to be accompanied with a short (max 2 sentences) of what inspired their shot.

Judging criteria will include: composition, aesthetics, exposure, whether the image fits the brief... the river needs to be in there!

The opening date for entries is from Easter day – 4 April 2021 – and closing date is 31 July 2021. Judging will take place by 1 September and winners will be announced in the RDA Magazine. The winners will be notified in advance with a press release offered as part of the prize.

Prizes for the winners will include a half day course with Gill Moon and for the Runners Up their prizewinning photograph to be framed.

Entries must be accompanied by the name and contact details of both the entrants and a parent/guardian – email and contact phone number.

## Recent *RDA Journal* Articles

The *RDA Journal* is an online publication. Articles are published fortnightly on Fridays on the RDA website ([riverdeben.org/blog/rda-journal](http://riverdeben.org/blog/rda-journal)). Subscription (by email) is free.

26/9/2020  
'The Other Side of the Mirror'  
Stephen Thompson

19/10/2020  
'Barge Wharves  
on the River Deben'  
Robert Simper

30/10/2020  
'Waldringfield'  
Leigh Belcham

13/11/2020  
'Winter Birds on the Deben'  
Sally Westwood

27/11/2020  
'Sutton Hoo – The Real Story'  
Moray MacPhail

11/12/2020  
'Drawing on Water'  
Claudia Myatt

23/12/2020  
'Tales from the Courts'  
Peter Wain

9/1/2021  
'Two Sides of a River'  
Julia Jones

21/1/2021  
'The Deben Quiz'  
Julia Jones

5/2/2021  
'Dancing Queen: Little Egrets  
on the River Deben'  
Sally Westwood

20/2/2021  
'Historical Walk around  
Easton and Letheringham'  
Sue Ryder Richardson

4/3/2021  
'The *Longshore*'  
Peter Willis

19/3/2021  
'Saltmarsh Research  
on the River Deben'  
Richard Steward and  
Robin Whittle

1/4/2021  
'Happy Memories Sailing  
a Cornish Shrimper'  
Robin Whittle

16/4/2021  
'The Deben in Pastels'  
Leigh Belcham

30/4/2021  
'Oddments from Page Family  
Holidays around the Deben,  
1980s'  
Anne Page

# Ollie Jennings

## Inside 5WSS

Situated on the edge of the Deben, beside Whisstocks and the Tide Mill, 5th Woodbridge Sea Scouts is often overlooked by passers by and never really seen to be particularly active or busy. On certain nights of the week, however, the quiet hut transforms into a thriving gathering of boys and girls, aged between 6 and 18. The hut itself is jampacked with boats, tools, activities, and potential fun – enough to do a different activity every week!

The general term of a 'scout' is now split into four sections for different ages – Beavers is for 6-9, Cubs is for 9-11, Scouts is for 12-14 and Explorers is for 14-18 year olds. I have been in the system for eight years now and have just started Explorers. As you move up the sections, the activities become more adventurous and independent, and I can confirm that from personal experience! You start off with leader-led activities and games and work your way up to challenging team exercises, marching, wide games and hikes. The beavers and cubs do lots of party-style games and sporty activities, as well as team-based challenges. As you move up the system more responsibility is put on you, and by explorers, the leaders are pretty much equal in decision making and organising.

Most of the sections meet on school nights, which starts, splits up or ends the week in a nice way. A typical scout night would be two hours long, starting at 7 and finishing at 9, and would have a particular theme or broad activity to do. These themes would usually be something like pancake day, or team challenge night, while the specific tasks and activities would fall under that category. One general focus that occurs in scouts is the team points system which is a friendly (yet sometimes competitive) battle between the four different patrols – the permanent 'teams' that the scouts are divided into. The patrols, Trumpeter, Defender, Echo and Dragon, are named after different Royal Navy commissioned ships and consist of about 6 scouts, including a patrol leader and assistant patrol leader. These ranks allow older scouts to earn more responsibly and help less experienced scouts, while taking a bit of weight off the leaders already full hands. A remarkable feat of scouts is the devotion and kindness of the leaders who sacrifice their time to benefit younger people. All my leaders have been amazing and I have learned so many skills thanks to them.

Another highlight of scouts has always been the famous scout camp, a full week of solid adventure, excitement and fun. I have been on several camps over the years and they have certainly been some of the best weeks of my life. Most have been camping while others have been onboard boats, whether it's a Norfolk Broads cruiser or a Type 82 destroyer in Portsmouth. One night we even had to build our tents out of rope and tarpaulins. Ironically, it rained more in that one night than it did for the whole month and most people spent that night in a puddle! In the summer, when the evenings are much longer



Cardboard boats on the river.



The aftermath of the annual raft race.

and warmer, the groups meet earlier to get on the water and have some fun. The Whisstocks development has made launching and rigging boats much easier, as well as providing a great space for activities. We are very lucky to be positioned next to the Deben as it is a great facility for most watersports. There aren't that many places for kids to learn knife skills, fire making or ropework and 5th Woodbridge has always been the perfect place for it.

Sadly, the recent covid crisis has caused scouts to retreat to zoom meetings and online tasks. The leaders quickly adapted to the change and organised weekly meetings and activities, including a 'Camp at Home' which was a great weekend of local hikes and adventures. In the middle of lockdown, Tim Peake, an ambassador to scouts, organised a 'Hike to the Moon' in which he managed to get many scouts from all over the world to walk one mile in their houses or gardens for charity. In Explorers I recently played online paintball and the Scouts coded computers that were onboard the International Space Station and broadcasted messages on it.

Although online Scouts has been good, it cannot compare to the usual face-to-face meetings and sessions of almost a year ago. Without its usual chaotic and exciting feel, Scouts cannot be the same without being the way it used to be. The feeling of a summer evening of watersports

and banter has been sorely missed, especially during the great weather last summer. Another impact covid has had on scouts is the lack of fundraising that usually occurs on various dates of the calendar. We need to renovate the scout hut to improve facilities such as showers, storage for boats and flexible activity space which can be used by both Scouts and the wider community. All the Beavers, Cubs, Scouts and Explorers can't wait to get back on the water and we hoping to go back to normal as soon as possible!

Check out our Facebook page, '5th Woodbridge Sea Scouts', or for further information contact Barrie Hayter, Group Scout Leader (email [gsl@5wss.org.uk](mailto:gsl@5wss.org.uk)).

*Ollie Jennings has always lived in Suffolk. He's a keen cyclist as well as a water sports enthusiast and is currently learning to windsurf.*



A warm summer's evening with the pulling boats and dinghies.

Stephanie Perks

## What a Tangled Web We Weave...

Stephanie Perks



Snared up in the web design business.

This little spider, *Theridion melanurum*, probably a female, was spotted busy constructing her web on the bank of the River Deben, one cold morning in November, working on a tangle of criss-cross threads that creates a 'snare' for any passing flying beings. These spiders or Arachnida belong to the phylum Arthropodia, of which 80% of all living creatures on the earth belong.

Spiders began first to spin webs at around 400 Ma and there are more than 41,000 recognised spider species that spin silk throughout the globe – except in Antarctica. Spiders' webs are exact,

sophisticated architectures, with exceptional mechanical properties, which are used simultaneously for a whole range of functions alongside the catching of prey. Spiders use their webs for sensing vibration – and by wrapping the eggs up in the silk offer protection for the hatched spiderlings the hatched. Different spiders spin different types of webs – 'snares', 'orbs', or 'traps' with radiating trigger threads, or may use 'sheets' of silk, as shown below.



Stephanie Perks

Sheets of silk.

Just because a web looks rather 'random' does not mean that the creator has been imbibing of some alcoholic herbal beverage, but simply that they have a different design in mind. Due to the high costs in energy, spiders create silk for their webs with threads that are only a few micrometres in diameter. They can differ the exact thickness of the silk strand depending on the type of prey available; bigger, more vigorous flies need stronger strands than smaller flies to capture them securely. However, they are all sufficiently strong enough to fulfil all their functions over considerable periods of time. Some spiders such as Garden Orb-weavers, rebuild their webs every day, by collecting up the silk at dawn, recycling the amino acids, that form the silk proteins in their bodies, and re-

using the material in their new web that they weave each night. Only 17 of the UK's 37 spider families actually use webs to capture prey.

In very cold weather one does not normally find any spiders' webs, as the spiders find a sheltered spot to hunker down in and go into 'diapause' – a state that resembles dormancy, but not quite the same, as they will emerge and hunt for food on warmer days. Spiders tend to emerge along with the insects – which is handy for an insectivorous creature. The females frequently survive alongside their eggs, that have been laid in a snug egg sac made from silk, kept either on the female or very near to her, to keep them all warm. Small spiders tend to have a shorter life span than bigger ones. As around two-thirds of the earth's surface comprises of water, zero and sub-zero temperatures can be very damaging particularly to small delicate creatures. However, spiders, along with most terrestrial arthropods, express a substance similar to a chemical antifreeze that inhibits the growth of ice crystals and therefore protects the spider, certainly in the first stages of sub-zero temperatures, up to minus 5 degrees centigrade.

However, the webs do not do so well and once the cold weather really sets in, they are often abandoned mid construction, as shown in the top right, a magnificent 'orb' web, mid progress:

This 'ice-ifact' sculpture on the right was spotted on a metal gate one frosty morning, demonstrating part of the strength of these web fibres, to withstand high freezing winds.



Web construction halted due to cold weather.

Spiders inhabit most parts of the earth's surface and can even fly – by using their silken threads as temporary balloons. Young spiders, or spiderlings, settle on a high place, such as the top of tall grass, raise their abdomens and spin one or more strands of silk, which on warm days enables them to rise up with the warm air currents, an activity known as 'ballooning'. With this technique the arachnids can reach heights

Stephanie Perks

of over 3 miles above the surface of the earth, and over 1,000 miles out to sea. See what different types of spiders' webs you can spot as you amble alongside the River Deben on a warm day.

*Stephanie Perks lives on her boat and has swum in, walked by, sailed on and generally admired the Deben for nearly three decades. She is fascinated by any creepy crawlies – insects, arachnids, gastropods, and other such delightful inhabitants of our planet.*



'Ice-ifact'.

Alan Turner

## To Wildly Swim When the Sane Just Stay Ashore

Hello. My name is Alan and I'm an addict!

I'm addicted to wild swimming. The closure of swimming pools, due to COVID-19, has encouraged me to keep swimming through the seasons.

Yes, it is very cold. There is no way I can make it sound like it's a delight to walk into cold water. It's not. I'd much rather be walking into warm water but as there is none... it's this or nothing. It's a challenge, a huge challenge and one which I never thought I would be engaged and much less to which I would become addicted.

There is a delight in launching into the river and pushing my body into the cold, making it obey my commands. Once in, I transform into a different person, a different creature. I feel at one with the water, morphing into a web-toed amphibian, hopping in and then swimming through the water.

On the shore I was a normal man, now I am one of the few, the small number of crazy fools who swim in the cold river. It's a beautiful feeling, overcoming the tingle and pain of the cold, sometimes with plenty of expletives.

I love the River Deben and have gone in as far upstream as Ufford Hole. A lovely river pool near Ufford Bridge, not very large but lovely and cool on a hot summer's day, or a quick dip in and out in winter!

Above Wilford Bridge, the river is plenty deep enough at high tide and feels like a glorious peace of the beautiful world, edged by the reeds and a bit tricky to get in (and out). There are quite a few passing water craft – canoes / kayaks / paddleboards, manned by people usually with cheery comments.

Woodbridge at high tide is stunningly beautiful and at the top of the tide, when the current is neutral, it is a lovely feeling to swim across to the far bank and back.

The Tide Mill is such an iconic landmark and this is a brilliant location to get your sketchbook out after a swim, fired up by the exhilaration of swimming.

If I'm in a hurry, there is always time to crack out a few quick pen and ink sketches.

Or if more time is available, then out come the watercolours and the flow of the river is captured with bold languid brushstrokes, with some boats bobbing at anchor, all under a huge Suffolk sky.

Heading downstream – Martlesham Creek, can be a muddy experience but there is an old wooden boat shed. I suspect it is held together only by spiderwebs and gravity but there is firm ground here. To be able to paddle out and join the flow of the river, this is my favourite place to swim around the moored boats and experience the sight and sound of the flocks of wading birds rising up and diving and turning to make beautiful patterns as they move along the shoreline.

Then there is Waldringfield.

A popular location for all the levels of swimming skill and temperature. The Maybush pub is an excellent place... for plaice and a pint of Adnams, which, after swimming is recommended but not before! Here again you can fill up your sketchbook with a constantly changing light and colours of the river with a huge sky a plentiful supply of boats, just begging to be drawn and painted.



There are plenty of other places along the river if you have water transport.

For Ramsholt, I'd ensure it's high tide but folks with better local knowledge may know more of the great entry points for a swim. The tide picks up in pace here and you have to be safe and also avoid getting muddified. It is however, a great place for local ales and the evening light and sunsets are stunning.

Out of the estuary and along the coast a bit, my favourite Sea swimming spot is The Dip. I can go in at high or low tide, keep close to the shore and I've always felt reasonably safe. The sea can offer a flat, dazzling, reflective surface but when it's lively it's like being on a roller coaster, and some days when it's a touch stormy, you have to be safe and just not risk it.

I keep exploring the river to seek out good locations to gain access to the water. I research how to get there, by vehicle, bike, walking/running and mark them down and share them with keen swimming friends.

Everyone has a method that works for them. I like to be prepared, so I can warm up quickly, after the coldness.

Some swimmers emerge and get warmed up as quickly as possible and then have a warm drink and cake! I feel fabulous after the cold swimming and once warmed up and dressed I feel lovely endorphins flowing through me.

No need for cake but if there is some about I'll certainly gobble it up.

I'm part of several wild swimming groups on Facebook and I would highly recommend



Alan and some of his sketches.

having a look at some, for heaps of inspiration and a huge range of feeling-amazing stories and pictures.

See you in the water, or on the edge of it ...with my sketchbook? Or have a look at my swims and sketches/paintings:

- Instagram: [@alan.turner\\_artist\\_in\\_ipswich](#)
- Facebook: Alan Turner

And if you have some great recommendations for swimming spots – let me know!

Facebook groups: The Deben Bluetit Dippers / Slow Swimming / Outdoor Swim Society / Art for Swimmers.

*Alan Turner's family moved to Suffolk when he was a child. He attended local schools and works as a sales executive for Brinor International, a local cargo company. As well as swimming and sketching Alan is a member of local folk groups and Morris dancers.*

Sue Ryder Richardson

## A Glorious January Walk in the Upper Deben Valley

It was a glorious bright cold morning, early in the January lockdown, when Bobby and I set off to explore the villages of Easton and Letheringham nestling in the Upper Deben Valley. As is frequently the case with waterside settlements there is a wealth of history attached to them. More details of this walk, together with a map, can be found on the River Deben website: ([riverdeben.org/blog/rda-journal](http://riverdeben.org/blog/rda-journal)).

Turn right onto the road from the carpark in Easton Village (TM 284587). Shortly take the footpath signed left towards the Bowls Club. What begins as a metalled drive, passes the very elegant Bowls Green, and soon becomes a grassy path with glorious views over the Suffolk Countryside.

Follow the edge of the old Easton Estate, which, in its heyday was surrounded by a two-mile serpentine, or 'crinkle-crinkle' wall. The wall here has sadly falling into complete disrepair, with large sections missing or tumbled, surrounding an area on the OS map marked as 'The Wilderness'; it is just such, filled with fallen trees and tangled undergrowth. You can only imagine how it must have looked when the Wingfields built their 17th-century Palladian Mansion here, a property that passed on through a succession of Earls of Rochford, who in the late 18th century built this now tumbling wall, and finally the Scottish Dukes of Hamilton.

Turn left where the path reaches a break in the trees along the line of Ash Grove, spotted with more of the disintegrating brickwork, and on reaching the road turn left again to pass Martley Hall, the final home of the family of the Dukes of Hamilton of Easton Hall.

Take the first footpath right to cross open countryside and reach woodland. In lockdown January the silence was palpable, the only sound coming from birdsong, running water in the river, brimming ditches, and from the valley hounds baying in the Easton kennels. By the time this is published, this quietness may have gone, but by way of compensation, the woods and ditches will be full of the glorious sunshine-coloured flowers of Spring. You will find primroses and celandines, dandelions and cowslips, alexanders will be abundant, you may smell wild garlic along waterways.

Halfway along the wood take the signed path left towards a lane across the fields you will see the tower of St Mary's, Letheringham. On the lane



River Deben at Sanctuary Bridge.

Watermeadows and Deben  
Letheringham

Watermeadows and Deben, Letheringham.

turn left and then shortly right onto a footpath. Follow this downhill, at the river Deben bear left, and follow the path to the road, where you turn right.

Pause as you cross Sanctuary Bridge, you may see the flash of a kingfisher, or waterbirds hiding in the reeds, before pressing on uphill to pass the church. Take the next footpath left, turning sharply left again to cross a footbridge, and make a diagonal across the field, towards the 15th-century gatehouse. There are some awkward steps here in the brick wall to the churchyard.

The church, the original nave of the Augustinian Priory, is all that is left of the 12th-century Priory of the Blessed Virgin. The churchyard is a wildflower haven, sadly lacking such in January, but in other seasons it will boast champions, knapweeds, cow's parsley and a multitude of others.

From the churchyard cross the open ground into a field and follow the path diagonally to reach the lane. Turn right

towards Letheringham, there are lovely views over water meadows here, and glimpses of the River from behind the row of charming cottages. On the further bank is Easton Farm Park (well worth a visit), if only to walk along the river again, suffused there with flowers and birdlife.

Through Letheringham keep ahead to pass by the ancient moated Old Hall, and the beautifully restored 18th-century Watermill. At the next corner keep ahead to take the footpath beside a driveway. It passes over footbridges,

through water meadows, and over the Deben, to arrive in Easton opposite a fine section of the Serpentine Wall. Turn right here to return to the car park, taking time to enjoy the delightful village some of which was created as a Mock Tudor fantasy by the 12th Duke of Hamilton.

*Born in Suffolk, I have a great love for a county that I have explored on foot for as long as I can remember. Slow travel lets me enjoy the landscape; savour its history, flora and fauna. After many years of the London commute, it is such a pleasure to be able to write walks for publication, as well other pieces.*



St Mary's, Letheringham

St Mary's, Letheringham.

Claudia Myatt

## Profile: Mary-Anne Bartlett

Emma Thompson



Mary-Anne painting watercolour.

In normal times, Woodbridge artist Mary-Anne Bartlett is likely to be found sitting under a tree in Africa sketching elephants as they wander by, or demonstrating how to sketch sea lions as they swim around you in the clear water of the Galapagos. As great-great-granddaughter of explorer botanist and doctor Sir John Kirk, Mary-Anne has travel, and particularly a love of Africa, in the blood. The idea for her tour company was born when she took a small group of artists with her to Malawi to share the



Mary-Anne Bartlett

An African elephant.

thrill of painting animals and birds in the wild. Twenty years on, ATOL registered Art Safari, based on Ferry Quay in Woodbridge, runs art tours to over 45 countries, including Papua New Guinea, Mongolia, China and Antarctica, as well as Europe and the UK.

In 2020, the travel business stopped dead. After spending the early months of the pandemic heartbreakingly unbooking, rebooking, refunding and dismantling all the tours lined up for the year, Mary-Anne and her assistant Sarah Glyde looked for ways to reshape the business and keep everyone's creative journey going in a world where no real journeys were possible. The River Deben provided a sustaining place to think and regroup.

*'The river connects. It's the river I grew up on, work on and play on. For me the Deben's changing tides and seasons are packed with memories, as well as everyday activities and future plans. Simply looking out on it gives space for thoughts and hearing the waders call is part of my sense of belonging.'*

Mary-Anne Bartlett



Spoonbills, quickly sketched on location.

## STOP PRESS

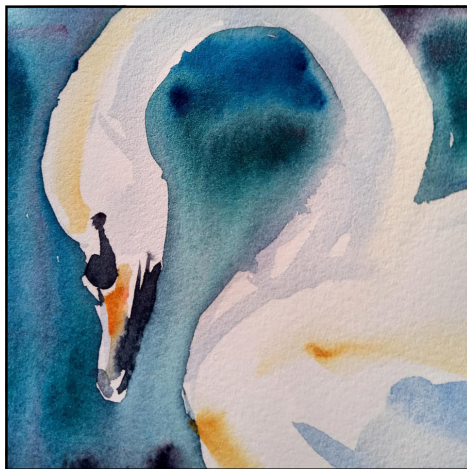
Mary-Anne Bartlett and Claudia Myatt will present 'Sketching the Deben' at the RDA AGM on April 28th.

By the end of 2020 Mary-Anne was ready to run her first virtual holiday on zoom. Painting from photographs in your own home is a far cry from the thrill of sketching on location but it's proving very successful. Mary-Anne's approach online is the same as it is in the real world – encouraging everyone to use art as a way of appreciating and observing our world. Guardian journalist Kevin Rushby attended a 'virtual Galapagos' tour in January, and found that the intense practice of rapid sketches and close observation had an unexpected effect:

*'We are reorganising our perceptions, our brain architecture. We have jettisoned our hunger to take photographs and instead are looking more deeply.'*

*'When we are finished, I realise that I am not dying to get out to the Galápagos; what I want is to settle down in front of the bird-feeder outside the kitchen window and try to paint the greater spotted woodpecker which has started visiting. Lockdown has forced this unusual journey on me, but it has proved to be one I am very glad to have taken.'*

The easing of lockdown restrictions in the summer of 2020 made it possible for Art Safari to host an event on the banks of the Deben, thanks to a grant from Suffolk Coast and Heaths. Suffolk SketchFest ran a programme of sketching walks and short outdoor workshops with five tutors, all in small groups of up to six people and making the most of a sunny September weekend. Mary-Anne hopes to grow the event this year and give more people the chance to gain their creative confidence.



Mary-Anne Bartlett

A Deben swan.

*'I carry watercolours, sketchbook, large brushes and a water pot for outdoor sketching. I try to express the essence of the subject through minimal lines and brushstrokes – I do plenty of looking and a small but effective amount of painting.'*

*'I love drawing wildlife on location. I enjoy the adrenaline of movement and capturing the uniqueness of moment so that the fleeting qualities of a sighting are conveyed in the artwork.'*

To find out more about virtual art holidays and online courses, visit [artsafari.co.uk](http://artsafari.co.uk) or phone on 01394 382235, and if you see two ladies with blue kayaks and big smiles out on the river, give them a wave. Mary-Anne will be the one with the spaniel!



Claudia Myatt

Suffolk SketchFest 2020.

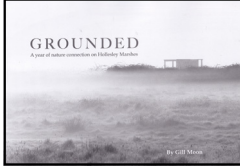
# Reviews

**Francis Wheen**

## *Grounded*

**Gill Moon**

Gill Moon



To many people the Covid lockdowns felt intensely monotonous, but for local photographer Gill Moon they were

more monochrome than monotone – though no less intense for that, as she reveals in *Grounded: A year of nature connection on Hollesley Marshes*, a selection of black-and-white photos with a lyrical accompanying journal of the plague year.

Morning walks have always awakened her senses, she writes in May 2020, 'but now, in the peace of this new normal, the experience is enhanced'. Seeking solace at a time when everyday certainties have suddenly melted into air, she finds it in the patterns and pulses of nature – 'the joyfulness of the dawn chorus, the sound of the wind, the patter of rain and the rhythmic lapping of the waves'.

Gill Moon describes the photos in this book as sketches of fleeting moments, unlike the more carefully planned landscapes for which she is best known. Like all her work, however, these pictures and words are illuminated by knowledge gained from years of closely observing the texture of coastal Suffolk – shingle and saltings, dragonflies and avocets, sea lavender and willow, crying curlews and singing seals.

She takes particular reassurance from a lone and gnarly horse-chestnut tree on her daily route to the marshes. Its trunk is scarred and partially

denuded of bark, the upper branches are spare and leafless. Yet it is still reassuringly *there*, as it has been for generations: a witness to history, emerging from the morning mist to greet her. Alone in an empty field, it might almost symbolise the isolation of many people during lockdown. But look more closely: rooks gather in its upper reaches to greet the dawn, little owls bob along on the lower branches. We are not always quite as alone as we may think.

**£28, [gillmoon.com](http://gillmoon.com)**

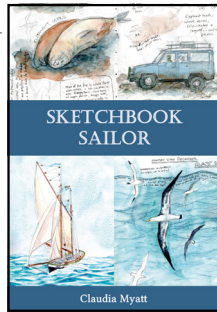
**(Limited edition of 100 copies, all numbered and signed.)**

**Peter Willis**

## *Sketchbook Sailor*

**Claudia Myatt**

Claudia Myatt



Artist Claudia Myatt lives on the Deben – literally, on a converted Dutch harbour tug – and her studio/gallery is close to Martlesham church, with its commanding view of the creek and the river.

As well as being an illustrator and designer, she teaches art, writes songs, is no mean harp player and is altogether a quiet force of nature, full of boundless energy and goodwill.

She's well-known for her jaunty drawings of boats, but it turns out she's equally at home depicting the blobbier aquatic mammals of the southern oceans, and much else besides. In late 2019, at what she calls 'the rebellious side of 60' she decided it was time to see some more of the

world and signed on for a two-month passage on a sailing ketch. *Tecla*, a sort of mini-tall ship, round Cape Horn to Easter Island and the Falklands.

And starting in the extraordinary assault to the senses that is the Galapagos Islands. ‘Then the magic begins. I take those first steps outside, not knowing what I’m going to see but hungry to see it, and knowing a bar with a glass of wine is going to feature fairly soon. Do you know the intense pleasure of that first walk of discovery in a new country?... My first sketches are always a bit uncertain until I get used to a new place... I found a bench near the fish market that wasn’t occupied by a sea lion and made a start.’

True to the spirit of voyaging under sail, she left her camera behind, trusting to her eye and hand to record the trip. The result is a beautiful, unusual, funny and thoughtful travel book, mixing art – mostly watercolours – with often quirky commentary, that will provide a pleasant lift to the spirits of a locked-down adventurer.

**£14.99, Golden Duck**

**[golden-duck.co.uk](http://golden-duck.co.uk)**

**James Skellorn**

*The Dig*

**Simon Stone**

Netflix



A lockdown treat is the new film about the discovery of the Sutton Hoo ship and treasure. We denizens of the Deben and feel a sense of ownership about Sutton Hoo and its history. What have they done with our story?

Carey Mulligan as Edith Pretty and Ralph Fiennes as Basil Brown are two outstanding actors who would make compelling drama out of a reading of the Woodbridge bus timetable. They do not disappoint. They are ably supported by Lily James as young archaeologist Peggy Piggott and Ken Stott as Charles Phillips of the British Museum.

The other star is the Suffolk landscape: big skies and winding creeks fringed with salt marsh. Director Simon Stone shot the outside sequences in the ‘golden hour’ just after dawn or just before sunset for amazing light effects. The film is only available on Netflix now. We wait to see the landscapes and skylines in their full glory on the big screen.

The story draws us into the personal dramas of Edith Pretty, facing declining health and the prospect of being parted from her young son, and Basil Brown as the local but unqualified expert battling against class prejudice to maintain control of the dig against the big guns of the museums. All face the approaching shadow of war. The story is given depth through conversations about the transience of life and what endures, and the wonder of holding in your hand an object that was last held and used by people hundreds of years ago.

Although the main set of the dig was recreated in Surrey and Mrs Pretty’s house is plainly not Sutton Hoo (Tranmer) House, the Butley River ferry features on Basil’s weekly bicycle commute from Diss to Sutton Hoo. Boyton marshes feature in several sequences, and the miniature barge *Cygnets*, *Snape* and *Ramsholt* church make fleeting appearances.

A delight not to be missed.

**£Free (if you have an account), Netflix**

**[netflix.com](http://netflix.com)**

# Getting Involved

**Jo Butlin**

## Deben Rowing Club

Deben Rowing Club (DRC), with its clubhouse in Woodbridge, has around 130 active members from teenagers to pensioners. Rowing is definitely a sport for all, and whilst known to be physically demanding, can be taken up and enjoyed by almost anyone.

The River Deben offers a fantastic playground for our rowers, who in normal times, are regularly seen all the way from outside the clubhouse down as far as Felixstowe and up to Wilford Bridge. Wind is the rowers' enemy, and therefore early mornings with glorious sunrises tend to be the best time of the day to be out on the water, when conditions are calmest. There is no better way to come into close contact with nature, whether having seals bobbing up around you, swans flying close overhead or just watching the wading birds having their breakfast. Having said that, for many rowers who are not so keen to get out of bed early, daylight hours during summer and winter are all used by club members to get out on the water. Winter rowing is very different from summer, and for the hardy inevitably results in cold feet and fingers. However, winter mornings often offer the very best of all rowing conditions and are remedied by hot chocolate and crumpets in the clubhouse or the Tea Hut as a reward.

For more competitive rowers, the club offers serious training opportunities, both on land and water. Whether in a single,



Jacq Barnard

An early morning row in the mist.

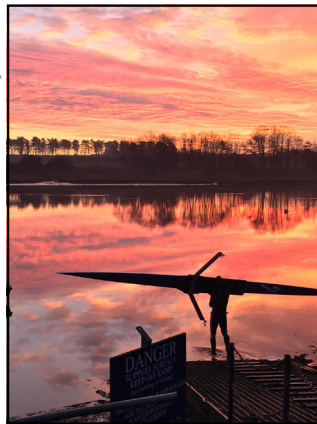
double or quad, there are plenty of opportunities to train with other crew members and the club regularly enters Regattas and Heads in the Eastern region and beyond, with some success. You will often see rowers training hard on the open stretch of water between Woodbridge and Waldringfield.

And for those rowers who are new to the sport, there are regular taster sessions and formal 'learn to row' training courses. With an active junior section as well as adults, all new rowers are welcome – despite a long waiting list. These are supported by other club members, and it is where new friendships and crews are formed.

*Jo took up rowing in her late 40s having stood on the bank watching her daughter row for several years.*

## Marco

Rowing on the Deben seems set to become ever more exotic. Marco is a Venetian *pupparino* brought to the Woodbridge boatyard by Maxine and Eric Reynolds. In 2020, Maxine,

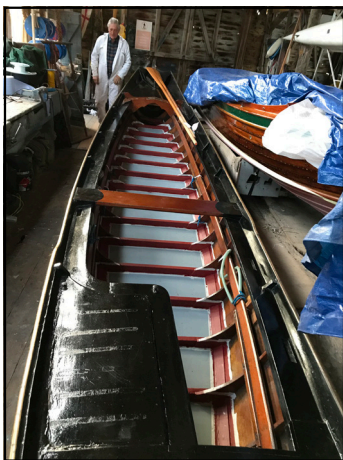


Jacq Barnard

A dramatic sunrise.



along with Venice resident and Row Venice co-coordinator Nan McElroy were hoping to offer 'taster' sessions as part of the Woodbridge Regatta. As soon as conditions permit, they aim to pick up where they left off, and taster sessions will be available, probably in partnership with the City Barge Boat Club ([citybargeclub.org](http://citybargeclub.org)) from Oxford, the only Venetian rowing club in England. Watch out for local announcements. Meanwhile Nan McElroy has written a fascinating article for the *RDA Journal* to be published on May 14th.



Maxine Webster

Marco in the shed.

roadmap for sailing out of lockdown and will post updates on the website. Their latest venture is the purchase of a Cornish gig and the formation of a rowing group within the club. Keep checking the website ([ffsc.co.uk](http://ffsc.co.uk)).

## Spirit of Place

The term 'Spirit of Place' refers to the unique, distinctive, and cherished aspects of an area, celebrated

by artists, musicians and poets with festivals and gatherings.

Sadly, most events were cancelled in 2020 because of COVID-19 restrictions. This series, starting June 27th, aims to lift the spirit of the community. Live celebrations of the arts, history, words, film and music are crammed into a Series of Seven afternoon soirees on selected Sundays from June to November 2021.

2pm at The Longshed, Woodbridge. Book early to avoid disappointment!

## Felixstowe Ferry Sailing Club

FFSC is 80 this year. In normal times they offer many facilities that are available to beginners, skilled dinghy and multihull sailors, yacht, powerboat cruisers and rowers or for those that just enjoy a drink and something to eat while enjoying 'the best' views of the River Deben and the North Sea from their clubhouse. Like other clubs on the river they'll be following the RYA

Felixstowe Ferry Sailing Club



Felixstowe Ferry Sailing Club.

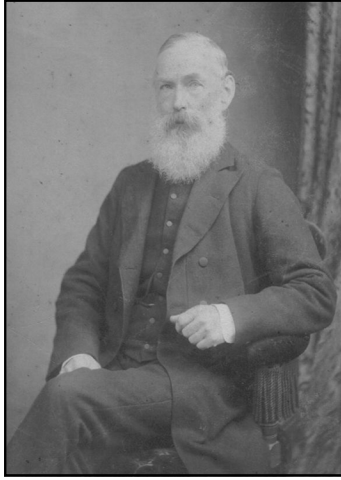


Jan Pulsford

# Waldringfield History Group

When the Waldringfield History Group was first formed, in 2007, under the guidance of Joe Clark, two of its main sources of inspiration were the original glass slides of Thomas Naunton Waller and the *Perennial Diary* of the Reverend Thomas Henry Waller his father. TN Waller's camera equipment is in Woodbridge Museum and the diary remains a family possession. It is also an important source for local history.

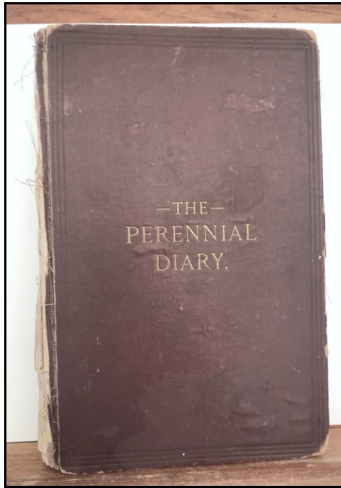
Waldringfield History Group



Thomas Henry Waller.

When the history group had finally completed and published their sumptuous book in late September 2020, Chairman Gareth Thomas decided it was time to step down after ten years in the role. He had previously transcribed the perennial diary in order to make it usable without endangering the volume itself, but still felt dissatisfied with its accessibility for research.

Waldringfield History Group



*The Perennial Diary.*

The printed Preface states that the Diary is intended to be a 'record of incidents of permanent importance in the life of the writer', a single volume of 'great events' which will 'remain of permanent and increasing interest to the possessor and might even be handed down to and prized by his immediate descendants.' Today, Thomas Henry Waller's great grandchildren, great-great

grandchildren and great, great, great grandchildren are all, now, looking at snippets of information about their family which, through this Diary alone, links back as far as 1770 when THW's great aunt Sarah Naunton was born. As amateur historians know every snippet of information tends to bear many links with other such snippets thus forming an historical matrix. In a *Perennial Diary*, however, there are no days of the week attached to the dates; consequently, it is a diary which may apply to any year. Over lockdown winter Gareth has completed the indexing of the diary, thus enabling it to be used for a wide range of historical research.

The Wallers were rectors of Waldringfield for 150 years and many will remember the excellence of the eulogies delivered by Rev John Waller at funerals and memorial services until his own death in 2013. These have been collected within the History

Group by John and Caroline Ogden who have also completed their collection of records covering service by Waldringfield, Hemley and Newbourne residents in both World Wars.

This is a small group making a big contribution locally. To learn more, email [waldringfieldhg@gmail.com](mailto:waldringfieldhg@gmail.com).

Shona Norman

## My River

Stillness. It is only now that I find a true sense of calm, of ease. I let my eyes settle on the not too distant horizon with my only companion, other than a lone figure sculling through the mirrored surface of the river, the river birds who make their presence known with their calls to one another as they dart across the shoreline. This would be the sole sound were it not for a gentle breeze that has started to stir through the sails of some moored boats, the array of colours displayed like weathered prayer flags that will live to see another day.

Each person will have their own hour that is magical to them on the river. For me, it is first thing in the morning, just as dawn is beginning to break and, if I am lucky, just at the time when the tide is starting to turn, the salty tang providing a clue to the destination of this river. Although there is a feeling of security and comforting at something so familiar and reassuring as the river, I also delight at the fact that no visit is the same.

William Wordsworth spoke about a sight upon Westminster Bridge that was 'touching in its mystery' as he looked out at the vista before him. So intense was his emotion, and pure his feeling of love for what lay around him, that Wordsworth chose to express his feelings through the form of a sonnet. The ebb and flow of the river as it progresses on its solitary path causes Wordsworth to take note of the River Thames' 'own sweet will' as it chooses its journey. Although Romantic poets like Wordsworth were renowned for their adoration of the sublime found within nature, poets have been drawn to the life giving properties of rivers for generations. No two perceptions or responses to the river will be the same and, as with the River Deben, every bend and tilt will galvanise a diverse range of

feelings. Similarly, each visitor to the Deben will arrive with a slight expectation but depart with a mood that is dependent upon the season with its unique flora and fauna.

In Westminster Abbey visitors will find the memorial to Ted Hughes immortalised by the final lines to his poem 'That Morning' taken from his 1983 collection *River*:

*So we found the end of our journey,  
So we stood, alive in the river of light,  
Among the creatures of light, creatures of light.*

Hughes's family chose an epitaph that encapsulated his adoration of the river and its life giving properties. Those words get to the heart of the awe and wonder that a river holds in its grasp. I have spent the majority of my life here in Woodbridge and have traversed the river path on numerous occasions by myself or with family and friends. Each time has been unique with the river providing a treasure trove of experiences and memories. I consider myself most fortunate indeed to have on my doorstep what I consider to be a sanctuary, my River Deben. Just as Hughes believed that in every end was a new beginning, I remain in awe at how a simple walk along the path of the river can be transformational. Never more than these strange times we find ourselves in has the river provided a source of energy and vitality. Next time I find myself on the path, looking out upon the water, I shall think of all those who have been, who continue to be, and who will be inspired by our River Deben.

*Shona Norman is Head of Woodbridge School. She credits her fantastic School community and the ever changing beauty of the River Deben for keeping her going during the Pandemic.*

Sarah Zins

## News from the Hards

February 2021

As it is difficult for the Deben boatyards to make plans for the summer in the lock-down days in which I write this, I am instead going to focus on some of the more unusual things going on up and down the estuary's hards.

To start with, I want to introduce a new 'boatyard' and the inverted commas are there because this is a one-man band operating out of a shed at Melton Boatyard. **Sam Doman**, the boatbuilder, grew up locally and has been sailing on the Deben since childhood. He is building a 14ft fibreglass dinghy from a mould which he took from the *Atlas* bargeboat. The original *Atlas* was built in 1949 and was used by the crew of a Thames sailing barge for carrying supplies from the shore and for helping the barge to manoeuvre in restricted waters. She is now owned by Robert Simper, who wrote about her in the Autumn 2020 edition of this magazine. The new and the original boat are photographed together at The Rocks. Sam is using modern materials for his build, so the boat is much lighter (and hence easier to handle, afloat and ashore) and has lower upkeep than a wooden boat. She has been nominated for this year's *Classic Boat Awards* in

the 'Spirit of Tradition' category, and by the time you receive this magazine, you should be able to find out if she beat the large luxury yachts in her class. Sam is also restoring a traditional yacht which he eventually intends to live on.

Back to the more unusual activities of the traditional yards, Mark and Emma Barton at the **Waldringfield Boatyard** have converted one of their old buildings into a retail outlet selling stand-up paddleboards, which have become the lock-down vogue. Stand-up paddleboarding is a calm, peaceful activity where people can reconnect with nature and reset their equilibrium. It also encourages excellent balance and burn lots of calories. You can take your board anywhere with you as it will pack into a rucksack which also has wheels. One of my favourite sights is to see a faithful hound posing as the ship's figurehead! Post-pandemic, the Boatyard is planning to get fellow paddlers together for social paddles on 'Wotsup Wednesdays' and to hold 'Paddle and a Pint' evenings once or twice a month at Waldringfield. Their website can be visited at [wotsup.co.uk](http://wotsup.co.uk).

Sam Doman



Robert Simper's *Atlas*, ashore at the Rocks, right of the young pretender *Longshore*.

Emma Barton



The Wotsup showroom.

And when we get to the really unusual, the **Woodbridge Boatyard** are restoring *Marco*, a Venetian Puppardino racing boat built in the 1970s and which won the first Vogalonga race. Matt Lis from the yard explained that this form of oar propelled racing almost died out in Venice, but has been strongly resurrected recently, especially by women including Maxine Reynolds from the boatyard. If you want to remember how things were pre-Covid, take a look at the race at [vogaLona.com/en/home-2](http://vogaLona.com/en/home-2) although be warned that it will make you feel very nostalgic for the days of joyful, crowded social mixing.

If you have spent any of your daily exercise walking along the riverbank in Woodbridge, you will have noticed the **sculpture of the Everson sisters** sitting in a rowing dinghy in the river near the Woodbridge Boatyard. It was commissioned by the boatyard and made by Andrew Baldwin to celebrate Molly and Ethel Everson who, with their brothers Cyril and Bert, inherited the yard from their father. They ran the chandlery, sail store and office and although those buildings no longer survive, their memory will live on thanks to this unique installation.

In other news, **Felixstowe Ferry Boatyard** are hoping to start up the Felixstowe to Bawdsey Ferry on Good Friday and it will operate at weekends only until 1st May, when it will start



'The Sisters', the sculpture by Andrew Baldwin now (sometimes) submerged near Woodbridge Boatyard.

operating daily if rules permit. The operating hours will be 10 am to 5 pm.

At **Larkmans**, as well as the usual repair schedule, the wooden-hulled *Ceres*, a yacht built in 1960 by Eversons, is being refurbished. *Ceres* was originally called *Glee*, then *Rosanna*, and has now returned to the Deben from Grimsby.

**Robertsons** are continuing their drive toward a more environmentally sustainable infrastructure through the installation of solar panels to the roof of the Sprat Shed. There are 52 panels in total, which should produce 15,758 kWh of electricity per year and the carbon saved equates to 0.203 kg per kWh, so just over 3 tonnes per year.

Their workshop is busy and one of their projects includes a complete refit of a teak ex-lifeboat.

*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 enjoys the Deben at every stage of the tide.*



A busy workshop at Robertsons. Shown bottom-left is the teak ex-lifeboat being completely refit.

# Hitching an Icicle

Roland Mann



After mastering twelve different knots for their basic knots training (can you identify them from the picture?), the River Rats move on to more complex stuff. The Icicle Hitch is shown being tested here – conveniently on a real icicle!

Roland Mann



This knot secures a rope even to a tapered spar – hence the ‘Icicle’. But it can be used on round spars too – for example a rope strop on the gaff of a lug sail to hook onto a traveller – and holds much better than other more well-known knots.

Take four turns around your icicle (or spar), the working end in front and to the left (Pic 1). Then take the working end:



Roland Mann

An Icicle Hitch, hitched to an icicle!

- to the right, behind the hauling part and the spar (Pic 2);
- over the spar and then behind the hauling part, from right to left (Pic 3);
- up in front of the spar, keeping to the right of the four turns, which forms a loop around the hauling part (Pic 4);
- round the spar and back through the loop (Pic 5)

Snug all up nice and tight (Pic 6), and haul away to the right!

*Roland, Martine, Charlie and Jasper live ‘off grid’ on a houseboat opposite Sutton Hoo on the River Deben. They home school the children and are very keen on learning and spreading all manner of empowering practical skills and capability. They also ran, and hope to run again when opportunity allows, the Hive Pop-up Garden Cafe in their riverside garden, and the Grab-a-Chance initiative.*

# The River Deben Association

The 2021 Annual General Meeting will be held on 28 April at 6.30pm by Zoom. Please see the insert for the Agenda and details of how to attend. These can also be found on the website. It will be followed by a presentation on 'Sketching the Deben' by Mary-Anne Bartlett from Art Safari and local artist Claudia Myatt.

## Our Committee

Robert Simper (Vacant)	Honorary President Chair
Sarah Zins	Vice Chair
Jane Haviland	Vice Chair
Kathryn Cooper*	Treasurer
Moray MacPhail	Membership Secretary
Caroline Matthews	Secretary
Sue Orme**	Planning
Liz Hattan	Conservation
Matt Lis	River Businesses Social Media

\* Retiring at 2021 AGM

\*\* Co-opted

## Our Contributors

Alan Comber	Website Manager
Julia Jones	Publications Editor

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Magazine:  
magazine@riverdeben.org

All other matters:  
chair@riverdeben.org

## Membership Matters

I'm planning a few changes over the next year in terms of the way we keep in touch, and also how subs are collected and paid for.

There is an insert with this magazine for those of you for whom I haven't an email address. We are very strict about keeping your details secure – so there will not be a flood of emails with irresistible offers from partner organisations. I'd envisage maybe a monthly newsletter and yearly reminders about your sub and the AGM.

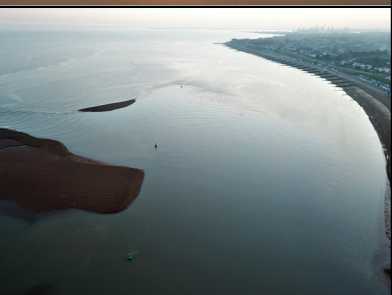
I'm also asking you to change the way you pay subs to direct debit which can be set up online. It will make it easier for you to pay subs (you won't get me nagging so much) and for the RDA to collect them. Those of you whose addresses I have will have been emailed re: direct debits. I am very grateful to the hundreds who have switched to this payment method. I hope this note is a gentle reminder to those who haven't yet!

With best wishes, Moray MacPhail

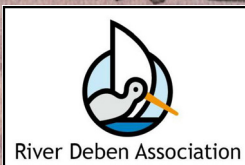


- |                                      |                     |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------|
| 1 Clove Hitch                        | 7 Figure Eight      |
| 2 Rolling Hitch                      | 8 Marlinspike Hitch |
| 3 Constrictor Knot                   | 9 Reef Knot         |
| 4 Round Turn and<br>Two Half Hitches | 10 Sheet Bend       |
| 5 Fisherman's Bend                   | 11 Benson Bend      |
| 6 Thumb Knot                         | 12 Bowline          |

Roland Mann



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.



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