



The Alde & Ore Association

Newsletter 50 - Winter 2018

The Chairman's note

What an amazing summer. The river was so often the coolest place to be. Yet the day of the Annual Barbecue could not have been wetter and windier but Association members are very hardy and a full marquee enjoyed it as much as in any other year.

The summer was definitely one for enjoying every aspect of our lovely estuary whether sailing, canoeing, walking, watching birds and other wild life – and just being.

The Association is about helping to preserve and provide enjoyment for all in and around the estuary. This summer we had two good walks, the Annual Barbecue and a bumper year for the ferry.

It is great to report the very good news that the Environment Agency have already restored the sea shingle wall south of Martello, as it planned to do this autumn after the ravages of the Beast from the East in March. David Kemp has kindly written a piece on this for us (please see page 12).

Meanwhile work continues on the review of the Shoreline Management Plan policy for that stretch of the coast. The Alde & Ore Estuary Partnership (AOEP) sits on the official working group dealing with this and I am happy to report progress is being made towards identifying options to be put to the public for consultation, once all



In this issue

Butley Ferry's milestone

Restoring Slaughden's Ridge

A visit to Pinney's

Braving a stormy Barbecue

Our new Marketing Group

The Brick Dock Appeal

AOEP updates

Dates for your diary

Reeds, glorious reeds

*A Butley Ferry milestone
See page 9*

the necessary sustainability and strategic assessment has been completed and the best evidence collected and made available to inform choices.

It looks as if the options will relate to ways of sustaining the shingle wall beyond the original policy of 2025 to 2055, rather than allowing a permanent breach to develop eventually.

On the planning front we await the result of the Public Inquiry into whether the appeal by the developer to install 43 houses in the corner of Brick Dock against the application being turned down by Suffolk Coastal District Council should be allowed. The Inspector held the inquiry over six days. Evidence was submitted and cross-examined by the counsels for the appellant, the SCDC and the Aldeburgh Town Council supported by the Aldeburgh Society, the Association and many individuals.

The public gallery was well attended, showing the level of local concern and the Association was represented on all days. Indeed the Association added to its four submissions made over the years to emphasise the impact of the plans given the proposed heights of the buildings and the designs to give most of them views over the estuary.

Other members of the public spoke too including one, following a reference from the appellant's side about the unimportance of the view from the river, who pointed out that with all the sailing, other boats on the river and visitors on the *Lady Florence*, as many as 6000 people in any year might view the landscape which could be changed by the proposed development.

The major issues are the balance between the normally essential need to preserve and protect Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and whether there is a proven housing need. The Inspector was very assiduous in taking stock at every viewpoint around the estuary from which the site could be seen, recommended by everyone including the Association, as well as listening to all that was brought into the proceedings. It is possible that a report may be completed by Christmas but we do not know when the Secretary of State will make a ruling in the light of that report.

Turning to Partnership matters, the AOEP being responsible for the plan and programme to restore river

walls to a sound level, as you will see on page 13, steps continue to be taken towards getting all the necessary evidence and business plans in place to put in for permissions and also to seek as much government money as possible. These simply take time as we have a long and complex estuary.

Meanwhile the Alde and Ore Estuary Trust is coming towards its first full year of fund raising following the initial launches, many leaflets circulated, approaches to individuals, the Cricket Match and a pilot 'swim-and-canoe-athon' from Aldeburgh to Orford in preparation for next year. In addition there have been some wonderful initiatives by individuals, in particular the Wine Tasting evening at Orford organised by Gilly Beddard, who very sadly died recently, Andrew and Theresa Curtis, Chris and Caroline Gill and Doris Fulford with Derek Smedley the wine expert. Fund raising will continue over the next few years and if as many of us can make donations now or commitments to make donations over a number of years it will all be very helpful.

The summer also saw the very welcome decision that the estuary is not to be designated as a Marine Conservation Zone. As the Association argued and along with the AOEP provided evidence, the estuary's habitats are already very amply protected by both national and international protection designations and a further layer would have been unnecessary gold plating. Furthermore, much as we value our estuary, the issues pointed up for designation did not have the evidence to support such protection. Again, the Association, with your help, is the eyes and ears for dealing with matters that may affect the estuary and is your voice for seeking to ensure a good outcome.

This summer Simon Barrow had been working with his team of volunteers, generously giving of their time and ideas, as to how the Association can broaden its appeal and promote understanding of its value to more in the Alde and Ore communities and of all generations. It is a case of work in progress.

I wish you all a very good winter with hopefully bright skies and lovely winter walks along the estuary, and seeing the wintering birds.

Wanted

Who would like the fun of being the Association's Newsletter Editor? Or be part of a Newsletter team?

Is there anyone who would like to help with the Association's website? We have our leader but help would be good.

Is anyone interested in doing more for the Association's various activities whether helping organise walks, being a trustee or helping on planning matters?

Please contact Alison Andrews 01728 452660 (aldeblackburn@aol.com)



A Walk in May ...

This May we returned to explore a different circuit of the upper Alde valley, starting and finishing at Whitehouse Farm where Jason Gathorne-Hardy kindly allowed us to gather and, after the walk, enjoy our lunch in the barn.

George Knight kindly led the trail, full of spring green colours in the upper Alde Estuary. The approximately six-mile circuit was easy, happy walking along valley bottoms, past newly growing wheat crops, and wooded areas with flushes of spring flowers including bluebells, ransoms (wild garlic) and many more. The leaves were emerging on the later trees like the oaks, of which there are many of a good and ancient size in this area.

We began admiring an exhibit for the Spring Festival before walking across a field with foot-high wheat northwards to the confusingly named Whitehouse Farm, and then past lovely names like Potash Cottage, Grove Farm, West Mead and Mount Pleasant Farm.

This took us around Rendham, where a sculptured head of the Roman emperor Claudius was found in the river, to Sweffling and on via Friar's Grove and Haw Wood before returning to the excellent long trestle tabled and benched furnished barn to have a lovely ham and salad lunch

masterminded by John Grayburn. William and Akiko Eddis set a splendid example for the Association, which he had suggested at the AGM, of collecting in any rubbish found on the route.

... a walk in September ...

For our September walk Liz Feibusch, our key organiser for this walk, identified a lovely four-and-a-bit mile round walk around Gedgrave marshes. We piled into as few cars as we could at Orford Sailing Club and parked, courtesy of the Gedgrave Estate, close to a path going directly south to the river wall. In this way we saved ourselves doing an additional four mile round trip which many members, particularly those living near Orford, are very familiar with as we wanted to reach the less-travelled farther parts.

Arriving there we turned right and walked up on the river wall that was recovering its green carpet after the very dry summer and much grazing by geese. The tide was high which limited the number of birds on the shore but we could see over to Havergate Island, where the walls



Akiko and William Eddis and their haul of rubbish.



at times and quite strong winds but the whole landscape was a wonderful tapestry of colours seen in the vegetation and the steely water between. With no manmade noise there was a splendid peace and quiet.

At the end of the walk Bill Pinney very kindly spent some time introducing us to the operations which Pinney's undertake in this quiet corner of the Butley valley to give us terrific quality fresh fish, shellfish and smoked fish of many kinds.

Then we climbed back into the cars and, thanks to Orford Sailing Club providing a base out of the wind and on the terrace overlooking the river, we feasted on a rewarding lunch of good freshly cooked ham with a variety of salads put together by members.

Note: We like to do two or three walks a year. It would be good to spread the organisation and ideas across members. If any member has a good idea for a walk in the Alde and Ore Valley, and if anyone wants to help with catering, we can make up walk teams so the burden does not fall on one person alone. Please do get in touch: aldeandore@gmail.com or 01728 452660.

had originally been built to accommodate pasture some 400 years ago, although it was last farmed in about 1921.

We could just see the newly refurbished walls where, following the breach in the 2013 surge, the RSPB had mended them to be broader and lower: this well thought through construction enables any exceptional tide or surge to overtop and fill the areas behind quickly so reducing pressure on the walls and at the same time refreshes the pools and lagoons for the benefit of the bird and other animal populations. This method is also of benefit to the upper estuary as it takes the edge off large surges before they go up river.

Passing along the river wall round into Butley Creek we were followed by a friendly seal keeping an eye on us from just below the salting edge. We passed the Butley Ferry crossing with its handsome new walkways, built by the ferrymen, protecting the salt marsh as well as helping passengers avoid heavily muddy feet. As the tide fell we were rewarded with seeing oystercatchers, redshanks and the odd avocet.

The pastures behind the walls were being grazed placidly by sheep and the ditches, originally the land from which the clay for the walls was won, had a flourishing swans' nest with at least five cygnets, a statuesque heron and other birds too. The sky might have been a little blue with clouds

... and a visit to Pinney's



Bill Pinney.

Devon depending on where the demand is.

At the time of the walk the main catch was sole and skate, using nets lowered to barely touch the seabed and skim over it for about half a mile. This has to be done where the seabed is clean; there is not very much of that as even starfish roll up into the net and make it unusable. This is real sustainable fishing. Lobsters are also good at this time of the year.

Bill explained that the best sites for pots were around the wrecks of coal ships, of which many were sunk in the First World War as getting coal to London was an essential cargo. Now the wrecks are home to the lobsters and the pots have to be lowered very gently around the edges of the wrecks so they don't catch on the very sharp projections of the broken boats.

None of us knew quite how much there is to oyster production until Bill told us. He explained that to grow oysters commercially, the eggs and sperm have to be caught, the fertilised egg called oyster larva develop cilia for swimming within 20 minutes! These are then kept in a salt water solution over two to three weeks where they grow from minute specks to a size, again tiny, where they are ready to become oysters when they grow a foot and cling to tiles, looking rather like granules on sandpaper.

After a little more growth they can be brushed off the tiles and kept in mesh bags, 3mm mesh for 6mm oysters. At this point Pinney's buy them in and keep them in the Butley, which is very clean, on the buoyed area above the oyster beds in the centre of the river. These tiny oysters are regularly sieved and moved into sacks with a mesh appropriate to their greater size. After three to six months – oysters all grow at different rates – the small oysters are then about 15 grams in weight and big enough to look after themselves, so they are broadcast on the bed up the

On 7th September, 16 of us enjoyed a wonderful walk around the Gedgrave loop with the crowning treat of being shown around the production site of the Pinney's of Orford business on the Butley Creek by Bill Pinney himself.

We began on the beach learning about the oyster beds and fishing. Bill has two fishing boats that go out to sea, weather permitting, and their catch is sold at The Butley Oysterage Restaurant, other local restaurants and then markets as far afield as Lowestoft, the Netherlands and



centre of the river where, after another 12-15 months, they can be harvested. Once harvested they are pressure hosed to clean them and then kept in purification tanks for 48 hours, entirely in circulating pure sea water which ensures that the oysters are clean, and then pressure cleaned again ready for market. (Never eat an oyster that is open, only the ones that are firmly shut).

This production is closely monitored and inspected by the food health authorities, which regularly take oysters away for testing. The oysters are in particularly good condition from October to July, as the breeding season, from August to early September, weakens them temporarily.

We then moved to look at the smoke house. For the smoked fish production Bill seeks to source the raw materials of the best possible quality. There is very little wild salmon available now and the farmed fish come from Wester Ross, where special non-fattening foods are fed to ensure good quality salmon. It takes longer for them to grow and so is more costly, but the end result is so very different (fast growing feed methods result in fatty salmon).

Cod roes come from Iceland as the roes are composed of very small eggs and are firmer than those produced by cod in the North Sea. Herring come from Norway where larger herring can be caught; local herring is very tasty but generally consumers want larger herrings. Mackerel come from Donegal in North West Ireland where they are

caught in peak condition in January (fish have periods when their texture and taste is poor because of the effects of the breeding cycle). Sourcing good quality fish is the basis for good quality smoked products.

Pinney's use solid oak logs for the smoking process. Sawdust is used by some smokeries but it can result in acrid and tarry smoke, whereas a slowly fired oak log produces a much sweeter smoke. The fish are prepared and hung individually in the smokery over about 24 hours, the timing an art in assessing if the fish is ready. Salmon sides are laid out in layers of salt for a while so the water is taken out and a side reduces in weight from about 3lb to 1lb before being hung. The fish are cold smoked first: they hang in what looks like a cupboard with smoke passing through. Then if the fish is to be hot smoked fish they are transferred to another unit without smoke, but strong heat from the base that takes a couple of hours.

After that the smoked products are taken to the Pinney business near Orford quay in Quay Street and the restaurant in Market Hill, Orford for final processing, such as boning and packing.

It was a fascinating visit, wonderful products coming from careful processing with minimum technology and all happening tucked away on the banks of the Butley River. Our huge thanks to Bill Pinney for giving us such an interesting insight into his business.

Another successful annual Barbecue Undaunted, members brave the storm

After a flaming, hot summer with brilliant and ceaseless sunlight, Sunday 26th August dawned to something completely different with horizontal rain and wind blowing Force 5 and gusting Force 8, or so it felt. Nevertheless Association members are never daunted. More than 100 braved the elements and came to the special place near Chapman's Creek that was kindly lent to us by the Skepper family. It was great to have three Skepper generations joining us.

Reaching there is an adventure in itself, as the road winds round from Iken, down Lamberts Lane into Ferry Road and then through a maze of farm tracks until we emerged at the river wall. And there suddenly was Aldeburgh which, a 30-minute drive away, seemed to be just a hop, skip and jump across the river. Those with heads bent against the storm may have seen the late flowering sea pinks on this remote unspoilt bank and saltings. Others may have seen just how much land, aquifers and buildings are protected by the long stretches of wall on the Sudbourne side as well as the newly refurbished wall on the Aldeburgh side.

Even the most stalwart of sailors who planned to arrive by boat could not beat the flying spray, wild water and

boats bucking on their moorings – possibly the first time we have had a barbecue in such challenging weather and with no-one coming by boat despite the tide being the determiner of the date.

Lizzie Clark had arranged for a splendid marquee into which we all squeezed and so many people met new people and chatted in spite of the adverse weather outside. Some sat outside in the lee of the marquee but were driven inside by the rain running off the roof and down the backs of their necks.

Paradoxically, with the weather forcing everyone to cram into the marquee, everyone declared the event a great success as, in the confines of the marquee, they met and chatted with new people rather than sitting in their own groups outside.

Lizzie had organised a fantastic array of food, with the help of Stannards, the butcher, to barbecue the meat, and some 15 members very kindly producing an ambrosial array of salads. The roulades rounded off the meal excellently. Clearly the secret of a good party is to feed everyone well, and all to enjoy being away from the elements.





As the marquee was somewhat cramped the Chairman posted her planned address on line instead, bringing members up to date on all matters concerning the Association and the estuary. A key point was that keeping the estuary going is now requiring a huge effort by the local community. The government agencies we work with here seek to be very helpful and assist the work to restore the river walls. The river walls need substantial work every 50-70 years, as it had been done down the centuries. The walls are just clay and settle. Surges will find the weaknesses so we must keep the walls in good repair.

The estuary plan is basically on course, as confirmed by the latest modelling, but there are some final details to be tweaked on what work needs to be done as the walls vary so much in quality and survivability. The Alde and Ore Estuary Partnership (AOEP) and Alde and Ore Estuary Trust (AOET) hope to have the final costing soon for the work which needs to be done in the light of the modelling we spoke about earlier this year. The cost will be some £12m, possibly a bit more and the Government we hope will come up with about £2m.

Photographs courtesy of Ian Cook.

Wanted: Annual Barbecue Maestro

We have the place, date and time: what we also need is someone who loves organising barbecues or a barbecue team for some 150 people, including marquee, meat, salad team, bar and parking.

Please contact Alison Andrews 01728 452660.



Bryan Rodgers at the Capel bank, 1993. Photograph and extract reproduced with the kind permission of Robert Simper.

A Butley Ferry milestone

Roy Truman writes:

Browsing in Woodbridge Library this summer I came across a book with the snappy title of *Rivers Alde, Ore and Blyth* by Robert Simper. Flicking through the pages of photographs of days gone by, I found one that, it turns out, marks a quite significant milestone in Butley Ferry history. The photo shows a man, standing in a dinghy, with sailing boats behind. The caption reads:

Butley ferryman Bryan Rodgers with Graham Hussey's *Horace & Hannah* behind, beating up the Butley River, 1993. There was a ferry operating across the Butley River until about 1919. The ferry house was near Barrow Hill and on the other shore there was a bell to summon the ferry. In 1993 Sir Edward Greenwell, who owned the ferry

right and the river bed, supplied the material, and Bryan Rodgers repaired the hards and reopened the ferry. The old hard on the Gedgrave shore is buried under two feet of silt. In the first season the new Butley Ferry averaged two passengers a week.

Bryan and Graham ran the ferry for many years and, when they retired from duty, others in turn have taken their places. My chance glance at a library book and a rudimentary grasp of mathematics made me realise that this year is, in fact, the 25th anniversary of the reopening of the ferry and worth a celebration.

Would they recognise what they set in motion? Well, as in their day the ferry is still a muddy little dinghy, still rowed, but festooned with life belts as modern safety standards

demand. We still enjoy, and benefit from, the support of the Greenwell family on both banks of the river. Repairing the hards has been an almost annual event although we now have a raised jetty on the Gedgrave bank, reducing the muddy walk across the saltings and down to the boat.

This will soon be joined, we hope, by a raised jetty on the Capel bank to minimise the mud collected by the passengers as they make their way to the ferry. What Bryan and Graham may be surprised by is the number

of people using the ferry through the season. This year is likely to see over 1000 passengers with almost 400 cycles. And what's more, the ferry has its own leaflet, Facebook page, website and has featured in numerous magazines, on television and on the radio.

At this year's annual Ferryman's Lunch we will raise a glass to their foresight and hard work, maybe enjoy a slice of celebratory cake, and look forward to the next 25 years of ferrying.

The Alde & Ore Association Marketing Group

Simon Barrow writes:

Following discussion at this year's AGM, the Association has formed a team to develop plans to:

understand our membership and what it seeks from us;

increase the level of engagement with existing and prospective members;

increase the numbers of younger members, *ie* those under 55.

The volunteers are William Eddis, Bobby Rusack, Frances Barnwell, Mark Goyder, Susie Bridges, Chris Gill and A&O trustee Simon Barrow. Trustees have now seen the Group's interim report which focuses on these themes:

Our independence as the only membership-driven body where all who wish to preserve the Estuary, and the life it enables, can have their say and be listened to.

Our confidence and freedom to influence, question and hold to account all who put at risk the aims of our founding statement on preservation.

With 2,500 members, the Association is a force to be reckoned with as our history over 25 years has demonstrated.

Update our approach to data management to achieve greater knowledge, response and engagement.

Review of our existing and potential audiences and how best to listen and work with them.

Convey the benefits of membership.

The Association thanks this new team and approves this thinking but will need more discussion on detail before announcing plans for implementation. In the meantime would members with experience in any of the following fields consider how they might help and contact Simon on simon@simonbarrow.org.uk: market and employee research; digital and data management; strategic consulting; internal/external communication; management of a Suffolk based business.



Frances Barnwell



Simon Barrow



Susie Bridges



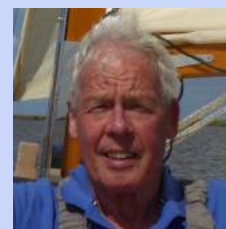
William Eddis



Chris Gill



Mark Goyder
Copyright Elizabeth Handy



Bobby Rusack

The Alde & Ore Estuary Trust

Jane Maxim writes:

After an event-packed summer, The Alde & Ore Estuary Trust (AOET) is delighted to have received a record number of donations from local businesses and visitors to the area. The wrapping of the old East Suffolk Hotel on Aldeburgh's High Street made headline news over the August carnival weekend and local fundraising initiatives included a 50p donation from every fish and chip meal at the White Lion and Brudenell hotels throughout the summer months.

With the Authors Cricket Club, including Sebastian Faulks and Tom Holland, stepping up to the crease at Sudbourne Hall Cricket Club in September, followed later that month by the Four Ferries Bike Ride, sporting events are popular and set the tone for the mass flotilla event from Aldeburgh to Orford, likely to be held in July 2019. Two swimmers in a test flotilla this year swam the course in one hour, despite jellyfish, and paddleboarders were even quicker.

Since the launch of the Save Our Suffolk Estuary Campaign in October 2017, about £550,000 has been donated and, pleasingly, almost £50,000 has been pledged via standing orders on a yearly basis. In 2017 alone, we were eligible for £14,500 in gift aid and 2018 will see this

increase substantially.

The Trust is only one source (although crucial) of funding for the Estuary Plan: farmers and landowners have taken on a £3 million pound loan as working capital, paid off via increased rates over 30 years, and have pledged to raise £5 million for their share. Applications for government grants (Flood Defence Grant in Aid) made by the Internal Drainage Board and to charitable foundations made by the Trust will also be very important. And the Alde & Ore Association is keeping the Andren Legacy (£600,000+) ready for work on the Orford flood cell.

In the meantime the AOET is now able to receive online donations via its website as well as by cheque, text, standing order or BACS. Please visit their website www.aoetrust.org for more information.

Lastly, please join us for the gala opening night at the Jubilee Hall, Aldeburgh of A Crag Path Christmas from 6.30pm to 9.30pm on 27th December. Tickets £30 for adults and £15 for children include a donation to the Trust, a festive drink and nibbles after the show. Click below.

www.aoetrust.org/new-events/2018/12/27/a-crag-path-christmas

The Estuary when the Beast from the East visited.



Broken shingle wall seen from the sea in summer. Photograph courtesy Keith Martin.



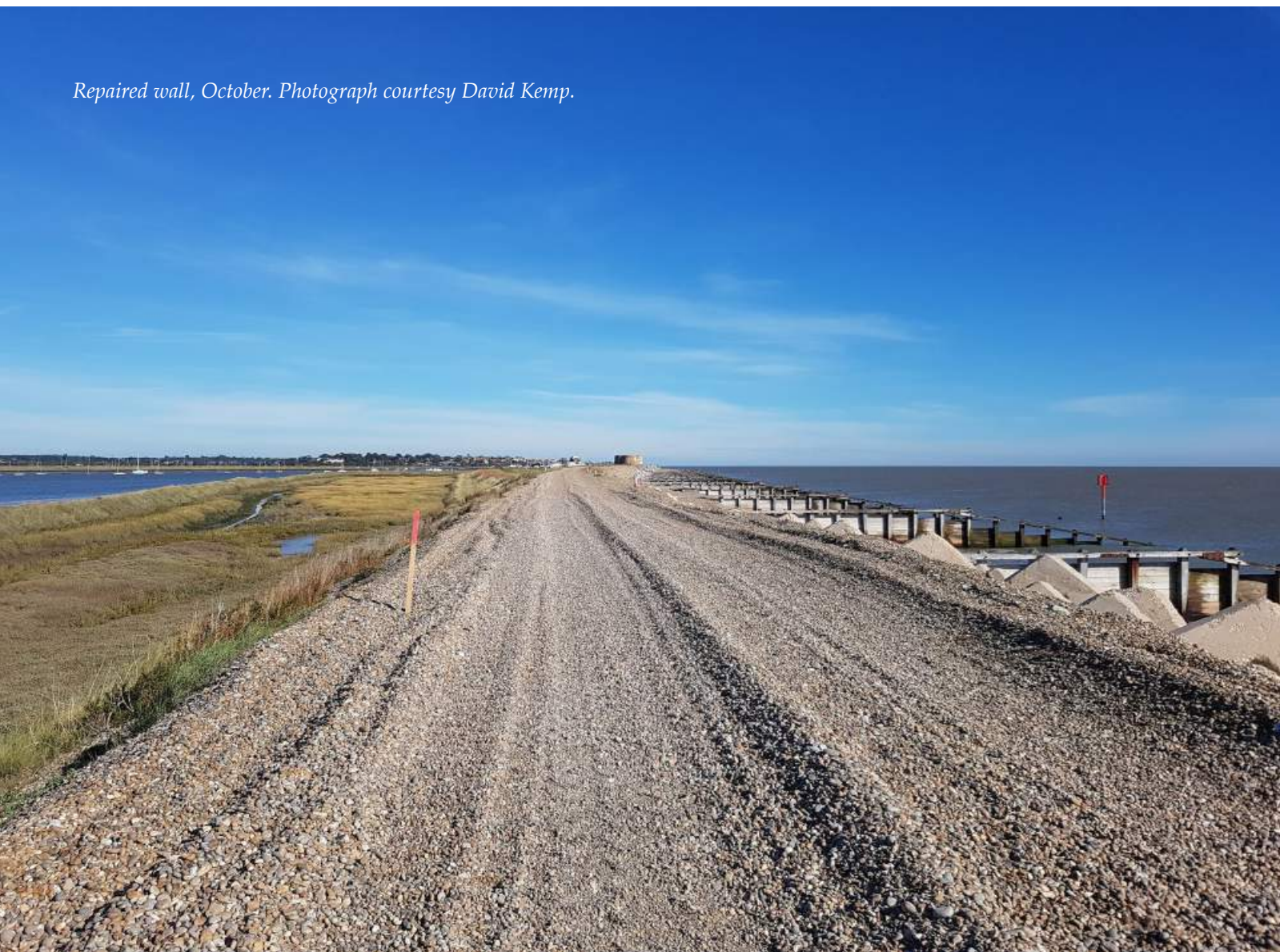
Works at Slaughden

David Kemp of the Environment Agency writes:

The storms of March 2018 had a significant impact on the Slaughden Ridge. By the end of the month a 7-metre wide crest was a thin line of shingle that had also been considerably lowered. The Environment Agency moved into action at the beginning of September to recycle shingle from Sudbourne Beach back onto the Slaughden Ridge.

The environmental sensitivities of such a precious site as Orford Ness necessitate numerous restrictions on this work. The timing of works is limited to September and October. The work is further controlled by restrictions on how much material can be removed, where it is taken from, the route that is used to access the material and bring it to the ridge, the placement of the material and the

Repaired wall, October. Photograph courtesy David Kemp.



number of vehicle movements.

Work began in early September creating safe access along the ridge. Once the route was safe for machinery the recycling of shingle to the ridge began in earnest, starting at the southernmost access point, removing the material from below the Mean High Water mark and moving northward to the next access point as each donor site was exhausted.

Weather conditions in September were excellent for carrying out the work. Unfortunately they were less good for bringing shingle to the donor sites. This left us short of material from below the MHW. Secondly, we encountered

problems on the night of Saturday, 6th October.

During the hours of darkness, 2½-metre waves, driven by an easterly wind, nibbled at the ridge. This has left us with a bank that is a little narrower than originally envisaged. Licensing restrictions mean we cannot rebuild it exactly as planned. It is a reminder that the ridge will always be vulnerable to easterly winds and waves, however much effort is expended on construction.

Work is now underway to remove our equipment from site, and to repair any damage to access tracks we may have caused. Our thanks to National Trust and Cobra Mist Limited for their cooperation in this project.

An Estuary Glossary

AOA: The Alde and Ore Association is concerned with ALL matters to do with preserving the Alde, Ore and Butley rivers for the enjoyment of the public and benefit to all and works by making the voice of the river heard. (All matters include everything from seeking to influence possible government policies that may affect the estuary, from planning proposals to activities such as the ferry, walks, walk booklets and more.)

AOEP The Alde and Ore Estuary Partnership was set up to draw up and run a flood defence programme to

protect the estuary, its communities, houses, economy and environmental features for the longer term; and to ensure the river is treated as a whole with the integrity of the estuary being maintained as far as possible by ensuring appropriate levels of defence standard along all the river walls.

AOET Alde and Ore Estuary Trust is the Treasury for the estuary. It is an incorporated charitable organisation responsible for handling all money collected in for the river defence works and also takes the lead on fundraising.



Alde & Ore Estuary Partnership

The Partnership is waiting for defined costs from the Internal Drainage Board (IDB) for schemes for both the upper and lower estuary. A public presentation of all finances and an update on fundraising is planned for early February 2019 to allow everyone to view the current situation with regard to consents, scheme plans, start of work and finances generally.

It is hoped that Environment Agency consents for work in Snape and Aldeburgh will be forthcoming to allow work to start early in 2019, weather permitting. Enabling development plans are on hold until the overall finances have been assessed.

Over the last year fundraising activities have produced over £1.2 million in the bank with additional pledges

made of £1 million. Applications to The Heritage Lottery Fund and other foundations are currently underway. The Funding Group are preparing a calendar of fundraising events for next year which will be available shortly.

Everyone who lives, works or visits the estuary is encouraged to donate however they wish – from £10 to £100,000 – no holds barred – either a one-off payment or staggered over several years. The Estuary Trust looks forward to hearing from you! Visit www.aoetrust.org for relevant forms or to contact the Trust if you wish to speak to a Trustee.

If you would like to receive newsletters and press releases please sign up for the newsletter on either of these websites www.aoep.co.uk or www.aoetrust.org

Reeds, glorious reeds

By Karen Mountford

If you visit the Alde river at the Snape Maltings the first thing you see are the reeds. They edge the river as it winds eastwards and from the deck behind the Maltings you can see them spread out into whispering acres of waving grass up to five feet tall.

The common reed, Norfolk reed or to give it its scientific name of *Phragmites australis*, is found pretty well worldwide at water margins and is superbly adapted to its habitat, being tolerant of wet feet and the brackish water in tidal river estuaries and salt marshes. In fact it is a little too well adapted as it tends to out-compete everything else and become a monoculture where it is happy.

On the North Warren RSPB reserve they cut parts of it back in places so the other wetland plants, like the loosestrife and the marsh orchid, can have a chance to grow. In former times of course, it would have been cropped for thatch and grazed by cattle but nowadays we have to manually keep it in check.

It spreads by rhizomes; underground stems, like a giant couch grass. The thick mat of roots anchors and stabilises the mud and every tide washes more mud in to be trapped. A temperate alternative to a mangrove swamp. The dead plant matter forms a thick mulch and eventually the land rises, goat willow and silver birch seed in and woodland starts to form.

In the spring new reed shoots grow through the previous year's dead stalks and eventually the flowers appear. The typical grassy tassels of a wind-pollinated plant in this case have a brief glory of glowing purple silk when they first open, fading too quickly to dull buff fluff.

At the edge of the river the reeds stop quite abruptly and I wonder if they have a limit on how long the roots can cope with being submerged, or maybe the tidal flow is enough to wash out under the roots and prevent them getting a grip. At low tide there is a clear slope of mud into the water along which the wading birds and the ducks wander, dipping in and out of sight.

The reeds provide a specialised nesting site for marsh harrier, water rail and bittern and bearded tits can also be seen here. The harriers nest on platforms they build within the reeds and the brooding hen is fed by the male who flies past and hands the meal over in the air. The hen rises from the nest to meet him and an acrobatic mid-air food pass is a sight to see. The fledged chicks also do this for a while, shrieking as they beg for food.

Judging by the numbers of dragon flies and damselflies that emerge from the reedbeds in the late spring and early summer there must be many larvae hunting among the roots beneath the water. They are also known as nymphs or naiads but they are ugly beasts with voracious appetites and a weird and faintly disgusting way of extruding their mouthparts to grab their prey. The adults – one name for them is the devil's darning needle – are expert hunters on the wing and some are flying jewels with the added bonus of eating mosquitoes.

This is really a rather special habitat and, as you stare out across the fen, admire the wide sky, listen to the wind and watch the ripple of the reeds.

Photographs courtesy of Birgitta Bostrom

Dates for your diaries

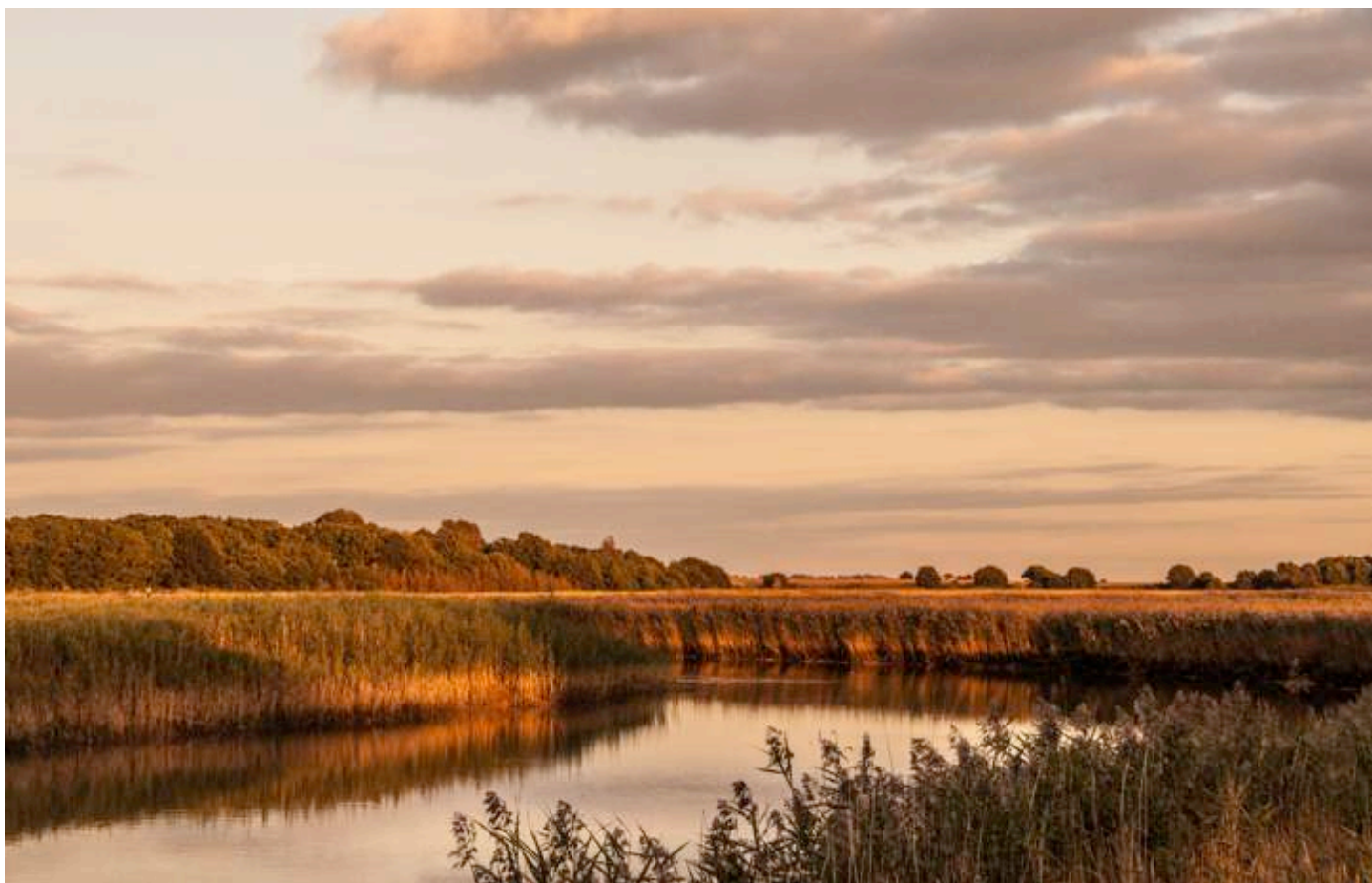
27th December 2018: Crag Path Gala Performance (Please see the AOET article on page 11).

Volunteers, please to help our saltings projects, 20th January 2019

Volunteers are invited to join a work party to help with coppicing and, most especially, making brushwood bundles (it only takes five minutes to learn how to do bundles) which will then be used in projects on the Alde and Ore to protect or enhance saltings.

Please come on Sunday, 20th January 2019 to Butley Woods. 9.30 am to 3pm, less it you like. Please wear stout boots or Wellingtons, warm clothes and wet weather gear if necessary, gardening gloves are a good idea and bring a pack lunch. For more details contact: Neil.Lister@suffolk.gov.uk <http://www.suffolkcoastandheaths.org/volunteering/volunteering-learn-more/work-parties/>

2019 Annual General Meeting, Saturday 6th or 13th April, date to be announced when the speaker is confirmed.





Outstanding photographs

We invite members to send in photographs of the estuary that they have taken and are particularly proud of. Each month one of these will be highlighted on our website (www.aldeandore.org).

At the end of a year,
a prize will be awarded to the most outstanding.

To start the ball rolling we begin with one of Iken on a foggy
May lunchtime, taken by Fleur Hayles

Contributions are always welcome!

Please send your observations, about the Association and its activities, suggestions for articles in the *Newsletter* and your photographs to the editorial team at info@aldeandore.org. Digital images should be submitted as jpg files and in a size of 1mb or more to guarantee print quality.

The *Newsletter* is prepared and published twice a year by the Alde & Ore Association, registered charity number 1154583. Our thanks go to the authors and to Alison Andrews, Birgitta Bostrom, Ian Cook, Liz Feibusch, Fleur Hayles, Peter Howard-Dobson, David Kemp, Keith Martin and Robert Simper for the use of their photographs in this issue.

Please note that signed contributions may not reflect the views of the Association as a whole.