

The Deben



Issue 68
Spring 2024

Some of the places featured in
this issue of The Deben magazine:

Debenham

Brandeston

Kettleburgh

Cretingham

Hoo



RIVER DEBEN

Ufford

Melton

Woodbridge

Methersgate

Martlesham

Waldringfield

Hemley

The Rocks
Ramsholt

Kirton Creek

Bawdsey

Felixstowe Ferry



The Deben, Spring 2024

Editor's Introduction	4	Getting Involved:	28
My Deben	6	Walking the Deben Way	
Judy Jones		Nick Cottam	
My Deben:	8	Getting Involved:	30
Everything Important Happens by Accident		The Deben Bluetits Swim Group	
Moray MacPhail		Ruth Leach	
Quay Life	10	Book Review:	31
Sarah Goodman		<i>A Century of Sailing:</i>	
Opening a Window	12	<i>Waldringfield Sailing Club 1921–2021</i>	
onto the Deben's Otters		Julia Jones	
Penny Hemphill		Artist Profile: Anne Townshend	32
Feather Business	14	Sarah Zins	
Sally Westwood		Interview: Simon Scammell	34
Suffolk Churchyards	16	Peter Willis	
Sue Ryder Richardson		News from the Hards	36
September Flowers	17	Colin Nicholson	
in Ramsholt Churchyard		The River Deben Association	38
Extraordinary Occurrence in Bawdsey:	18	<i>The RDA Journal</i>	39
An Historical Note			
Peter Wain			
Co-chairs' Report	20		
Jane Haviland and Colin Nicholson			
Obituary: George Collins	22		
Robert Simper			
Sixty-Three Years at Plumtree	23		
Robert Simper			
Getting Involved: Work Experience	25		
Hettie Thorogood			
I'll Never Look at at Beach	26		
the Same Way Again			
Kate Osborne			



Jane Haviland

The Harbourmaster's Office at Ramsholt. We were sorry to lose George Collins on Boxing Day, and include an obituary for him on page 22

Editor's Introduction

Introducing the previous issue of this magazine I felt apologetic that I'd failed to include any material directly relating to the upper reaches of the river and not really enough about the river mouth either. While I have tried to do better this time – thanks mainly to Nick Cottam and Kate Osborne – I can see that this is in many ways a Ramsholt issue. That's not surprising given the sadness felt by many people when we heard of the death of Ramsholt's harbourmaster George Collins (junior) on Boxing Day. For many of us the memories of George (and his twin brother Billy, still with us though no longer active on the river) have become part of the spirit of the place – together with earlier memories of his father, old George. You could argue that Ramsholt anchorage wouldn't exist if it hadn't been for George.

George Collins senior (b. 1902) lived in Ramsholt all his life. He used to sail his mother up the river to Woodbridge to do her shopping and started work as a farm labourer aged 12. Boats and the river were at the heart of his existence. He lived in one of the church cottages where he brought up six children on his own after his wife died at the beginning of WW2. These included George junior and Billy and baby Doreen aged only 6 months. The church cottages have since been pulled down but one of the dwindling number of people who remember them is Robert Simper who writes, in this issue, about moving out from his own Ramsholt cottage after 63 years. Robert concludes 'Change is the only thing which is constant'.



Hettie Thorogood in her earlier years, writing her log on *Peter Duck*

Judy Jones (no relation) picks up this theme as she looks back on her own family connections with the Deben and considers how annual events such as the Suffolk Scouts 'Wet Weekend' at Ramsholt have continued over more than one generation providing hundreds of youngsters with chance to get on the water.

A country churchyard is a good place to think about change and continuity. Sue Ryder Richardson celebrates

churchyards, not as melancholy places but as nurturing environments for plants and small creatures. This gives me the opportunity to thank the *RDA Journal* readers who helped me identify some of the unobtrusive flowers I found in Ramsholt churchyard on a chilly day last September. And, speaking of churches, let me draw your attention to Waldringfield History Group's Gareth Thomas who is undertaking a source-to-sea survey of the Deben Churches. This is currently being published in the *RDA Journal* on our website. Pick any one of them for a spring or summer exploration.

Penny Hemphill looks through the RDA's recently acquired trail cameras to offer us glimpses of the secret life of the Deben otters and Sally Westwood uses her own expert observational skills – and her camera – to describe Deben birds washing and preening. I almost felt I was sitting with her, watching and learning. Peter Wain has a different perspective. He looks at small, apparently randomly discovered items, and asks what they tell us about human activity on the Deben seven centuries ago. It helps us remember that the river is



George Collins senior

also a human community and a workplace. 'News from the Hards' regularly reminds us of this, as does Moray MacPhail's account of his almost accidental arrival to run a specialist chandlery in Woodbridge and Peter Willis's interview with Simon Scammell of Suffolk Sails. My granddaughter Hettie Thorogood describes recent work experience in a Hertfordshire boatyard as she learns to repair the dents that hard racing with Waldringfield SC has inflicted on her Cadet.

The river offers fun and inspiration as well as hard work. Robert Deaves' recent book portrays the 'remarkable story' of Waldringfield SC's first 100 years. Jane Haviland bids farewell to the RDA co-chairmanship though not to the joys of walking, cycling, rowing and photography. Ruth Leach celebrates immersing herself in chilly salt water with the Deben Blue Tits and our cover artist, printmaker Anne Townshend, tells Sarah Zins why she looks forward to exploring the river as a resident, no longer a visitor.

In human terms Sarah Goodman's account of the way she and her wife Elizabeth are being helped through Elizabeth's life-changing cancer by the sensitive kindness of the liveaboard community at Ferry Quay is the most important article in

this edition of the magazine and I endorse her plea for the support for the Brain Tumour Trust. I also have a couple of small requests of my own, though not the same degree of seriousness. You will see from Notes on the Hards that skilled work from the Woodbridge Boatyard has earned Peter Duck a nomination in this year's Classic Boat awards. Decision is by public vote which closes March 11th. There are some lovely boats nominated. Here's the link: awards.classicboat.co.uk

In late July and August this year I'm hoping to be fully involved, with several other Deben sailors, supporting the GBR Cadets who are hosting this year's Cadet World Championship in Plymouth. My daughter-in-law Alice Thorogood has written an article for the *RDA Journal* explaining what's involved riverdeben.org/rda-journal/volunteers-running-an-international-event. Anyone who'd like to know more or is interested in sending a message of support with a modest donation (£10) can email me at my personal address julia@golden-duck.co.uk. For any other matters connected with *The Deben* magazine or the *RDA Journal* please get in touch via magazine@riverdeben.org.



Scouts at Ramsholt taking part in Wet Weekend 2023

Judy Jones

My Deben

There is a photo of *Iwunda*, my father Jack Coote's boat, anchored off Ramsholt dock in the 1950s when I was probably seven or eight years old. I have a lasting memory of climbing the sandy cliff and thinking how high we were and how small the boat looked. Having spent our family holidays exploring most of the rivers and creeks of the Thames Estuary for the yachtsman's pilot book *East Coast Rivers*, the River Deben seemed the prettiest. Little did I know that later I would spend 50 years on and around this lovely Suffolk river.

Having married and bought a 22ft lifting-keel Kestrel, Graham and I moved to Felixstowe in 1977. We brought her round from the Blackwater and found a mooring just inside the Horse Sand at Felixstowe Ferry. We quickly learnt to work the tides when making dinghy trips to and from the boat with one small baby in a carry cot and one toddler in a life-jacket and reins. We also began to appreciate how sheltered the mooring was, tucked away out of the channel, between the mud and saltings on the Felixstowe shore and the Horse Sand, in spite of the fast flowing ebb tide. Changing boats after a couple of years, we moved up to *Mako*, a 27ft Halcyon. She provided more space for family holidays and we sailed her for 14 years.

From with the same sheltered mooring we would watch as our two boys explored the saltings by dinghy, keeping an eye on their heads moving as the tide rose and they rowed deeper into the creeklets and muddy gutways.

Later we acquired a Mirror dinghy and a Topper, which allowed the boys more freedom to adventure further up river, sometimes accompanied by an adult or by the bigger boat. Most of their dinghy trips were just up to Troublesome Reach but occasionally they



Iwunda at Ramsholt in the 1950s.

voyaged all the way to Woodbridge. Many weekends were spent on *Mako* with the family, venturing up and down the river, anchoring overnight at The Rocks or Methersgate and setting out on more muddy voyages in the dinghy. The cat came too and memorably had to be retrieved from the river after falling off the boom.

After a sailing weekend away from the Ferry, we would time our return to coincide with low water. This enabled expeditions to the drying Horse Sand where many a complicated irrigation system was constructed, awaiting the rising tide to fill the canals and float the toy boats. The Horse also proved to be a novel place to bring friends for an adventure.

Owning a boat is not just about the sailing. During the spring fitting-out season FF boatyard became our home while we antifouled the boat and got ready for the season. Small children soon learned to find friends and amuse themselves mudlarking in the saltings, or crabbing off the jetty. The boys never seemed keen to help with the boat work even when they were older!

Sailing with the Scouts at Felixstowe Ferry showed the boys how important it was to know your tides.

When some visiting adults, used to inland waters, came to sail at the club, the young Scouts were able to show their knowledge to good effect. Local knowledge and respect for the water were lessons instilled in our boys at an early age.

The Scouts and Guides 'Wet Weekend' was an annual fixture in our calendar and continues to this day. If you have ever wondered why, on a summer weekend once a year, Ramsholt Dock is swarming with 150 to 200 young people canoeing, dinghy sailing, raft-building and being ferried out to a variety of cruising boats – this is the Wet Weekend. Organised by Suffolk Scouts and Guides, the event gives youngsters a chance to camp and spend two days enjoying a variety of water activities. It takes a certain sort of cruising boat owner to welcome aboard groups of four to five young people with their muddy shoes and wet trousers, who have probably never been on a boat before. Nevertheless, the same boats come year after year to give the children a taste of big boat sailing.

In the school summer holidays there were family cycle trips to Waldringfield along the tracks via Kirton Creek and Hemley and ferry trips across to Bawdsey to cycle to Ramsholt.

As our boys got older they occasionally borrowed the boat for a trip up river with friends, especially when we changed to a Moody 29, *Diaton*, with much more room for entertaining. I am not sure the friends they invited realised that sailing required a dinghy trip from a muddy hard to get to the boat. We could be certain that George would give us a report next time we went ashore at Ramsholt. 'I saw your lad up here' was all he would say!

Our last boat was a lifting-keel Parker 32, *Sandack*, bought jointly with our younger son. With his children now

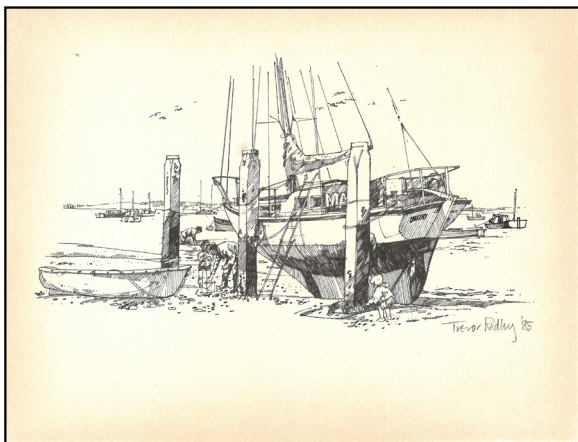
sailing there have been four generations of our family sailing on the Deben.

In recent years, I have been walking the river banks, which has shown the Deben from a different angle. There has been more time to watch and listen to the birds, although I still do not know a reed warbler from a reed bunting. However, just seeing the busy waders at the water's edge or the kestrels hovering over the marshes reminds me of the rich variety of wild life there is along the river.

One of my best memories is of the first sail of the year, usually in early May, when going up towards Ramsholt we always heard a cuckoo. I am not sure if it was the same bird every year! For 35 years, that sound heralded to me the start of a new sailing season. Sometimes all we did on a weekend was to sail gently up river with the tide, find a mooring off Martlesham Creek and enjoy a quiet night afloat with the sounds of the river lulling us to sleep.

It seems the Deben has been central to my family for a very long time.

RDA member Judy Jones's father Jack Coote produced East Coast Rivers from 1956. It was then continued by her sister Janet Harber, also an RDA member.



Mako on posts.

My Deben

Everything Important Happens by Accident

In the late 80s I had a proper job complete with suit, money a commute and so on. One Friday evening I was as usual at Paddington station, with time to kill due to a cancelled train. I knew I had a meeting with a publishing house on the Monday, so for small talk bought some of their publications, amongst which was *Dalton's Weekly*. This was a bit like Exchange & Mart but for small businesses. There it was – a 'rare opportunity' to buy a chandlery business.

It was Robertson's Chandlery in Woodbridge. Well one thing led to another (despite my part-Welsh wife's hesitation to move to the 'Far East'!) and by March 1991 I found myself on the steps of the building looking out over the River Deben. Since the existing manager had decided a few days earlier to move to Holland to make garden gnomes instead of providing a handover, it proved to be lucky for me (though not many others) that Whisstock's collapsed that same day. One of the people looking for a job was Vic Beamish. 'I'll give it a go,' he said, retiring from my employ nearly 20 years later.

Those steps up to the entrance (now demolished in a recent 'development' of the building)

served me well. Just as I had done, on a fine day customers would stop at the top, survey the scene for a moment and come into the shop in a good mood. I could build on that; it is after all the job of a chandler to send people away happier but poorer.

It was never a proper job, certainly the money, suit and (thankfully) commute had all gone. But what a place to live and to bring up children. For a while I kept a canoe at Robertson's and when the tide served would divert the children on their way home from school for a trip to 'Honolulu'. It's a little sandy beach just downstream from the saltings at Melton, never tropical, but the name stuck, like the mud if you stayed too long. The slightly ramshackle fish and chip shop at Felixstowe Ferry was always a treat, not to mention the crabbing at Bawdsey, and the riverside pubs. There's not much to rival the Deben for attractiveness on a variety of fronts.

And what characters along the river. For example when Bass's Dock was run by Frank Knights almost as a home for maritime waifs and strays, there was an eclectic mix of boats and people. Old barge skippers and seadogs often living on craft often held together more by habit than nails. They found the proximity of the Anchor a great comfort, where the bar seemed to have the effect of making any tale a lot taller.

Of course I also got to know the people involved in the marine trade along the river. An extraordinary – perhaps unique – feature of the river yards is that they all then worked in wood. Even more extraordinary is that they still do. Methods and materials will have changed of course, but they epitomise a living



Vikings on the raid in the Thoroughfare!

and developing tradition of craftsmanship far removed from the often nostalgic heritage sector. That reflects in the diversity of boats at their moorings, again a far cry from many other parts of the country.

And that heritage goes back a long way of course. I'm sure Everson's was originally Aeverson's in Saxon times. Anyway, getting involved in Maritime Woodbridge for a number of years really brought it all to life. One year it fell to me to hire some Vikings. They came back to me with 'which type of Vikings would you like, early middle or late?' Inevitably plumping for middle, about 30 of them turned up, though in Transit vans rather than longships. Their raid of the Thororoughfare, including attempts to steal gold from the bank (unsuccessful) and mead from the off-licence next door (very successful) was a highlight of that year's event. But at the same event that jollity took place alongside a serious and well-attended talk on the Viking ships at Roskilde in Denmark. Impressive stuff.

So what is the River Deben today? Well there are more people in the area with wider interests and activities both on and off the river. 30 years ago there were few if any canoes, rowing skiffs and paddleboards. Swimming was usually something you did if you fell off a boat. But as it has been in the past, the river is still a connector rather than a divider. Parts of the community may bicker now and then, but it is still a community of which I am privileged to be a part.

All because of a few minutes at Paddington.

Moray MacPhail is the River Deben Association membership secretary and treasurer. He ran The Woodbridge Boatstore – later Classic Marine – from 1991 to 2016, making fittings for classic boats (and parts for cathedrals, castles and colleges, too). The workshop has now become the Suffolk Repair Shed, but that's a whole different story.



Sailing with the family in *First of April* just downriver from Waldringfield



The Woodbridge Boatstore

Quay Life



Down below on the houseboat



Elizabeth and Sarah

Thank you, Julia, for inviting me to talk about our life on a houseboat at Woodbridge Quay, and the community we live in, particularly in times of difficulty.

We (my wife Elizabeth and I, and our dog Leo) moved to Woodbridge just over 6 years ago – we had our wide beam barge built in Liverpool and it came to the Quay in October 2017 – it is still the best decision we ever made! We knew we were excited to move off land on to our beautiful boat, but we had no idea then how much we would fall in love with Woodbridge, the wonderful friends we would make and the amazing community we would find.

We overhear people walking past chatting about the boats and what it must be like to live on one – the most common question is 'is it cold in

the winter'? No, its harder to keep it cool in the Summer than warm in the winter! They are all different and unique, much like their owners, but they sit together on the mud and water as a beautiful collective, a life style choice rather than a necessity.

Just over a year ago Elizabeth was diagnosed with a grade 4 glioblastoma, the most aggressive form of brain cancer, and life changed forever. After surgery and months of aggressive treatment, we celebrate her success at the moment to keep the growth at bay – in the words of our amazing oncology nurse Judith, she is a success story already. Her cancer affected her ability to work and travel like she did before, however she and our dear friend Lyn have collaborated to form a band called Hedgeriders, and produce an album, many



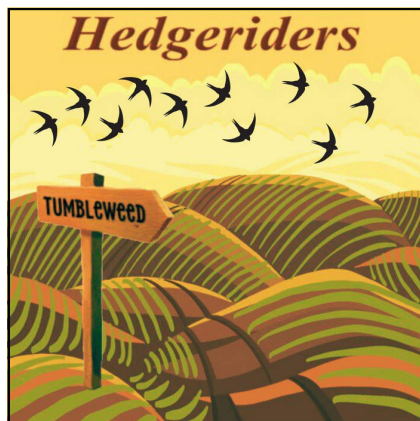
Winter view on Woodbridge Quay

of the songs inspired by the beautiful place that we live. Have a listen to 'Sun Sets on the Quay' at hedgeriders.bandcamp.com/album/tumbleweed (photograph by Roe Woodroffe). Even better buy the album, some of the proceeds go to the Brain Tumour Trust (a plug I know but why not!!)

When we first got Elizabeth's diagnosis, I asked her if there was anything she wanted to do/places she wanted to go – she didn't hesitate in her answer: 'I want to go home and have more of what I already have.' So that's what we do. Our community treat us so kindly as they always have, but with a gentle touch of consideration of our circumstances, not to constantly ask, but to remind us that they are there for us. Our children and grandchildren visit us regularly and bring such joy. Our families and friends stand beside us so that we never feel alone. We walk, we laugh, we dance, we sing, we party,

we cry, we are living! And what a unique and beautiful place it is to live.

Sarah Goodman and Elizabeth Swift live on Woodbridge Quay. This is their album (with Lyn Gameson) in aid of the Brain Tumour Trust: hedgeriders.bandcamp.com/album/tumbleweed.



Roe Woodroffe

Opening a Window onto the Deben's Otters

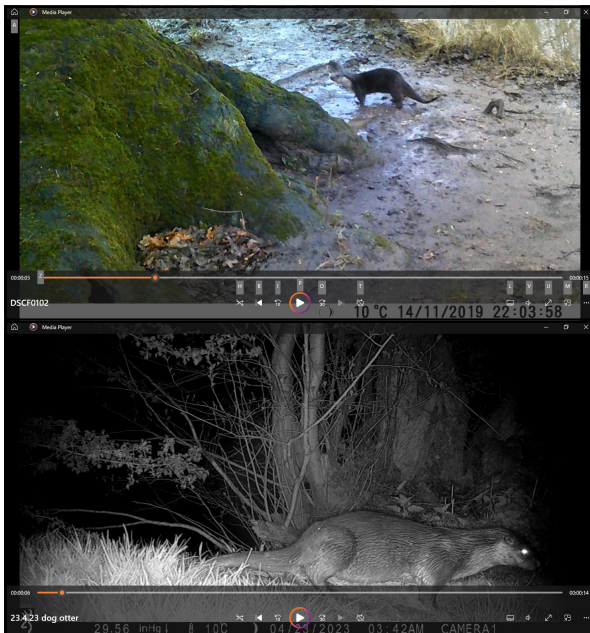
At the Suffolk Otter Day in February 2022 I listened to otter enthusiasts talking about otters along their stretch of river. I watched video after video of incredible footage taken with their trail cameras of otter activity along the Blyth, the Little Ouse, the Lark and the Waveney. I was inspired and thought, 'Why can't we do this on the Deben – my river?' Well it seems we can, and we are, and it is about to get even more exciting.

With the indefatigable help of Nicky Rowbottom from the River Blyth otter group we met some of the RDA committee to discuss our ideas. The support from them was immediate and positive and within a few weeks the RDA had funded two trail cameras (one funded by Gwen Nelson) so the project could begin. Nicky and I immediately deployed the cameras – one on the estuary and one upstream of Ufford.

We needed volunteers to help run the cameras just as we needed landowners to allow us to put the cameras up on their riverside land. Great excitement followed: within the first two weeks we got some superb footage of a mother with three cubs upstream of Ufford and a single otter visiting the estuary camera. For every video of an otter there are dozens of other creatures such as deer, badgers, swans, ducks, pheasants, a buzzard and hundreds of grey squirrels who seem to take great delight in criss-crossing the line of fire and setting the camera off for fun! Our first volunteer to show the patience to deal with all this has written a paragraph of her own.

By late autumn I realized that we needed more cameras to cover the catchment and more volunteers to help run the cameras. First things first, volunteers and training. Nicky and I ran

a training session last December for the Deben Otter Group – a dozen enthusiastic people came along including RDA committee members and people living throughout the catchment who just wanted to learn about otters and be involved. One volunteer is so otter mad she has called her kayak *Otter Spotter* – we love this enthusiasm! The course covered otter ecology and how otters made such a successful return to our rivers with improved water quality and riverside habitat. This conservation success was achieved through working with landowners and conservation organisations over the last 25 years. We also demonstrated survey techniques with the eventual



Otters spotted on the RDA cameras



Deben Otter Group volunteers.

aim of us all undertaking a survey to look at otter activity through finding field signs under and around bridges. This is another part of the DOG initiative.

Just after new year we were successful in our bid for Farming in Protected Landscape (FiPL) funding for 6 trail cameras for the DOG. This will mean that we can extend the trail cameras throughout the catchment and hopefully get a much more accurate picture of how otters are using the river.

Any volunteer project must have an objective and a timescale. So, the objective is to undertake a bridge survey with the trained volunteers in early spring. This will follow the same methodology as the Suffolk County Otter Surveys of 2005 and 2010 which I undertook for Suffolk Wildlife Trust and the data will then be compared to establish how otters are faring compared to 14 years ago. By March 2025 the project will be completed but the trail cameras will be kept in place and we will go on running them to try and build up a better picture of the Deben's otters. In March this year I will be presenting some videos of 'our' otters at the Suffolk Otter Day and it will be a delight to do so.

Penny Hemphill, Freelance Ecologist with 25 years' experience specializing in riparian mammals and river restoration, lives in Hoo in the Deben valley.

Julia Dansie

A Volunteer's Perspective

Despite having named a dog Tarka after Gavin Maxwell's famous story, it was becoming a volunteer with this group that introduced me to the amazing antics and beauty of the elusive otter. I was hoping from the trail camera we had previously attached to a tree in an area where otter poo was seen, that the 20 second video clips would show rare footage. Actually what I excitedly scrolled through was 70 clips of grasses and low level branches wafting in the wind as they too set the camera off and then two wonderful otters who squatted and pooped. I was hooked...



John Boyle

An otter in a local Suffolk river

Sally Westwood

Feather Business

Sally Westwood



Greenshank preening



Greenshank looking at me

Sally Westwood

The Common Greenshank had been preening its feathers, with a very slight upturned bill. It stopped preening and looked in my direction, with gentle eyes. It had spotted me. I was sitting on my fairy chair on the river bank, clad in green from head to foot, head obscured by my camera, held securely on a tripod.

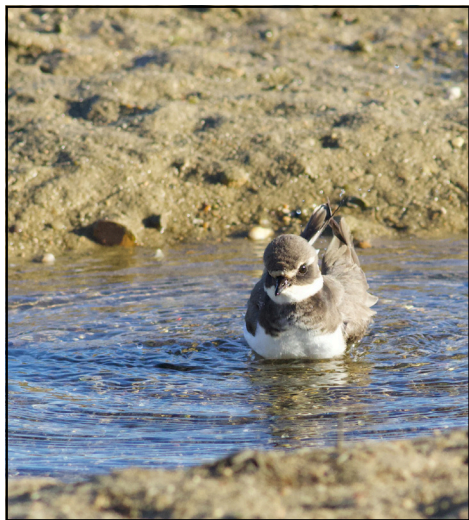
It was overcast and damp, clouds that were light grey earlier, now looked heavy and dark. I needed my warm clothing. I had been there for sometime before the Greenshank ambled along the edge of the water, and stopped for a preen.

Recent sightings

Ruddy Turnstone was seen at Felixstowe Marshes; Spoonbill was spotted at Ramsholt Marshes; Raven was observed flying over The Rocks, near Low Barn Wood; and another Spoonbill was seen at Ramsholt Lodge Marsh.

Usually the plumage of a Greenshank is rather grey with green legs and white belly. In the low light the feathers looked like separate delicate pieces of light brown silk, individually embroidered around the edges, to create perfect feathers. Each feather interlocked, to lay flat against the body.

Of course, the feathers of a bird are what sets birds apart from other creatures. Feathers may be thought of as having a structure like a tree. The trunk or central hollow shaft is called a rachis. The branches sprouting from the rachis are called barbs. In the majority of the feathers, such as the feathers that form the tail and the shape of the wings, the barbs are subdivided further into barbules. On the bird's flight feathers, the barbs grow in the same direction either side of the rachis. Whereas the barbules of adjoining barbs hook together tightly to become a smooth surface that is essential for the bird to maintain a streamlined and durable aerodynamic form.



Common Ringed Plover bathing

The barbs on the down feathers twist together to trap air and provide intense insulation.

Birds undertake preening to ensure that all feathers are correctly aligned and all interlocking barbules are securely in place, and to spread secretions of oil from the uropygial preen gland onto their feathers. It was thought that the oily substance results in water repellent feathers, but it is actually the intrinsic structure of the feathers that ensures the feathers are waterproof. Regular preening with the oil from the uropygial gland ensures the feathers remain strong and supple, over time between moulting.

Earlier in slightly better light, I spent time with a Common Ringed Plover. The ebbing tide had conveniently created a bathing pool of suitable depth for the Ringed Plover. It stepped down slowly from the mud into the pool, and set about the important business of bathing. A female sparrow stood nearby on the mud, attracted to the plover's bathing, perhaps tempted to have a wash. The plover stared at me, but continued to bathe, seemingly undaunted by my presence. The light brown plumage indicated that the bird



Bathing finished for the Common Ringed Plover

was a non-breeding juvenile. The light brown and white shorter chest and facial feathers puffed out like fur, as the plover moved repeatedly, back and forth in the water.

The fluffed out feathers exposed the bare skin at the base of the feathers. The breast was then submerged underwater and rocked back and forth, then the front end of the bird emerged, the head was pulled right back, which formed the shape of a cup, together with the elevated tail and wings, filled with water and this resulted in a covering of the feathers on the bird's back. The elevated feathers ensures the bare skin at the base of the feathers become wet. The feathers were then lowered forcing the water between the feathers. When the plover finished bathing, the feathers were soaked and in disarray. The bathing was followed by a puffing out of feathers, a good shake, and a jumping into the air with wings outstretched. A second jump elevated the bird out of the water, onto the mud. Seconds later, the plover walked rapidly across the muddy bank, stopped, looked around, checked the sky and began to preen, arranging feathers back into alignment.

Sally Westwood is a Psychologist, works as a researcher and is a professional bird photographer. She lives on a boat on the Deben and loves its birds.

Sue Ryder Richardson

Suffolk Churchyards

We are blessed by the number and variety of churches in the Deben valley. Along the small stream that rises near Debenham, grows, becomes tidal, and meanders to the sea at Felixstowe, we can visit grand edifices, medieval places of worship central to village life, tiny churches – stranded as if an oasis amidst the fields, and ancient abbeys, their flint and brickwork slowly tumbling back to earth. A mass of flora and fauna thrive in this valley: beside the riverbanks, in woodland and water meadows. Rare plants flourish in some remote spots: wood anemones at Brandeston, so slow to colonise, show their delicate white flowers in spring, speckling the bare earth just before the trees bear leaf. But nowhere are there more species than in the churchyards that pepper this rural landscape.

According to a 1996 survey, over 97% of Britain's wildflower meadows have disappeared, and the shocking truth is that even more have gone since then. Habitats have been destroyed by the plough, the use of fertilisers and herbicides, and of course developers. Our decimated natural grasslands now carry a relatively sparse number of species, and so, despite our apparent unspoilt countryside, the most precious gems left to us are the graveyards of our churches.

These hallowed grounds have remained very largely untouched for centuries. More recent understanding of grass management has allowed the 'no-mow' look to flourish. An annual cut of the grassy swards in late July allows time for the flowers to bloom, and the cut itself serves to spread the seed more widely. These churchyards have many different and diverse species of flowers; one survey in Shropshire found over 140 different species in one tiny churchyard. In our valley, varieties will vary from the more pastoral flora in the upstream churchyards of Cretingham, Kettleburgh and Brandeston, to

wild grasses, knapweeds and marguerites at Letheringham, and then these, and others more suited to the coast and salt water, at Ramsholt.

I would urge everyone to visit the churchyards of this valley through the seasons. Catch the early harbingers of spring, sunshine yellow, celandines, primroses, cowslips, oxlips (the Suffolk County flower), and buttercups. Later watch as butterflies fleetingly spread their wings on the floral patchwork of early summer: the purple orchids, betonys, clovers, pimpernels, trefoils and vetchlings. High summer finds churchyards alive with the hum of bees, as taller plants, knapweeds, scabious, champions, willowherbs, shift in the light breeze. Toadflax and lichens cling to cemetery walls, lizards dart, and everywhere there will be the sound of birds. Autumn brings a myriad of red berries, seed heads and pods, the skeletal heads of umbrells draped in cobwebs, above a ground littered with fungi.

Take a flask to any of these churchyards and soak up the life contained within their walls. They are places of life and hope despite their name. In many cases they will also have outstanding views: the Deben Basin from the Old Abbey at Letheringham, Martlesham Creek and the River from St Mary's church. And possibly the finest is the most isolated, at Ramsholt. The walk to the church alone is a reason to visit. Take any of the many footpaths, sit in this peaceful place, and watch the to-ing and fro-ing of the river, look at plants and birdlife, listen to the cries of waders as they stalk between the reeds and mudflats. Here the whisper of wind carries the scent of salt and grass. And the sense of time stood still.

Sue Ryder Richardson was born in Suffolk and has explored the county on foot for as long as she can remember.

September Flowers in Ramsholt Churchyard

Julia Jones was visiting Ramsholt Churchyard in September 2023 when she noticed several unobtrusive small flowers which she photographed and asked *RDA Journal* readers to help identify (riverdeben.org/rda-journal/ramsholt-churchyard-september-flowers). Not everyone agreed on all identifications - but that was probably the photographer's fault.

Particular thanks to Oriel O'Laughlin, Sue Orme, Annabel Thorogood, Dee Longdin, Sue Rusack.



1. Yarrow,
Achillea millefolium



2. Field poppy,
Papaver rhoeas



3. Alexanders,
Smyrniolum olusatrum



4. Red valerian,
Centranthus ruber



5. White campion,
Silene latifolia
(or sea campion?)



6. Field scabious,
Knautia arvensis



7. Red valerian,
Centranthus ruber
(again)



8. Chicory,
Cichorium intybus
(or possibly bellflower?)



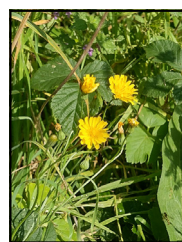
9. Lady's bedstraw,
Galium verum



10. Bramble,
Rubus fruticosus



11. Perennial cornflower,
Centaurea montana
(or lesser knapweed?)



12. Autumn hawkbit,
Leontodon autumnalis
(or hawksbeard?)

Extraordinary Occurrence in Bawdsey

An Historical Note

When Billy Butterworth went to dig his vegetable garden in Bawdsey one day in 1998 he had no idea that it would be the first step in an extraordinary occurrence and he would also be uncovering a bit of local history that had its origin over seven hundred years before.

As the spade came out of the ground Billy saw a small round disc which looked like a coin. (image 1)

He picked it up, cleaned it and was able to distinguish the image of what appeared to be a bird which he later sketched (image 2). He also made out some lettering around the edge..

Billy sent it to The British Museum who confirmed that the image was of a bird, possibly a dove. (Image 2) and the words 'Radulf Gebault' were distinguishable. The symbol of the 'R' was combined with a cross which can be interpreted as 'Roger'. This symbol may have been Roger's mark. (Image 3)

The words 'de Cramligtu' were also recognisable and indicated where

Roger was from. Probably what is today know as Cramlington, a small town just north of Newcastle upon Tyne.

The British Museum was of the opinion that this was a merchant's seal dating from the period 1250–1300.

The find raised intriguing questions. What

was Roger doing in Bawdsey? Was he a regular visitor? Had he brought goods to sell in Bawdsey's weekly market or at the annual fair? Perhaps he was buying goods? It is known that ships from Goseford were to be found in many English ports, including Newcastle, so was Roger going to transport a cargo home on a ship from the Deben? Perhaps he as shipping ale or English wool to Flanders where it was in great demand?

After Billy Butterworth made his find the extraordinary event occurred. In a field, in a different part of Bawdsey, another small disc was found (Image 4).

When this disc was examined the symbol of



Image 1



Image 2

Peter Wain

Peter Wain

a cross combined with the letter 'R' could be easily seen in the centre. Around the rim were the words 'ROGER DE CRAMLIGTU'.

What had been found was further evidence of the presence in Bawdsey of Roger the merchant from Cramligtu. In addition this seal was found in an area of the village that was almost certainly the site of the fair. The fair in Bawdsey was important. It was first established in 1154 when there were very few fairs in Suffolk and it was a three day event. However, in 1283 it was extended to eight days. Isolated at the end of a peninsular with a low density of population and no significant nearby settlements, this extension reflected the importance of Bawdsey as a trading centre and the maritime nature of the commerce that took place.

Although we know the identity of many of the Medieval traders who lived on the lower Deben, (for example, the Essouls, the Redberds, the Pynsweyns and the Cortelers) the identity of visiting merchants and their origins is almost nonexistent. The discovery of these two seals thus adds, in a small way, to our knowledge of local history although tantalisingly we still do not know how often Roger visited Bawdsey and what he traded.

Also, how did he manage to lose two seals and I wonder what Lady Bracknell would have said?

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Brenda Butterworth and Robert Simper for their considerable help and permission to use the photographs and to TFS Photo, Woodbridge for taking the photograph – image 1.

Other sources

Wain, P., 2016. 'The Medieval Port of Goseford'.

Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and History. 43. 582-601.

Historian Peter Wain's specialist subject is the lost mediaeval port of Goseford on the lower Deben. He is also a Trustee of Bawdsey Radar Museum.

Peter Wain

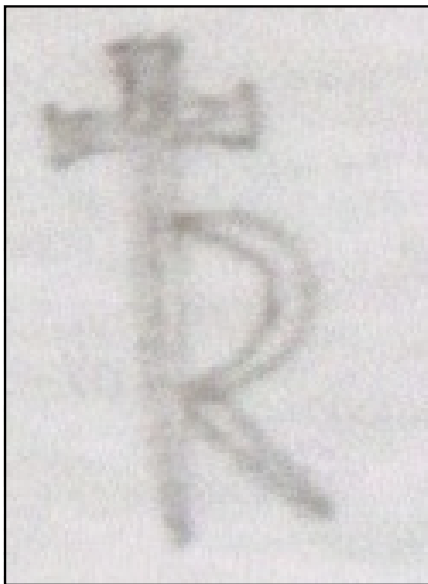


Image 3

Peter Wain



Image 4

Editor's note: Readers who are not familiar with Oscar Wilde's play The Importance of Being Earnest may not know Lady's Bracknell's wonderful comment 'To lose one parent, Mr Worthing, may be regarded as a misfortune; to lose both looks like carelessness.'

Co-chairs' Report

February 2024

Jane Haviland



Jane Haviland

As I write this, the crocuses, snowdrops and daffodils are beginning to burst through the winter's dark doldrum days and long nights and bring joy to so many people. Thank goodness for Spring.

I have been asked to keep this report brief as we have a full complement of articles, each giving us an insight to lives, issues and developments along the river.

Writing this report is a chance for Colin and I to reflect on what the RDA members and committee have been doing over the past 6 months and also to understand what more needs to be done and how we can set about doing it.

The RDA has been extremely fortunate regarding the amount of activity that has been undertaken by an increasing number of volunteers, particularly over the last year during which we have been getting some significant projects off the ground. We are proud to have amazing people doing amazing things in the shared objective of enhancing the River Deben.

Whether involved in undertaking surveys, getting people together for training or garnering enthusiasm for addressing climate change, it doesn't matter how little or how much each of us has done, simply by being a member we are contributing to a capturing a better understanding of the river. The funds that the membership raises through subscription and donation helps the committee undertake actions including but not limited to, purchasing and monitoring wildlife cameras for otter surveys, support scientifically robust fish surveys run by Eastern Inland Fisheries Conservation Authority (EIFCA) and Institute of Fisheries Management (IFM) and to undertake training for the monitoring of riverfly. All these activities contribute to a better understanding about the health of the river. In addition, we are able to host informative talks, notably and most recently Lord Deben, who came and spoke passionately about how we can all work harder about combatting climate change.

On the subject of talks we are fortunate to be hosting Dr Robin Price from Anglian Water and David Findley from Ufford Parish Council and Deben Climate Centre at our 2024 AGM in April, both of whom are passionate about understanding better the water quality of the River Deben and establishing systems for improving it.

In addition, the RDA has been invited to become part of the working group for a new project supported by DEFRA known as Recovering the Deben-From Source to Sea. This has come about as a result of the Deben Roundtable meeting held by the then Secretary of State for



Bawdsey erosion (see News from the Hards)

the Environment and local MP, Dr Thérèse Coffey, on 10 August 2023. In recognition of the environmental problems on the Deben, the call to action to improve the Deben has led to the establishment of this innovative project, only the second in the country.

As Andy Went from the Essex and Suffolk Rivers Trust states below:

‘Partners of the East Suffolk Catchment Partnership (ESCP) have come together to develop a high-level action plan and project concept called “Recovering the Deben: Source to Sea”. The project working group currently comprises of representatives from: Essex and Suffolk Rivers Trust (ESRT), Environment Agency (EA), Natural England – Catchment Sensitive Farming (NE-CSF), Suffolk Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (SFWAG), Suffolk Wildlife Trust (SWT), Upper Deben Farm Cluster (UDFC), and National Landscapes, UK (formally the AONB), who are driving the project forward to address the environmental failings in the Deben catchment.

‘The project comprises five steps, one of which relates to Information Gathering and Data Analysis. It is vital to gain the greatest understanding of issues facing the Deben, the information available and what is being

collected. It is important that within this phase there is suitable representation on the Working Group from the wider Deben community, to ensure we facilitate appropriate consultation about the river and its future as well as the data being collected and actions already underway.

‘The Project Working Group has invited the RDA to become a member of the Working Group to enhance community representation and a greater understanding of what is happening on the ground. The RDA will assist in being able to shape

how the project can work to support further improvement actions and data collection throughout the project’s delivery.’

We trust that you, the membership, is supportive of this initiative and perhaps some of you will wish to become more actively involved. Please do email volunteer@riverdeben.org on the website for further information should you wish to become involved.

It is now time for me to thank YOU ALL for your support during my tenure as your Co-Chair and it is with mixed feelings that I stand down. I have thoroughly enjoyed my time on the Committee since 2018, having been both the Vice Chair for a year and Co-Chair for almost 4. I look forward to supporting Colin and the team in leading the Association to what I know will be a fruitful and constructive new chapter.

Jane Haviland is Co-chair of the RDA. She is a solicitor specialising in environmental law and has a keen interest in photography and rowing.

Colin Nicholson is Co-chair of the RDA. He had a varied career in the international pharmaceutical industry. More recently, Colin worked in sport, as Chief Executive of an Olympic National Governing Body, organising participation in the London Olympics and three Commonwealth Games. Colin is also Vice-chair of the Deben Estuary Partnership.

Robert Simper

Obituary: George Collins

George Collins was truly a man of Ramsholt, he was born there and spent the last part of his life being harbourmaster controlling the yacht moorings. George and his twin brother Billy were born in 1931 in a cottage below Ramsholt Church. His father, also George, had been a blacksmith at Shottisham, drove a lorry when they had solid tyres and then became chauffeur at Bawdsey Hall. When he retired he became the first harbourmaster at Ramsholt. The twins had two sisters and a young brother Bob known as Rusty. Old George was very proud that some of his forbearers had been in deep water sailing ships. From his wood shed I retrieved ship models waiting to become fire wood made by those ancient sailors. The Collins family had a tragedy when they all still lived at home and their mother died. There were six cottages down the track from Ramsholt Church and Old George was last one living there. It is almost impossible now to find the sight of that cottage in nettles.

Like many twins George and Billy had a close relationship and if possible they worked together. First they worked at Ramsholt Lodge Farm feeding the cows. Then tractor driving for Norman Simper on the farm and on to lorry driving from Carters at Melton, which meant moving away from the village. Young George moved on to managing a Fison's warehouse near Ipswich Dock lock gates. The twins also moonlighted working for Noreen Prichard Carr at weddings, always very smartly dressed.

I never saw Young George helping Old George on the moorings, but sometimes he got his youngest son Bob out to help him. Bob was on a troop ship which sank and he spent sometime in the water and after that he was not in the least keen on going on the river, unlike the twins who



View from Ramsholt church on the day of George Collins funeral

got afloat when ever they could. At the funeral of Old George Young George asked the chairman of the Ramsholt Fairway Committee if he could be harbour master and so it was agreed.

George and Billy bought a small yacht and sailed a lot. Also they anchored off Bawdsey Manor to get fish to eat. Geoff Ingram Smith gave George an old wooden World War II life boat which he used as a floating 'office'. When the Collins twins decided they were too old to row out to their boats the lifeboat was hauled up beside the quay. George was already highly popular with yachtsmen along the East Coast because he tried to find visitors a mooring to go pick up. Once George was permanently alongside the quay, he extended his welcome to visitors to Ramsholt Dock who all remember him with great warmth. Sadly George died on Boxing Day last year aged 93 and so ended a long happy life mostly spent on the River Deben. At his funeral Ramsholt Church attracting 230 people who overflowed outside. All because George was very friendly to visitors.

Local historian, farmer and sailor Robert Simper is President of the RDA.



Pearl Simper at Plumtree Hall

Robert Simper

Sixty-Three Years at Plumtree

Pearl and I got married in the hot summer of 1959 and when we first arrived at our new home together I carried her over the threshold which I had been told was the proper custom to follow. Our rented cottage was beside Shottisham Creek, but over a mile down a narrow track, first half tarred and then just a dirty track. That first summer together was idyllic, but as winter closed in it became more challenging. The cottage had probably been built in about 1610, possibly for the tenant of an oyster fishery in the near-by Old Shottisham Creek. In the living room was a sort of cheap version of an Aga. It did not provide much heat and we never managed to cook a meal on it. We had installed a small generator which could run some lights and a tiny cooker, however in

cold days of the winter wind seemed to come through an awful lot of cracks. There was a small, moody petrol pump to lift water from the well to a tank upstairs. If you put in too much petrol, the water ran over top of the tank and through the living room ceiling. This seemed to surprise visitors quite a lot.

The Ramsholt population (we were told later) agreed that one winter down in that awful place at the end of the track and that young couple will be out of there. Both Pearl and I had grown up on lonely farms so that we took our very rural lifestyle as a challenge to be overcome. Besides we liked having the River Deben at the bottom of the garden. There is a public foot path on the top of the river wall, but for about the first ten

years no one used it, and our three children grew up in a sort of rural paradise. The real leap towards joining the twentieth century came when mains electric finally arrived in Ramsholt in about 1962.

The main attraction for me was that we could keep our boat *Sea Fever* and then *L'Atalanta* in the creek at the bottom of the garden during the winter. Some of the happiest time of my life was spent paddling about in the mud in the spring, all on my own, painting the boat. Once a man walking past on the footpath asked me what I was doing. I told him that I was heating tar to treat the bottom of my dinghy to try and stop it leaking. He replied if I really did live in this place all time? What did I do for entertainment such as going to the theatre? When I told him this probably was my theatre, he gave me a very odd look and went off quickly.

Two of older men working on Ramsholt Lodge Farm were very concerned that the previous tenants of the cottage, who had used it as weekend retreat in the summer, had renamed it. Both men said firmly 'it is really called Plum Hall' and the Ordnance Survey confirmed that. The term 'hall' was part the dry Suffolk humour; applied to remote and difficult places, it meant they were anything but a Hall – such as Gobblecock Hall, Hungary Hall (both local). I promised the men I would get it renamed one day. Thirty-six years after moving in, we bought the cottage and I renamed it Plumtree Hall, even though both men had gone by then.

Ownership meant that at last we could put in central heating, but the cottage had been listed because it

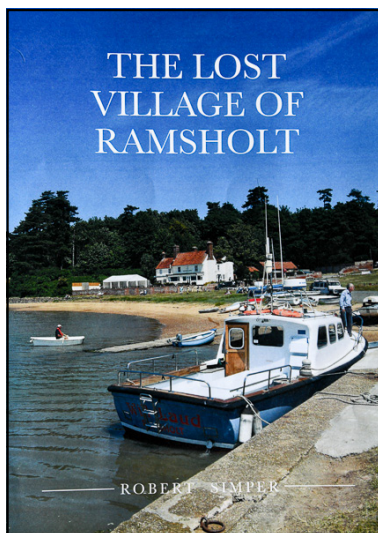
had pargeting in the roof where it had had been extended. Pargeting is really an Essex custom (did the oystermen bring it in?) and sometime later I discovered, to my horror, it had all fallen off – presumably in the heat – and I didn't remember what it had looked like.

The name Plum Tree might have been nineteenth century because some new land owners in the 1880s had tried to get Ramsholt to earn a rental income by planting an orchard on the river side. However, the trees in the garden are actually greengages, not plums. This does not seem to have been very successful and the cottage was abandoned when Sir Cuthbert Quilter bought the estate in 1892. He wanted a blacksmith to shoe about forty farm horses, so he installed a blacksmith and built a thatched 'shop' on the back for him to work in. The back lawn is full of nails which the blacksmith just threw out. The first maritime connection to the cottage appears to have been in 1930s when Quilter's grandson Raymond kept a boat in the creek for shooting duck in the winter.

In the early days we were often snow bound, once for about three weeks when the kids were young, though we did get some food by tractor

from the Alderton shop. Pearl had done the flower garden and I tried to keep the rest looking tidy – when I was not on a boat somewhere.

It took sixty-three years for us to fully realize that we lived in a lonely place with no neighbours to help. Leaving was not easy, but then we were just moving up the track to have part of my son's house. Change is the only thing which is constant.



Robert Simper

Getting Involved: Work Experience

Ben Dingwall



Cutting up a laser

In November of 2023, I spent a week with Ben Dingwall (a boat builder and repairer.) For a long time, I have been interested in how boats were made and how the different hull designs affected the speed of boats, and because of Ben I had an opportunity to find out.

On the first day, after an unusually early start for me, we cycled down to the workshop and got busy with prepping for the day. After cutting up an old laser radial with a jigsaw, I got talking to a man who explained how changing the front of his firefly affected the speed of his boat and how it cut through the water.

Afterwards, Ben and I got to work moving my boat into the workshop and made a list from bow to stern of all the dinks and dents that have somehow appeared since taking over as helm (there were quite a few!)

A few days in the workshop taught me how to fix the dents, learn how to apply gel coat properly (not the botch job I do at home) and polish and clean my boat to a high standard. Once Ben and I had finished with *Boombastic* (my cadet) we moved on aiming to make a new centreboard



Making new foils

and rudder, and after a quick lesson on how my existing foils were slowing my performance, I started making the foils. I found the whole process fascinating – who knew boats and foils were made out of foam?

In the midst of hard work, I met many interesting people who were delighted to share with me their sailing and boat building experiences, including someone who had been trained by Jack Holt, the man who invented the cadet! I found it amazing learning about how the different materials affect the strength of a boat.

Whilst the careers office at my school is brilliant, nautical engineering is not something that comes up. I am very thankful to Ben and his family for letting me stay with them and opening my eyes to a new world of sailing career opportunities.

Hettie Thorogood is in year 10 at Thomas Gainsborough School, Sudbury. She's a member of the Waldringfield Cadet Squadron and is hoping for a place in the GBR team at the World Championships at Plymouth this summer.

Hettie Thorogood

I'll Never Look at a Beach the Same Way Again

Kate Osborne



The River Deben at Bawdsey

I set up Beach Bonkers using beachcombing (outdoors and in) to inspire people about our internationally rare and fragile shingle beach habitat. One of my biggest challenges is not the weather itself as I've been remarkably lucky over the last eight years with only three spectacularly torrential, but thankfully brief, downpours. Rather the challenge is convincing people that beachcombing is far more productive outside of the summer months.

Suffolk shingle beaches are vast and open all year round, but in the winter it can be wonderfully wild and it's possible to really connect with the elements. The roaring and whirling of the wind and waves are tremendously noisy and exhilarating. Not only can you have the entire beach to yourself, but it can feel as if you own it.

The effects of the weather, wind, and waves wrought upon the beach cast up many more treasures than the smooth seas of summer. The only piece of amber I have ever found was just before Christmas at Bawdsey, caught in the seaweed in the strandline. That was the same event where a beachcombing policeman found a small ball of plastic clingfilm which turned out to be a drug 'wrap'!

Nicky Clarke



'A rare and fragile habitat'

When you can no longer feel your hands the culinary rewards are fabulous in this part of the world. A pub – sometimes with a fire. A tea room with a hot brew and sugary cake. What's not to like? You've earned it!

Another recurring challenge is that beachcombing is perceived as an activity just for children or families. But over and over again I hear, 'I think I enjoyed that more than my kids'. No-one ever fails to get excited on a beachcombing treasure hunt.

I've realised all you need to be a beachcomber is curiosity. GK Chesterton said 'The world will never starve for want of wonders; but only for want of wonder'. Sad and true but on a beachcomb I see that wonder starting up and rejoice in it.

At the beginning of a beachcomb people stride along the beach, perhaps expecting the treasures to leap into their arms. As time goes on they slow down, even sit down, and really start to look. Often at the end of two hours I am chivvying them to get back to the starting point. More than once I have been delighted to leave people beachcombing on the beach and headed off to my next event!



Suffolk shingle beaches are vast and open

The best thing I can hear at the end of a walk or talk is 'I will never look at a beach the same way again' or that I have ruined walking on the beach for people as they are no longer able to race along knowing all the potential finds they are walking over.

I was saddened by the craze to hide and paint pebbles on the beach. Most paints contain plasticisers, plastic gems and stickers were added – all of which would pollute our environment. Why even bother? At my last count there were 84 different shells, stones, sponges, egg cases, bones, bryozoans, teeth and fossils you could find on a Suffolk beach and that doesn't include our over 50 species of crab and almost 700 species of seaweed we have in the UK. You never know what you might find. There are two tides a day, every day, constantly turning up new treasures to marvel and wonder at.

Happy hunting!

Editor's note: When I asked Kate Osborne about her plans after retiring from Beach Bonkers, this was her reply:

What next? Life in essence! Running my own business has been all-consuming (people think I spend my days swanning around on the beach but in reality I spend a ridiculous amount of time tied to my computer) and taking talk bookings up to two years in advance means I've missed out on so many things. Life is short - I plan to live it :)



The world will never starve for want of wonders...

PLEASE BEACHCOMB SUSTAINABLY

Take away as much rubbish as you can but everything else belongs on the beach. Our shingle beaches are a complex & fragile habitat – the plants & animals that live there need that driftwood, shell or stone far more than we do.

Kate is retiring April 2024 and pretty booked up until then, but a few opportunities for bespoke beachcombing are still opening up as people's plans change. For further info and to get on the waiting list please go to beachbonkers.org.uk/book-your-bespoke-beachcomb or email BeachBonkersHQ@gmail.com. There's also an opportunity to win a kilo of 100 year old Seaham sea glass, and who knows after April I might be giving sea glass away. Keep watching!



Nick Cottam

Getting Involved: Walking the Deben Way Part I

Head north from Woodbridge and you can broadly follow the upriver Deben, non-tidal from Ufford, more reclusive and often hidden altogether along tree-covered brooks and meandering streams. The source of the river above Debenham, lies a twisting 25 miles or so from its Felixstowe mouth but who knows which field-side ditch or hidden culvert really is the source.

One way to find out, or at least take part in the debate, is to start walking what I'm calling 'The Deben Way', the route which most closely follows the course of the river from its source to the sea. The terrain is pretty and flat, the river itself is steeped in history – Saxons, Vikings, boat builders *et al* – and the route can be split

into four not too exhausting walks – or two longer trails if you're feeling fit and energetic. In this article I'm going to cover the first of two non-tidal sections of the river, a stretch of just over 10 miles from Debenham to Kettleburgh.

The walk starts about a mile north of Mickfield on the road to Brockford to the west of Debenham (Grid Ref TM 140 629). You will need a kind person to drop you and any walking chums off as you set out on your quest for a first glimpse of the Deben. Follow the footpath sign and walk east to the seasonally very pretty Mickfield Meadow and Nature Reserve. Spring is a good time but any non rainy day will give you a sense of tranquility in these pre-Deben uplands. The meadow is rich in wild flowers as it has never been sprayed or

fertilized. Continue to head north along the field edges and then turn right to join Stoney Lane which at about two miles long is reputedly the longest ford in the country.

Away from those first trickily culverts is the start of the Deben proper. Stoney Lane can be a lazy trickle or a gushing torrent depending on the time of year. If it's dry you can walk along the stony bed of the ford while there is a path above if it's too wet. Look out for the Groaning Stone, a smooth riverbed rock which is said to turn over and groan at midnight when the moon is full.

Continue along this very dramatic section of the early river until you reach Derrybrook Farm and then press on to the Aspoll Road where you turn right towards the centre of Debenham, full of pretty period houses and quaint shops, more like a small town than a village but village it is.

At Water Lane – the clue is in the name – you can carry on following the river by turning left. The clay soil above Debenham has historically left the village vulnerable to flooding. Statistics confirm that summers and winters are getting wetter and that rainfall can be more intense. In fact six of the 10 wettest years have occurred since 1998. Old records in the University of Oxford's Bodleian Library hint at a more fulsome upstream Deben with a note that 'ships of considerable burthen came up to the Town...'

Floods aside, there's a great café for refreshments at the end of Priory Lane before you head south towards the village of Creetingham. Note the river on your right as it wanders bashfully through water meadows, keeping you company as you turn right and then left, following field boundaries to Potash Farm. Turn right at the main road and then left, passing an old outbuilding, crossing a field into woods before reaching the road. Then on you go following the course of the river to the rolling greens and wild edges of Creetingham Golf Club.



Stoney Lane during the wet season

Feel relief perhaps that there is no need to stop for a nervous swing as you pass golf club buildings and keep going past streams and tributaries of the main Deben and on to Kiln Wood. Now head for Brandeston and stride (rather than wriggle) along Wriggle Street to the centre of the village. Enjoy the Creetingham village sign with its surreal mosaic of a Viking ship and further downstream there's Brandeston Ford, an idyllic spot where cattle and other animals have been able to cross the river. Nearby, hidden in the undergrowth, is what locals claim to be a smuggler's hole, used for hiding contraband such as tobacco and brandy.

On we go through Brandeston, straight on past the village sign near the popular Brandeston Queen, staying on Low Street to get back into the countryside. There's the Deben still lurking to our right as we head for The Street, Kettleburgh (TM 267 604) and the end of this first leg of the Deben Way. Time to take a deep breath and ideally enjoy refreshments as you wait for your lift or if you're really feeling energetic, press on for the second leg towards Ufford. Whether you carry straight on or wait to walk another day you have a treat in store.

Nick's book Walking the Deben Way is a work in progress, though we're pleased to say that Part I, Mickfield–Kettleburgh is forthcoming in the RDA Journal. If you're interested in receiving the maps for this walk and the three other walks which take you to the mouth of the Deben email Nick at nick@nickcottam.com.

Ruth Leach

Getting Involved: The Deben Bluetits Swim Group

Ruth Leach



‘We felt healthier and happier’

You may have seen them in the River Deben, a distant splash hints at their approach, then a bobble hat becomes visible and finally; a colourful tow float skimming upriver on the incoming tide, heralds their arrival.

As they get closer, they are escorted into safety by other swimmers, welcomed by peals of friendly laughter and banter about how cold the water is. These are the ‘Deben Bluetits’ on a cold wintry morning sunrise swim at Waldringfield.

They emerge from the river flushed and glowing pink but it’s the incredible mixture of triumph and achievement on their faces that shows what they are feeling inside. Because despite the crimson skin...these people are truly happy.

The ‘Deben Bluetits’ swim group is part of the ‘Bluetits Chill Swimmers’ founded by Sian Richardson, an experienced triathlete from Pembrokeshire, in 2014. With a worldwide membership of 100,000 Bluetits worldwide; they swim, dip and connect with local blue spaces all year round and are renowned for their inclusivity and strong sense of community.

Ruth Leach



‘and quickly started to feel fitter’

The local group was started by Angela Soames and myself just as people were enjoying a renewed love of nature as a result of the forced isolation during the pandemic.

We started meeting up and dipping at Waldringfield but we had so much fun and felt so much better for it our social media posts soon drew other people in and a group of swimmers started to meet up regularly. We felt healthier and happier and quickly started to feel fitter – it was all good. As our group of like-minded water enthusiasts grew Angela Soames took the decision to formalise the group and we became affiliated to the Bluetits Chill swimmers. Angela has now moved on to other sporting pursuits leaving the group in the capable hands of the enthusiastic, friendly and inspirational admins who are all year-round swimmers.

Adult participants of all ages and ability are welcomed – if someone is planning to swim it is shared on the Facebook page ‘Deben Bluetits’ and they are free to join in if they would like to. The only expectation is the adherence to the code of safety laid down by the Bluetits Chill Swimmers head office.

Swimming safely is hugely important – wild swimming in the Deben brings its own risks from strong currents, the tides, river traffic, hidden obstacles, deep mud and cold-water shock.

The group swims at Waldringfield while there is another group at Shingle Street.

For further details visit our Facebook page: Deben Bluetits.

Ruth Leach is a photographer, campaigner and county councillor. A longer version of her article, with an update on water quality, will be published in the RDA Journal on 8th March 2024.

For more information about the Bluetits Chill Swimmers and view their code of safety please visit: thebluetits.co/pages/dont-be-a-tit-be-a-bluetit-swim-safety-resources.

Julia Jones

Book Review:

A Century of Sailing:

Waldringfield Sailing Club 1921–2021

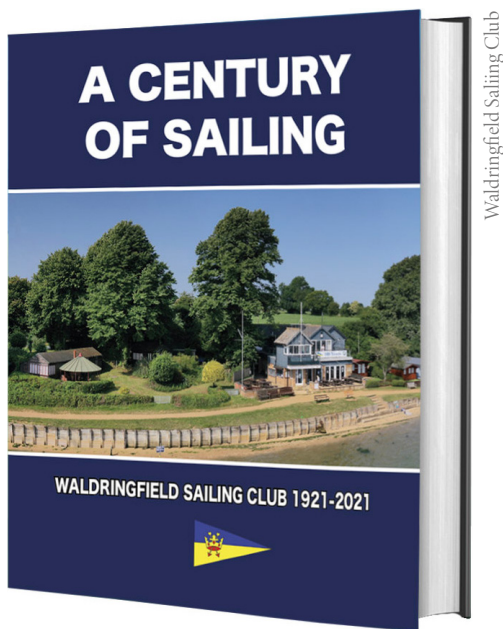
Robert Deaves

The post-WW1 1920s are often considered years of national exhaustion, personal and hardship, yet some people found they had a little more leisure and looked for fun. An initial gathering of a dozen people in Waldringfield, driven by the self-help ethos to organise a series of 6-8 races a season, has developed into a club of 800+ members, running more than 500 starts a year, competitive in national and international events while remaining determinedly local.

Writing in the *RDA Journal* (17 November 2023, riverdeben.org/rda-journal/a-remarkable-story-100-years-of-waldringfield-sailing-club) Robert Deaves called it a remarkable story – and so it is. Not all those 1920s start-ups are flourishing now as Waldringfield SC is.

This handsome 450-page book includes over 1000 photographs and is a tribute to Deaves's hard work and professionalism as well as to the commitment of the club members themselves.

£35, Waldringfield Sailing Club
waldringfieldsc.com



Artist Profile: Anne Townshend

Sarah: Hello Anne, and welcome to becoming a Deben- dweller! I hear that you have recently moved to Debenham, not quite the source of the Deben, but a long way upstream. What brought you there?

Anne Townshend



Anne Townshend

Anne: I previously lived in Nayland, then Boxford, West Suffolk, and have always loved old houses. But I decided with my partner – a long-term Woodbridge resident – that we would like an everything-working modern house with no draughts and we found a house which was about to be built in Debenham.

Sarah: When did the idea of being an artist take hold?

Anne Townshend

Anne: I've always been interested in art – I did a foundation course at art college and took art as my main teaching subject at teacher training college. But the demands of a busy job as a teacher and a young family left me little time for my then-interests in watercolours and charcoal. So it was only when I retired about 12 years ago that I had the time to really concentrate

on exploring art as a more full-time occupation.

Sarah: How did you decide that it would be print-making you would pursue?

Anne: I went on a number of courses and when I encountered my first print studio workshop, I immediately felt an affinity with that medium. The Print Workshop at Gainsborough's House gave me great support both on the artistic

front, and with practical advice for mounting exhibitions and selling work. I started going there about ten years ago and it introduced me to a close group of print-making friends. Most of my work now is limited edition prints from hand carved lino blocks, mostly made using the 'reduction' method, and printed with oil-based inks on my press.

Sarah: So will your press have a special place in your new home?

Anne: Yes, I will have a dedicated room in the house for a studio. My press is quite something – it is made by a firm called Harry F. Roach, who saw that the cast iron in the old



Anne's press



Poppy field

presses was cracking and couldn't be repaired. They knew that printmakers liked the handsome appearance of the Albion press, so they have reproduced it for a new generation of printmakers. It is enormously heavy so will have to be dismantled and re-installed in my new home.

Sarah: Where do you find the inspiration for your work?

Anne: Subjects for my prints all tend to be Suffolk inspired and I love the water and being on the river.

Sarah: Going forward, will the Deben feature in your work?

Anne: I'm very excited to be moving to the Deben's source, and definitely want to explore its route to Woodbridge and the sea, although these are as yet only kernels of ideas. My partner's boat is moored at Ramsholt, so our expeditions



Tractor tracks

in *Orbit* give me a great opportunity to find inspiration from the river.

Sarah: I first saw your work in the Artspace gallery in Woodbridge last year. Where do you tend to exhibit your art?

Anne: I have been exhibiting my artwork on the East Suffolk coast at Aldeburgh, Framlingham, Woodbridge, Snape, as well as Sudbury, Saffron Walden, Holt. My prints have been featured in several of Alan Marshall's books, and are also used by 'Green Pebble' cards.

My next exhibitions are at the Aldeburgh Gallery from 6th to 12th June, the Quay Gallery at Snape from 4th to 10th July and the Courtyard Gallery in Aldeburgh from 21st to 27th August.

Anne's website is: annetownshendart.weebly.com
Instagram @annetownshend.

Sarah Zins is a former chairman of the RDA.



Sand dunes, Southwold



Terns nesting

Peter Willis

Interview: Simon Scammell

Geoff Dixon



Zinnia leading the Victory class fleet,
'up harbour' Portsmouth



Anonymous

Simon helming Merlin Rocket
Stormcloud in Poole Harbour

Suffolk Sails can trace its origins back to the legendary Austin Farrar, whose ex-business partner Jim Welland set up the firm in 1980 in Woodbridge – initially in a shack in Robertsons. 'Eventually he got bored of flooding and moved here in 1984,' explains the present owner, Simon Scammell. 'Here,' not far from Woodbridge Tide Mill, is part of a complex of buildings that includes the Salt House where goods that serviced the mill were once stored.

Sadly most of the archive relics of Farrar's Seahorse Sails were lost in an over-enthusiastic clear-out, but Simon pulls a bulging and battered red ring-binder off a shelf in his office.

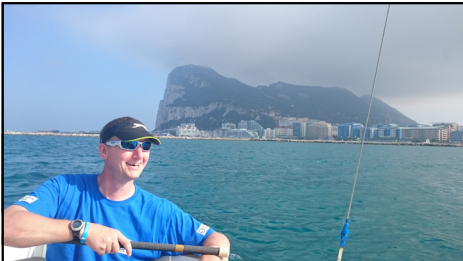
It's a 'rig book – quoting file' from Seahorse Sails / Austin Farrar. *British Oxygen*, Sir Robin Knox Johnston's Round Britain winner and Sir Francis Chichester's *Gypsy Moth IV* a few examples.

Simon joined in 1998, with a view to taking over the business. 'Jim anticipated he'd "start to retire" in about five years, but it didn't happen until 2007.'

By that time Simon was ready to computerise the business; he was an early adopter of SMAR AZURE sail design software. 'Some of the traditional gaffers and luggers we still make in the traditional way, scale-drawn and hand-cut, and computers at first were not that accurate, there was always some hand trimming for quality, but now what I see on the screen I see on the floor. The design software and laser cutting is now more accurate than the naked eye, allowing us to make sails for boats up to 60ft.'

There have been other changes over the years, too. 'Most of the boats we service are still local but we see our clients cruising much further afield now, and I've watched their sizes go up.

Simon Scammell



Team racing at Royal Gibraltar Yacht Club



Simon at Suffolk Sails

When I started the average length of a boat on the Deben was 24 to 26 ft – 32 ft was considered big. Now it's closer to the average.'

Some things don't change though – including the Easter rush. 'Dave White – ex Z spars MD – warned me, when I was starting out: "You'll get used to it – your skin will get thicker and you'll suffer fools less gladly."

Actually, Simon seems an equable sort of chap, with a dry Liverpudlian sense of humour. 'I think Jim hired me for that – his in-laws came from there too, in fact we'd discovered our families lived in the same street.'

And he restores his equanimity every summer by decamping to the Solent for Cowes Week, where he crews a Victory yacht for his brother.

Closer to home, at Felixstowe Ferry he has a Firefly for his children – 'the best boat for small people' – and a Merlin Rocket for himself. And he races on a few classic yachts enjoying the teamwork and banter that goes with friendships built on the water.

Back at work, he says 'Most sailmakers find all the money is in boat covers these days, but we still focus predominantly on sails and sail accessories'. Though some things have changed. 'When I started we were a jack of all trades, sails, rigging, covers, strong on snuffers – made them for every sailmaker in the UK and some abroad as well.'

New sails and covers/accessories makes up the majority of the work. Servicing and repairs account for about 40% of the business. All the sails and covers are hand-washed by a specialist contractor. 'I wouldn't let them be put through a machine – quickest way of wearing them out.' All *Nancy Blackett's* sails are here (following the demise of our previous maintenance firm) so that's reassuring news. And Suffolk Sails has a 'Silver Carbon Charter' awarded in 2017, meaning old sails don't disappear into landfill but are recycled – some into a range of tote bags, kit bags and the like... now there's an idea for some *Nancy Blackett* souvenirs!

Peter Willis is President of the Nancy Blackett Trust and a former deputy editor of Classic Boat magazine.

News from the Hards

Mark Longdin



Margeurite Explorer passing Felixstowe Ferry en-route from Ipswich to Woodbridge

Some things may go quiet across the winter months, but life and activity continues apace up and down the Deben Estuary, its boatyards and associated enterprises. A series of high tides and tidal surges have punctuated the last few months, but fortuitously not coinciding.

Woodbridge and Waldringfield Boatyards:

Since the last issue of *The Deben* magazine a record number of boats have been brought ashore for storage at Woodbridge and Waldringfield Boatyards.

Meanwhile, in their workshops much work is afoot: *Aelfwyn* (National Historic Ships No. 2246) is receiving replacement deckbeams, deck, cabintop, keelbolts and more; requiring painting and varnishing are a new-build Everson 11' clinker dinghy, a Whisstocks Deben Four Tonner restoration together with several other yachts and dinghies; several new wooden masts need to be created from scratch.

On the 3rd of April breaths will be held for the announcement of how *Peter Duck* (28ft berm ketch) has fared in this year's *Classic Boat* Magazine restoration awards. This nomination comes after two years of major maintenance work

Simon Ballard



Timber rot at the Tide Mill

at Woodbridge Boatyard that means that Arthur Ransome's well-known 'marine bath chair' will be safe for decades (votes close 11 March).

Maintenance of pontoons and moorings is ongoing at both yards in anticipation of the new season. Woodbridge and Waldringfield Boatyards recently also had the privilege of assisting Tam Grundy in moving the 70ft 1934 Danish sailing fishing boat *Margeurite Explorer* from Ipswich to Woodbridge where her restoration will continue.

The **Deben Cruises** 2024 schedule is already filling up well with coach, private group and individual bookings to enjoy the scenic and informative river trips from Waldringfield.

The **Felixstowe Ferry Foreshore Trust** is looking for further volunteers to serve on its management committee. With the River Deben Association having a share in the trust, it is likely that an RDA

Officer might step forward as that volunteer! (there are 2-3 meetings per year some more, some less).

John White, Harbourmaster at the Ferry reports that The Bar and the Knolls are moving which is normal throughout the winter months. Trinity House will be doing their annual survey in early spring, which will include the Deben entrance and the Orford river. In the meantime, the Deben entrance buoys can still be used with caution. Anyone using the channel is encouraged to call John for the latest updates.

Unfortunately, the Bawdsey cliffs are in a terrible state of erosion, with landslides, old wartime emplacements and trees ending-up on the beach. It is only possible to get along the beach at low water so anyone thinking of going to take a look should be aware of getting cut off by the oncoming tide! (Tide times available on the RDA website).

John received a visit from the Community Support Officer of East Suffolk Council who was seeking any information on speeding on the river, powerboat wash, any jet-ski problems, the current speed limits. There is currently a raised awareness of these issues which will be included in The Deben Estuary Partnership Plan – being revised in 2024.

Ian Moore, Harbourmaster at Ramsholt: Whilst in role in time for mention in *The Deben* #67's Editor's Introduction, still-new Harbourmaster Ian is looking forward to his first full season at Ramsholt. As always, every effort will be made to cater for visiting yachtsmen and although Ramsholt has no official visitors' moorings, several of the established mooring holders allow their moorings to be used on an 'at own risk' basis. If any queries, do call Ian on his official mobile 07510 444462.

Tony Lyon, Harbourmaster at Waldringfield: There remains a high demand for moorings, whilst in the newly designated bathing water area, wild swimmers are coming down regularly and there

have also been recent sightings of an otter just off the beach. New scrubbing posts are available for suitable vessels to use at a cost of £20 per tide – bookings should be made via the Harbourmaster on his official mobile 07925 081062.

Woodbridge Quay: Work is continuing flat out on the Café to try and get it finished. Of course, work has been torpedoed on a regular basis by the over-winter tidal surges and gale force winds making it very hard to progress but the end is now in sight!

Woodbridge Quay's ownership extends to the beach by the pedestrian bridge over the railway and there are plans for further tidying up of the beach, having already removed lots of lumps of broken concrete, plastic rubbish and general clutter including about 4 dilapidated dinghies! Licensing the use of the beach may be the best way forward.

Woodbridge Tide Mill: After the printing of 'Educating Young Eco-warriors' in *The Deben* #67, Woodbridge Tide Mill's engineering team have discovered some timber rot in the inner pit area that on close inspection requires to be made good by an expert.

The cause of the problem is that the timber stays wet for longer with today's higher tide heights, compared with when the Mill was designed over 850 years ago. The timber in question supports the main bearing for the colossal vertical shaft that drives the millstones. The shaft's wood and metal gears convert horizontal rotation from the mill's wheel into vertical rotation up through the Mill to power the stones. Given its importance, this significant piece of wood needs the sort of attention that will require expertise, heavy lifting, and budget to see through.

After expert advice and a professional structural survey, a tender has gone out for replacement of the timber with bricks. The cost will be in excess of £11,000. So, the coming months will be occupied with preparing for this project and seeking a grant or grants to help pay for the essential work.

The River Deben Association

Annual General Meeting: 24th April 2024

Are we Really up the Creek?:

An informed discussion on water quality

Following the AGM of the River Deben Association, there will be a discussion on water quality in the river.

It will be prefaced by a short talk from two speakers, both well-versed in the issue:

- David Finlay (*Citizen Scientist Coordinator and Chair, Ufford Parish Council*)
- Dr Robin Price (*Anglian Water company*)

There will be plenty of opportunity to put your questions to them after their talks. It's your chance to find out actual facts on this often emotive topic.

Doors open 7.00 for 7.30.

Entry is free to RDA members, £5 to non members. Tickets are bookable on Eventbrite. eventbrite.com/e/are-we-really-up-the-creek-an-informed-discussion-on-water-quality-tickets-850654429297

If you would like to come but do not use the Internet, please advise the Membership Secretary at Riverside, Fayrefield Road, Melton IP12 1NX.

Welcome refreshments will be provided.

Committee

Robert Simper	President
Jane Haviland	Co-chair
Colin Nicholson	Co-chair
Liz Hattan	Vice-chair
	Conservation
Caroline Peeke	Secretary
Moray MacPhail	Treasurer
	Membership Secretary
Matt Lis	River Businesses
Sue Orme	Planning
Caroline Matthews	Riverside History

Co-opted, for election at RDA 2024 AGM:

Anne Marie Sellon	Social Media
Ben Grundy	Estuary Matters

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Julia Jones	Publications Editor
Alan Comber	Website Manager
Tristan McConnell	Publicity

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All other matters	chair@riverdeben.org



River Deben Association



The RDA Journal

The *RDA Journal* is published fortnightly on our website: riverdeben.org/rda-journal. It offers space for RDA members with particular interests and knowledge to write at length about subjects which interest them. This is building up a significant archive of expertise. Recent contributions have included:

20/10/2023

Leave Only Ripples

Matt Lis

03/11/2023

**Remembrance
Sunday 2023: Two
Films from Tim
Curtis (We Fought
Them in Gunboats
& Stanley's War)**

Julia Jones

17/11/2023

**A Remarkable
Story: 100 years
of Waldringfield
Sailing Club**

Robert Deaves

01/12/2023

**Churches of the
Deben: Part 1**

Gareth Thomas

15/12/2023

**Ramsholt
Churchyard
September Flowers**

Julia Jones

12/01/2024

**Lord Deben's
Climate Change
Talk: 'Net Zero—
where are we now?'**

Tristan McConnell

26/01/2024

**Citizen Science –
Fish Survey 2023**

Steve Colcough

09/02/2024

**Volunteers Running
an International
Event**

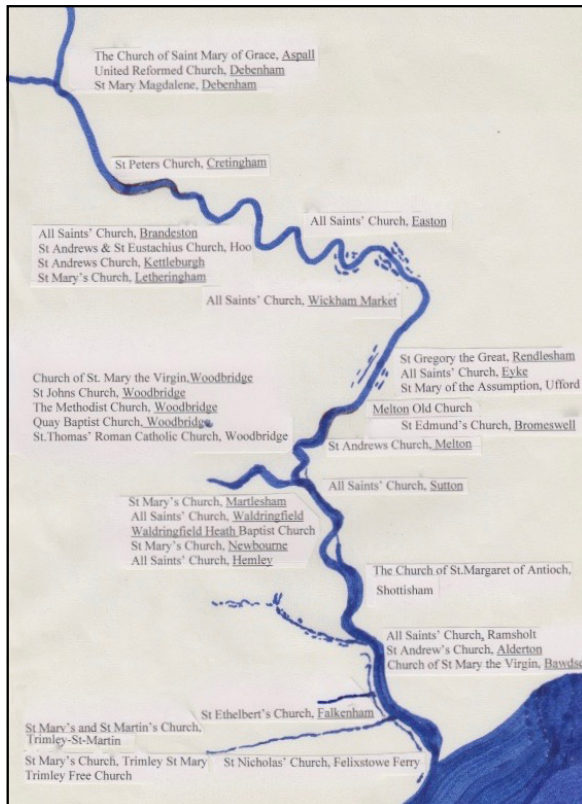
Alice Thorogood

23/02/2024

**Churches of the
Deben: Part 2**

Gareth Thomas

Gareth Thomas



The Deben Churches

Among the varied and expert articles published fortnightly on the RDA website as the *RDA Journal*, you will find five different walks contributed by Sue Ryder Richardson. These are circular walks centred round locations in the Upper Deben as well as Hemley and Martlesham. Nick Cottam has given permission for us to publish his Mickfield–Kettleburgh (*Walking the Deben Way* part 1) similarly. All of them include maps, text and photos, and include references to some of the lovely Deben Churches. Now, if you carry a phone with you, you can also find exploration and informed comment covering an increasing number of all the 33 Deben churches in Gareth Thomas's source-to-sea survey, beginning at Aspell. It's another way to explore our river in its setting.



Julia Jones Geoff Dixon



Anne Townshend



Jane Russell



Caroline Peeke



Caroline Peeke

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

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