



The Alde & Ore Association

Newsletter 54 - Autumn 2020



In this issue: birds, bathers, benches and a question for members.

Your Voice - Your Estuary

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Editor's introduction



I am delighted to be taking on the role of editor of the Alde and Ore Association Newsletter. Originally from Lincolnshire, I fell in love with Suffolk, and especially its coast, while at school in the county. I split my time between London and Aldeburgh and am now able to spend more time in the latter as I gradually slough off my day job as a freelance editor. My husband sails his Lapwing at Aldeburgh Yacht Club, while I prefer drier pursuits on land, especially walking our water-shy labrador along the estuary banks.

Many of the usual items covered by the newsletter are missing from this issue, thanks to Covid-19, so there are no reports on barbecues and walks and other jolly outings enjoyed by members. But there are articles to remind you of what a special place the estuary is.

The strapline of the newsletter is Your Voice, Your Estuary – and it is definitely your voice that we would like to hear reflected in future issues, especially for the 30th anniversary of the Association in 2021. Please send articles and suggestions for subjects we can cover on anything to do with the estuary, both past and present, and your photographs to inspire, excite and entertain our readers.

Monica Allen

An estuary glossary

The **Alde and Ore Association (AOA)**, set up in 1991, is a membership-based organisation 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 government policies that may affect the estuary or planning proposals to activities such as the ferry, walks, walk booklets and more.)

The **Alde and Ore Community Partnership (AOCP)** is the guardian of the estuary plan to keep the river walls, and therefore all the life of the river that depends on it, in good heart. It has a key role in communicating with all the communities in the estuary, particularly through the parish councils, about what is going on. The AOCP is the successor to the Alde and Ore Estuary Partnership (AOEP), set up by Suffolk Coastal District Council, Estuary Planning Partnership

and the AOA in 2012, which had completed its initial task of developing a coherent flood defence plan. The Partnership has representatives from across the community: parish councils, the district and county councils, landowners, business and the AOA.

The **Alde and Ore Estuary Trust (AOET)** 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 it also takes the lead on fundraising.

Suffolk Coast Acting for Resilience (SCAR) is a strategic partnership of organisations and individuals of all political persuasions representing groups on the Suffolk coastline. The aim of SCAR is to preserve and protect, for future generations, the Suffolk coastline, tidal rivers and surrounding land area.

Cover Photo: October sunset. By Fleur Hayles.

Chairman's notes

The best thing about this summer is that so many of us have been so lucky to be able to get out and about in the Alde and Ore Estuary and along the coast. I do hope you have been able to do this. For the sailors, with many lovely days out, the main frustration has been the restriction of keeping within social bubbles and then an incredible number of days with heavy winds – it is not often a full Regatta day is blown out. But then again, with the warmth and sunshine, the opportunity for lovely dry walks along the river walls where distancing is possible has been very welcome.

In this newsletter, you will see that one thing the summer has done is reveal how many river swimmers there are – the contributions on pages 10–11 show the many approaches and what is enjoyed. Another joy of the river is the birds, with some more up-to-date views of avocets and spoonbills than those depicted below shown on pages 12 and 13. Mike Swindell's article on waders complements his earlier enlightening one on gulls in the estuary, while Roy Truman gives us a story of the life of an individual gull.

Walking down river to Orford in late October reminded me once again how varied our saltings are. At this time of year, the red sorrel was dominant with white wisps of aster down, but a month or two ago it was the sea aster itself. Before that was the sea lavender, which succeeded the thrift that followed the range of white flowers in the spring. It is good the saltings have recovered from the usual winter battering and hopefully

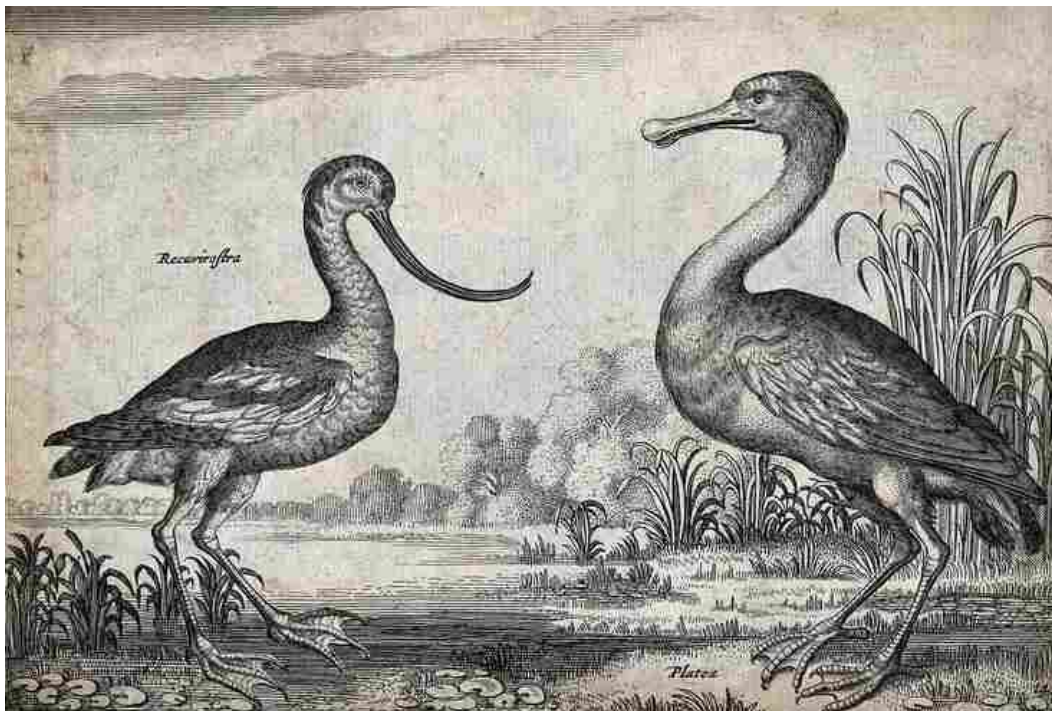
few people or animals walk over them and wash from boats is not damaging. As a very important part of the river defences, as well as being rare and useful habitat for anything from small fish to birds, whether resident or migratory, the saltings are yet another of the treasures of the estuary that we need to value and protect.

Which brings me to a very important point that emerged at the AGM – here we are with an amazing estuary, landscape and environment, but are we passionate enough about it, do we care enough, are we prepared to put in time and resources to keep it going? Do read Simon Barrow's article on page 8. As an Association we need to address this further.

Seeking to protect the estuary from adverse applications and policies continues as always. Dealing with matters that affect the rivers and estuary seems to take longer during these Covid times. So much more has to be done by email or on the internet: some of it is less effective and less inclusive and we miss serendipitous meetings of colleagues in different places and organisations, casting new light or alerting us to new issues.

Nevertheless, the applicants for the various energy projects plough on, seemingly remorselessly. The Association cannot sit by. Trustees have been ensuring that the concerns that any of these give rise to are registered, affecting as they might the long-term stability of the fragile and dynamic Suffolk

coast. Sizewell C (SZC) papers imply that the Greater Sizewell Bay has self-contained marine processes, concluding that the SZC's massive construction protruding in the long term into the sea as the coastline continues its natural recession would not affect coastal flows. This seems strange when over the centuries the entire length of the coast has experienced successive changes from the closing off of Dunwich harbour and the town disappearing into the sea, the silting up of the Minsmere River and indeed North Warren north of Aldeburgh, where there was once a safe inlet for smaller vessels, and the creation of the Orfordness Spit, which protects



Two birds, an avocet and spoonbill, by a pond. Engraving. Credit: Wellcome Collection. Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) See pages 12 and 13 for more modern views of these fabulous birds.

the Alde and Ore, over very many centuries. The assertion that changes at Sizewell will have no effect further south needs justification, so the Association will continue to make these points.

It is good to read the report from SCAR on page 7. There is great strength in the Association working with other interested bodies up and down the coast, as all can present different perspectives and so broaden the information and knowledge being brought to the Planning Inspectorate's attention.

During the summer mixed views have been heard up and down the estuary on the increased number of motor and speed boats, both strongly for and against. Whether that reflects more leisure time being spent in the estuary or is a continuation of what has been happening over time is unclear – maybe with more people out and about it has become more obvious. Everyone, however they enjoy the river, needs to have

a care for other river users, the environment and everything in it, but would an advisory leaflet for all river users be helpful, as has been done on the Deben? If anyone is interested do let us know.

We offer a very warm welcome to our new Newsletter editor, Monica Allen.

Looking to the next few months, and also continuing Covid restrictions, would you like some Zoom presentations or discussions on any particular matter, to brighten your winter? Please let us know.

Meanwhile we wish you all a good winter with plenty of opportunity to enjoy the fresh air and landscape of the Alde and Ore.

Alison Andrews, Chairman,

Annual General Meeting 2020

For those of you unable to attend the Annual General Meeting postponed in April but held by Zoom on 23 October, do visit the Association website to see the updates of what has been happening during the year. www.aldeandore.org

Alde and Ore Community Partnership update



As recorded in the Spring Newsletter, the new Alde and Ore Community Partnership is the successor to the Alde and Ore Estuary Partnership and the construction works project for renewing the river walls is being taken on by the East Suffolk Internal Drainage Board (ESIDB). The new

Community Partnership is taking forward the guardianship of the Plan and communications, including consulting with the Alde and Ore estuary community, while the programme of works is in progress over the next few years.

The outline business case request for flood defence works approval and grant aid funding towards works at Aldeburgh, Iken and Snape was submitted by the ESIDB this summer. The outcome from the Environment Agency is expected this autumn, but the innovative nature of the project means that it is likely to be closely scrutinised. Once feedback has been received, work can then commence on the second business case for works covering Boyton, Butley, Chillesford, Gedgrave, Orford and Sudbourne. The whole estuary programme of works will take some 7–8 years to complete.

The Partnership, like the Alde and Ore Estuary Trust, is awaiting

the outcome of the application for works and grant submitted to the Environment Agency. Once there is news, the Partnership with the Trust and ESIDB working in collaboration will be communicating to as many groups across the estuary as possible.

Meanwhile, the AOCP has been settling into its new role, albeit Covid times affect what can be done. The time has been used for required background work, putting in place the necessary machinery of governance and communications for the new organisation to operate effectively.

The AOCP is holding quarterly meetings to which members of the public are invited. The last two were by Zoom but there was a good turnout. The next meeting is expected to be on 10 December 2020. The minutes of all meetings can be found on the AOCP website www.AOCP.co.uk

Alison Andrews

Background note: The newly formed Alde and Ore Community Partnership involves the whole community, with every parish bordering the rivers having a seat on the Partnership, together with a county councillor, two district councillors, as well as businesses, ESIDB and the area amenity organisation, the Alde and Ore Association. The AOCP will continue to receive help and support from the national agencies Natural England and the Environment Agency, and locally from Coastal Partnership East.

THE ALDE & ORE ESTUARY TRUST

SAVE OUR SUFFOLK ESTUARY

2020 update

This year has been very different to the one the Trust envisaged in the Spring 2020 edition of the Alde and Ore Association newsletter. Because of Covid-19, all fundraising events organised by our hard-working staff and volunteers had to be cancelled and, indeed, the Trust decided that actively asking for donations at a point where so many people were struggling was not right. Instead, the Trust's April newsletter gave information on businesses still open and information on local support organisations where members of the community might seek help during lockdown. Whilst these event cancellations will have an impact on current year income, many of our generous supporters are continuing to donate.

Our July newsletter focused on the Trust accounts and annual report for 2019, filed with the Charity Commission and available on the AOET website (www.aoetrust.org). The annual report stressed that an estimated 9,000 people depend for their livelihood and their homes on the continued existence of the estuary in its current state. Income for the year was over

£630,000, enabling the Trust to award a grant to the East Suffolk Internal Drainage Board of over £140,000 for the preparation, submission and completion of the Outline Business Case for the Upper Estuary, which was submitted to the Environment Agency in May 2020.

Looking ahead, as members of the AOA know only too well, the Trust encourages donors to give for works throughout the length of the estuary for a specific reason: work on the walls can only gain Environment Agency and Natural England approval to go ahead within a programme that ensures no buildings are at an increased risk of flooding from completed work. The estuary, as we all know, is an integrated environment from Snape to Shingle Street. The integrity of the estuary will be enhanced by the resilience approach agreed in the Estuary Plan 2016.

Jane Maxim and Emma Lloyd

www.aoetrust.org/new-blog/2020/7/17/annual-report-and-financial-statements-for-the-year-ended-31-december-2019

Charity Christmas cards

We are very pleased to be offering charity Christmas cards again this year. Available to purchase from Aldeburgh Bookshop, O&C Butcher in Aldeburgh, and Snape Maltings, each pack of 6 cards features two images.

Measuring 5" x 7", the cards are by Suffolk-based artists Emma Chichester Clark and Caroline McAdam Clark. Each

pack contains 3 of each design and retails for £6.00 with £1.50 from the sale of each pack being donated to the Save Our Suffolk Estuary fundraising campaign.

Please call Aldeburgh Bookshop on 01728 452389 if you wish to purchase these cards over the telephone and have them posted to you.



Emma Chichester Clark. Wide Eyed Hare (detail).
www.emmachichesterclark.co.uk



Caroline McAdam Clark RWS. Night Between the Leaves (detail).
www.mcadamclark.com

A gull's life

Roy Truman

Quiet days at Butley Ferry are a good time to watch the wildlife. Between the comings and goings of the passengers you can observe the comings and goings of the birds. But although you can ask the passengers about their journeys, the birds are less forthcoming and need to be observed over time and distance to build up a picture of their lives. The habits of many birds are well known, and some are extremely predictable. The cuckoo you hear will have travelled thousands of miles across Africa and Europe to breed in Suffolk, while a robin may have been born in your shed and stayed in the area to raise its own family. But some birds, however common, can be a bit of a mystery.

Birds of the same species tend to look alike, so the only way to spot a particular individual is if it has a distinctive feature such as odd colouring or an injury. To take the guesswork out of this, birds may be 'ringed' by fixing uniquely numbered coloured rings to their legs, or even a combination of coloured rings, so that they may be identified. These rings do not harm the birds and for each species there is a ring of just the right size. The British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) is responsible for the training of ringers and for collecting the data received from the observation of birds or by recovering the rings from dead birds.

On small birds the rings may be seen through binoculars but the information on them will be too small to read. On a number of occasions I have seen a skylark with a silver coloured ring on one leg by the ferry but, sadly, the only way we can learn more about this individual is if its ring is recovered after its death. Many birds are ringed in hope rather than expectation. The rings on some of the larger birds, however, may be read through binoculars and one individual, a local born and bred, has been spotted, fit and well, at the ferry.

A herring gull landed on a post on the jetty last year and I could see a large red ring on its leg. Through my binoculars I could clearly read the letters KSA, so I emailed the BTO with this information. This was the first time I had done this, so I wasn't sure if it was of any interest to them. I was surprised and thrilled to receive back a history of the bird with all of its sightings recorded. I don't know whether this individual is a he or a she as the male and female are almost identical, but as long as KSA knows, that's fine.

KSA was ringed as a pullus (a young bird unable to fly or leave the nest) on Orford Ness, on 11 July 2004, making it 15 years old



Herring gulls, one with a visible ring. Credit: BTO.

when it visited the ferry. In 2005 it was spotted in Southwold and later in Wetherden, near Stowmarket. In 2006 it visited Flixton and in 2007 was back in Wetherden. The day after being spotted at Wetherden it reappeared at Orford Ness. That same year it took a continental holiday and was recorded at Vissingen-Oost in the Netherlands, in early April. In 2008 it returned to East Anglia and was seen at Aldeby, Norfolk, in September and November. There were no sightings in 2009, but in 2010 it was back in Suffolk and seen in Butley. In 2012, back to Aldeby, and from 2013 all sightings have been along the Suffolk coast at Snape, Lowestoft, Orfordness, Havergate Island, Butley Church and, of course, Butley Ferry. Where it got to between these sightings remains a mystery, but as an adult it has remained a 'Suffolk bird' through and through, probably returning to the same nest site each year to raise a pullus of its own.

Records suggest it could live to be 30 years old. The downside is that herring gull numbers are falling, as are the numbers of all gull species in the UK, with the exception of the Mediterranean gull. The herring gull, which seems so ubiquitous, is now on the 'red list' as its breeding population declines.

So, keep your eyes on the skies. Keep a lookout for KSA on your walks around the Alde and Ore area. If you spot it, or any other ringed bird, make a note of the colour of its rings and which leg they're on. If you have binoculars, try to read the letters or numbers and contact the BTO. Even partial information can prove useful.

Roy Truman, Head Ferryman

BTO is at www.bto.org and the email address is info@bto.org. BTO provides a lot more information about ringing and how to train to be a ringer at www.bto.org/our-science/projects/ringing

SCAR news – Sizewell C

Keith Martin, Chairman of Suffolk Coast Acting for Resilience

This may well be out of date by the time of publication; however, as I write, the period for submission of Relevant Representations is over and the Planning Inspectorate (PINS) has just published its initial assessment of them. This amounts to:

- Little concern regarding the proposals for sea defences and coastal processes.
- Much additional information sought, but little of this relates to SCAR interests (i.e. making the Suffolk coast more resilient).
- A notice of changes to the Development Consent Order (DCO) from EDF which EDF judges to be material. These include changes to the Beach Landing Facility – there is a desire to increase rail and sea delivery capability. This will please many of us but, until we see developed proposals, we are wary that this may not be good for the coast.
- Potential changes to the Hard Coastal Defence Feature (HCDF) – not surprising as few design details were included in the original DCO.
- Notice of a 30-day consultation period, starting on 16 November, with further documents and information available online and in EDF offices.

I have also recently joined a meeting with the Environment Agency (EA) and Office for Nuclear Regulation briefing local groups on their assessment of the DCO. In essence a summary of the EA's Relevant Representation, available on the PINS SZC website, this amounts to:

- Subject to receiving, and being satisfied with, design details



for the HCDF they are relatively content with the proposals for sea defence.

- They are also content with the proposals to manage long-term effects by a Marine Technical Forum on which they, and other public bodies, will sit along with EDF.
- An insistence that they will not be pressured by late submission of technical information and that they will give the proposals all the attention and time necessary to ensure a proper assessment is made. I was reassured by this, particularly in respect of the many design details that are, so far, missing. The publication of a further period of public consultation in November reinforces this.

SCAR, and other local groups, are not happy with this position. We remain concerned about:

- Sea defences to the north, particularly Minsmere, and the south, particularly Thorpeness and Aldeburgh.
- The insistence on the greater Sizewell bay being a discreet coastal forces unit and that coastal effects will not be felt further south than the ness at Thorpeness.
- The reliance on the integrity of the Sizewell Dunwich banks and their ability to protect this section of coast for the life of the development (160 years).
- The consequences for coastal processes not behaving as predicted. We believe that a more precautionary approach should be applied.
- The over-reliance on the Marine Technical Forum to police and enforce adverse consequences for the coast and coastal communities. We have much less confidence that appropriate future remedial action will be taken in good time at the cost of EDF and that there will be no adverse consequences for local people or the public purse.

Our only option now is to respond to the next period of consultation and then continue to repeat our views during the examination. We are also keen to develop our technical input, with expert advice, but of course funds are limited.

Keith Martin is also a Trustee of the Alde and Ore Association.

Update to Shoreline Management Plan

You may have seen that in October the East Coast Council formally adopted the revised Shoreline Management Plan for the Sudbourne Beach area south of the Martello Tower. The current policy until 2025 is Hold The Line, but from 2025 the interim policy of No Active Intervention up to 2050 has now been changed to a permanent one of Managed Retreat, that is,

managed resilience of the shingle shore, extended to 2100. This is very good news. While the policy change does not carry any money commitments, nevertheless, it will make the case for arguing for support very much stronger. So thank you all for your splendid responses to the consultation in November 2019.

What worries 2,000 Association members this autumn?

Simon Barrow

The answer is probably the same as every other community right now – the continuing pandemic, unemployment, disrupted education, continued social distancing, leaving the EU with no deal, HMG uncertainty and a no-hugs Christmas.

But how many have a local worry – our ability to preserve and protect our way of life here and the need for improved sea and river defences? When will the next big surge happen? What is the likelihood that surges will get bigger if climate change predictions are correct and sea levels rise?

I mention this given that there is no avalanche of emails, demanding phone calls and tough questions putting pressure on Association trustees. There appears to be little overt concern that this magical and unique area is under such threat. When communities really care they certainly make a noise and make the authorities uncomfortable. Think of the Heathrow third runway protest in its time, think nearer to home about the current protests re Sizewell C and Scottish Power's plans at Friston.

Why do members apparently seem to feel so passive and happy to let Association trustees 'get on with it'? No one seems to be losing sleep yet the Association is the only membership-driven organisation in this space. It has achieved so much in its 30 years' existence. Let's hope for imminent positive news from the authorities both technically and financially. Whatever the result I doubt that the way forward will be trouble-free, and our role is to remain a formidable pressure group representing our members. Of course we must work closely together with all the others involved but without lowering our guard.

Perhaps many Association members and indeed estuary residents overall just do not realise the potential threat to them in personal terms. One explanation may be that the majority of householders do not really worry because they think their house is not going to flood. Yes, several houses were flooded in Snape, Aldeburgh, Orford and Butley in 1953, while in 2013 2 pubs and 26 houses flooded in Snape. However the majority were not. That classic photograph of a man rowing a boat in flooded Aldeburgh may not, therefore, have the desired impacts because, correctly, most people's reaction is that that will not happen to our house or our street.

However, what might happen to their way of life across the Alde and Ore estuary? It's not just your house, it's all the other reasons why you live somewhere. So what is a likely forecast of what life here would be like without adequate sea and river defences, particularly given that surges may become more frequent and more dangerous? Whatever the position of your house, how much of all this would you miss?

- Little or no sailing – with no river walls the navigable

channel would disappear. And the increased tidal flow would make sailing much more difficult other than in strong winds.

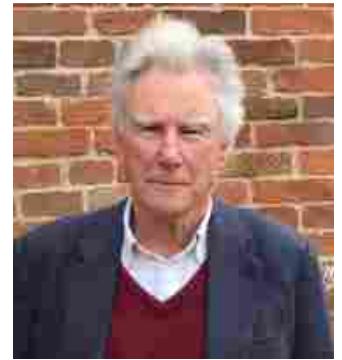
- No Snape Maltings, both music and the retail complex.
- 'Seas of mud', or intertidal habitat depending on your view, everywhere, not just Hazelwood.
- Loss of agricultural land and sources of irrigation water and consequent loss of the employment agriculture provides.
- The need for some roads to be moved permanently or restructured, meaning long detours. Might Aldeburgh become an island?
- Reduced walking particularly on river walls as some 100 km of footpaths might be lost.
- If this area is blighted by these factors we can expect lower investment in businesses here including tourism and lower house prices.

Additionally,

- In land and property terms, the value of residential houses in our area greatly exceeds the value of farmland and the upland irrigated by fresh water aquifers in the flood plain.
- Businesses also depend upon the estuary, such as those based on tourism and leisure pursuits (sailing, golfing, fishing, pubs, hotels, restaurants etc.).
- Furthermore, the Association's study (2013) on the commercial business economy of the entire estuary area revealed a value of over £100 million. Consider the impact on employment if this reduces.

By no means all British east coast areas are rated as highly as coastal Suffolk right now, but that could change. If undefended, or indeed with a rising perception that that could be the end game, then this wonderful place could become an object of pity rather than envy and no longer be such a desirable place in which to live and invest.

This is a dangerous line of argument of course. Present owners of property, businesses, leaders of our numerous festivals (books, poetry, documentary films, food and drink) depend on a thriving local audience. Building awareness of the potential level of risk for everyone could result in accusations of 'nest fouling' and 'Project Fear', but at the very least we need a statement of how all of us would be affected if undefended. I realise it would be easier not to play this card and hope that the present Estuary



Simon Barrow.

Photo by Sheena Barrow.

Plan, the result of much iterative working with those ultimately responsible, does go through and sufficient funds are raised. However, that is not certain and a campaigning body that is not seen to wholeheartedly and powerfully represent everybody must be at risk of failure. This is a challenge for the Association and it is one which in my opinion we cannot duck. Our influence is dependent on thousands across the community who are proud, active, engaged and united in their passion for this cause. That is what makes any charity a force to be reckoned with.

Do get in touch and do take part in the membership research which the Association is planning.

Simon Barrow, former AOA Trustee, simon@simonbarrow.org.uk

We are very grateful to Simon for raising these important themes. We are considering a questionnaire to all members so that feelings can be gauged. The questions would include how concerned you are about sea and river defence, whether you regard your own property at risk, how might your way of life be affected if defences failed, what might be the impact on the whole community – jobs, road links, leisure opportunities, and who you hold responsible for keeping the pressure up to protect the area.

We have to find a way to make it easy for all our members, both those who operate online and those who prefer to stay with hard copy only, to respond. Watch this space, but meanwhile if you feel strongly please let us know write now to info@aldeandore.org



*The surge of 19 November 2020 flooding Aldeburgh Yacht Club.
Photo by Keith Martin.*

Update from the Environment Agency

Many of you will have noticed how the shoreline has changed dramatically overnight in the many storms and high wind periods in the summer and recent weeks from Aldeburgh Town to Shingle Street entrance, including the stretch south of the Martello Tower. The Environment Agency (EA) agrees that the ridge is changing daily. It is monitoring it regularly to fit in with spring tides and storm events.

David Kemp, EA, thanked Roger Baxter and the Alde and Ore Association volunteers who attended our meeting in February and who subsequently walked the walls of the estuary. He read with great interest all the reports, and where defects have been reported

the EA can now plan and budget to address them next year. Lockdown curtailed EA grass cutting in 2020, but most of the work was completed, although regrettably with 22 days' rain out of the last 27 in October, it was not possible to finish at Butley Mills and Chantry Wall.

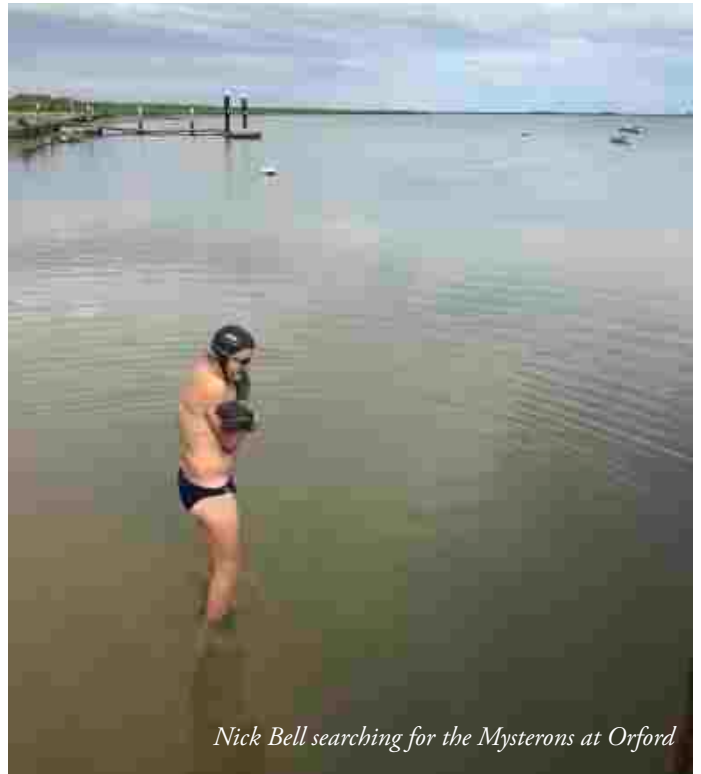
At Iken Anchorage, the work to the wall, completed in summer 2019, costing £180,000, was, in part, addressing damage due to the activities of badgers. Next year the EA will need to look out for badger setts in the walls as well! One of the entrances at Anchorage was the size of a manhole. This does little for the efficacy of the bank as a flood defence.

Wild swimming in the Alde and Ore

First, find a place to enter the river. This is a challenge particularly at low water: watch out for lacerating shells and find a good pedicurist if you don't like mud-blackened toes. Once in the river, the overwhelming sensation is the 'brain-freeze' cold, like eating ice-cream too fast. Even wearing a neoprene cap, the first few minutes of immersion are spent battling a vice-like migraine. Sensible people will beat an immediate retreat home to a stiff drink and postpone the headache to the next morning.

Then there's the water clarity, or lack of it. The Alde is an off-putting yellow-brown with zero visibility. The combination of nothing to see, nothing to hear (earplugs), and hypothermia-induced numbness results in sensory deprivation, which is very boring and for extended periods can bring on 'hallucinations and bizarre thoughts' (to quote Wikipedia).

The ideal when swimming is to achieve a state of rhythmic reverie, but it won't last long in the Alde. Inevitably there will be a nasty jolt back to cold reality when you blindly bump into something. Up-river the flotsam and jetsam can get quite thick during spring tides, and when the water temperature rises the transparent moon jellyfish appear. The smacks (the appropriate collective noun for jellyfish) can become so thick it's like swimming in bean soup. Thankfully they don't sting, but they're a bit yukky, especially when impaled on one's fingers at the start of a stroke. On long swims, as they bounce along my body, I'm convinced they are Mysterons, the invisible aliens on a mission to destroy earthlings in the *Captain Scarlet* 1960s TV series.



Nick Bell searching for the Mysterons at Orford

Perseverance is a necessary characteristic of the northern latitudes swimmer, so if you're still reading this article, well done! Wild swimming could be for you. Now for the plusses.

Shivering blue swimmers may not look happy on the outside, but inside they are ecstatic because the 'endorphins' are frolicking in their brains. Indeed, many become addicted to the sport because of the rush of endorphins.

According to Lynn Sherr, author of *Swim: Why We Love the Water* 'swimmers beat joggers and walkers in every cardio number. It's great for the lungs and works every large muscle group building leanness and promoting flexibility'. Cyclist, scrunched over your handlebars, take note! And given the current vogue for mindfulness, with the emphasis on breathing and emptying one's mind, it's not surprising that wild swimming is becoming trendy.

Swimming is a discipline with a powerful positive feedback loop: there are many days when the idea of immersion is very unappealing, but never a day when you don't feel great on emersion.

I can't think of a sport that requires less kit than swimming. I did treat myself to a GPS watch this year to measure distance covered, but otherwise it's very difficult to find stuff to spend money on. Do get a wetsuit for the really cold days – you'll swim faster too, because of the extra buoyancy – but every year I am trying to extend the season without one. The body acclimatises to the cold and this year I shed the wetsuit on 5th April and hope to continue exposing my body well into November.

The big cappuccino



My greatest discovery since acquiring a place in Aldeburgh has been the Alde and Ore Estuary. I spend much of the summer months swimming, kayaking and fishing in all the many wonderful spots along its banks. It is warmer than the sea in summer so on high tide I will often spend an hour or so swimming up stream then floating back with the current. I call it the big cappuccino as it is usually similar in colour and makes me feel alive afterwards. Last Christmas I got a winter swim suit so this year I might continue into the colder months.

Matt Selby

Cold water swimming strengthens the immune system, lowers stress, speeds up the metabolism and is great for sleep. And, according to a study conducted by the UK's Thrombosis Research Institute, it boosts testosterone production in men. We may look absurd in our goggles and nylon briefs, but we male swimmers are a virile lot! But we needn't feel smug because open-water swimming is an endurance sport in which women outperform men: of all the successful Channel crossings, women are on average 33 minutes faster than men.

The Alde and Ore is a wonderful and under-used swimming playground. There is always a spot that works for any combination of wind and tide. That said, check tide times and the forecast before heading out.

Stay near to the bank, especially if there is a lot of boating activity. You can also get close to wading birds as they are relatively unconcerned by swimmers. This year I passed within two metres of shelducks with their young. Seals seem fairly relaxed too, though there was one occasion in early winter – mating season – when I was out in my wetsuit and a large bull approached within three metres. Did he view me as potential mate or rival, and what would be the least-worst scenario?

Favourite estuary spots

Iken Cliffs: good in most wind directions but best at high tide. On sunny days the water is warmed by heat-absorbing black mud, which can make for pleasant swimming even in late April. I prefer swimming towards Snape because the channel is wider. It

can be very sociable, but the water is sometimes quite mucky and full of jellies.

Slaughden Quay and Orford Quay: the advantage of these two locations is that they work in nearly all tide levels. Because the river bends sharply in both locations there is an eddy on the opposite bank, so head off downstream and then cross over to ride the current coming back. In Orford keep a good distance away from the quay itself.

The Butley: works at all tide levels but be respectful of the ferry if it is in operation. The water tends to be clearer than at Iken, but the tidal current can be stronger.

Orfordness: on a calm day take a boat out to the spit and, following the paths suggested by the National Trust, cross over to the sea. This year, especially, I have experienced magical moments at dawn swimming along the shore with the sun rising over the sea and not another soul in sight. I am not so keen on the river side as the current is often strong and careful attention must be paid to the speed boats and water-skiers.

The Aldeburgh to Orford Flotilla. The first event for swimmers, kayakers, canoeists, paddle-boarders and rowers was held at the end of July 2019 and was a big success. It's a 5-mile swim which a recreational swimmer will cover in about 2 hours thanks to the outgoing tide. Hopefully the next one will be in summer 2021, tide and Covid regulations permitting.

Nick Bell

A power walk rather than a sprint

I have been submersed in the austere and cold North Sea all my life, from cooling off after primary school in Southwold to windsurfing, waterskiing and dinghy sailing on the Alde. Most of these wettings were an unfortunate but inevitable side effect of what was otherwise a reasonably comfortable leisure activity. Last year, however, I decided to do a triathlon for the first time. One of the disciplines was a 2.4 mile openwater swim. After a spell of reminding myself how to do front crawl in Leiston pool I took to the river – voluntarily!

Until May I needed a swimming wetsuit if I wanted to be in the water for more than 10 mins. After that I could manage about 60 mins without neoprene. The water became my friend and I began to appreciate and enjoy its mood swings, from glass to significant swells. The ebbs and flows affect the swimmer in a different way to a boat, and the wildlife, including the seals, who treat you as one of the pod, is wonderful from water level.

A top tip – invest in a bright swimming cap and a swimmer's inflatable safety buoy. Boats need to spot you from a distance and the buoy is useful for your phone, energy bar and AYC charge card.

I now treat my swims as a power walk rather than a sprint and enjoy the whole experience. It is encouraging to see many more swimmers enjoying the river.

Johnny Wheeler



Johnny Wheeler at the Aldeburgh to Orford Flotilla, July 2019, with daughter Jessica who paddled!

If any women would like to describe their experiences of swimming in the estuary we would love to hear from them. Ed.

Suffolk's first spoonbill chicks on Havergate Island

Rare spoonbill chicks have fledged in Suffolk for the first time in three centuries after changes to Havergate Island flood defences.

A 15-year RSPB project to encourage spoonbills to breed on Havergate Island has at last come to fruition. This summer, two pairs have bred successfully, fledging a total of four chicks. After a huge tidal surge in 2013, the RSPB, with funding from Defra, lowered spillways into Havergate, making it a natural flood defence against North Sea surges. Sea walls around the island were lowered by half a metre to allow water to flood into natural lagoons during storm surges. This not only protected the sea wall, it also helped protect nearby residents with additional flood storage in the lower Alde-Ore.

The Environment Agency said in 2013 that the work was being carried out as part of research to develop their understanding of how natural flood management could protect residents from the risk of increased flooding in the future.

Spoonbills are very rare in the UK. Before 1999, there had been no confirmed sightings since the 17th century and the last record of birds in Suffolk was in 1668. Nowadays, up to 100 spoonbills visit the UK every year, but they are still of conservation concern.

Tall, white, heron-like birds with long, black legs, spoonbills display a yellow breast-band and shaggy crest feathers during the breeding season. The long spatulate bill that gives them their name is full of sensitive nerve endings, and they sweep it from side to side through water to catch small invertebrates and fish.

In recent years, Havergate Island has hosted increasing numbers of visiting spoonbills but, until now, no chicks have survived. The Havergate team tried various strategies to encourage birds to nest, restoring natural habitats and even using dummy spoonbills and ready-made 'nests'. When raised platforms were created to mimic their natural nest sites the spoonbills began sleeping on them and displaying breeding behaviour such as passing sticks to each other



Grown spoonbill chicks on a Havergate nesting platform. Credit: RSPB.

and grooming partners. In 2019 hopes were raised when five pairs made nests, but sadly none were successful.

The team then installed a 350m-long fence, partially submerged in water, around the nesting site. In 2020 over 30 spoonbills visited the island. A drone fitted with a zoom camera was used to confirm which spoonbills were actively nesting and the team were delighted to see four chicks successfully raised from two separate nests.

Aaron Howe, RSPB South Suffolk Sites Manager, said: 'We hope the news that these rare and incredible birds had a breakthrough after 15 years' work will help raise people's spirits... Projects like these show how important reviving natural habitats is for the survival of our precious wildlife – and for people. Wildlife-rich greenspaces are not only vital for our wellbeing but can also provide other benefits for the community such as the natural flood defences at Havergate Island. The message is clear – if we look after nature, nature will look after us.'

With thanks to Aaron Howe and the RSPB, www.rspb.org.uk



Spoonbills in the water. Credit: RSPB.

Sea-pies and Sanderlings

Waders on the Alde and Ore

Mike Swindells

A variety of waders can be seen on the estuary, particularly on the mudflat banks, mainly from autumn to spring. The best low-tide mudflats are near Snape Maltings, the area near Iken Cliff, extending down to the opposite side of the river off the Blackheath Estate, viewable from the hide on Suffolk Wildlife Trust's Hazlewood Marshes reserve. Further down-river there are several smaller mudflat areas, and Orfordness and Havergate are also good for seeing waders.

Waders come in all sizes, from the Chaffinch-sized Dunlin to the Buzzard-sized Curlew. But as size refers to the total length of head, body and tail it can be misleading, because their long legs and bills make some waders appear larger than birds of similar body size.

This list indicates the waders you are most likely to see on the estuary, with similar but less common species shown in *italic*. Each category is in order of size.

Large black-and-white (easiest to identify): Oystercatcher, Avocet.

Small: Dunlin, *Sanderling*, Ringed Plover, *Curlew Sandpiper*, Knot.

Medium: Redshank, Greenshank, *Spotted Redshank*, Golden Plover, Grey Plover.

Large: *Bar-tailed Godwit*, Black-tailed Godwit, *Whimbrel*, Curlew.

Many waders have unspectacular speckled grey plumage with paler underparts for most of the year, but during the breeding season (when we see them only rarely in Suffolk) they have rich red breasts and bellies, which are a total contrast. Sometimes we see hints of this plumage starting in spring before the birds migrate north, and again in early autumn when they return but have not completely replaced their summer plumage. Many waders breed on the northern tundra, going in late spring when the ground thaws. They have only a single brood, and return from August onwards, or even earlier if their nest fails.

Identifying waders

This article has only three pictures, but there is a far superior substitute for anything I can provide. The British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) is a highly respected scientific organisation with about 30,000 members, including all bird ringers holding a valid permit. Its bird identification series (<https://www.bto.org/develop-your-skills/bird-identification/videos>) currently numbers some 75 videos on all types of birds, from the tiny Goldcrest and Firecrest weighing about 5 grams (the weight of a 20 pence piece),

to the Eagle at over 5 kilograms. It provides a large amount of information on all of the waders described here (apart from the Avocet and the Oystercatcher), including their often distinctive calls. In every video each wader is paired with another similar bird that may be confused with it.

I shall try to add a little more background for the commoner waders, starting with two common (at least locally) black-and-white birds that are easily spotted. The Avocet is particularly famous in our area (see photo below). They became effectively extinct in the UK in the early 19th century, apart from spasmodic single attempts to breed in Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex, and, surprisingly, in County Wexford, Ireland, in 1938. Following the flooding of the east coast marshes to prevent enemy landings in World War II, the first birds returned to breed in 1947 at Minsmere, with four pairs, and Havergate Island, with four or five pairs. Numbers have continued to grow ever since, and winter counts on Havergate Island can now reach 1,000 birds.

Avocets are slender, elegant birds, predominantly white, and in flight their blue legs extend well beyond the tail. The sharply upturned bill tip is related to their feeding method. When the bird bends its neck down, the end of the bill lies parallel to the water and the bird sweeps it from side to side, filtering water through to extract tiny crustaceans. In very young Avocets, the upturn of the tip starts to become apparent at about 10 days old.

The Oystercatcher is also unmistakable. It is a heavy-looking bird, with red bill and legs. The bill is stout by wader standards and can prise open the shells of oysters and mussels. They have the country name of Sea-pie because of their resemblance in colouring to a Magpie. They are common throughout the year on the estuary, breeding on adjoining marshes.



Avocet with young. Four-legged avocet are particularly rare!

Assume it's a Dunlin, unless it's not

Moving to small waders, the commonest is the Dunlin, believed to be the most numerous bird in the northern hemisphere. They can be seen in large flocks, and the basic rule is to assume that a small wader is a Dunlin and prove that it is not before considering what else it might be. Dunlin may be confused with the bigger Knot.

The photograph below of a Dunlin on a Knot's back is fascinating, because birds simply do not do this! There have been suggestions that it is Photoshopped, but I do not think so, as the indentations made by the Dunlin's feet can be seen.



Genuine or not, this photograph shows the difference between the Dunlin and the Knot. The 'jockey' and the bird on the left are Dunlin (black legs), and the others are Knot (green legs). Note the hint of red breeding plumage in the Knot at the back.



Black-tailed Godwit in summer plumage.

The other common small wader is the Ringed Plover, with distinct black markings that fade to grey outside the breeding season, white 'eyebrows', and the small bill (by wader standards) that is common to all plovers.

Or is it a Redshank?

The commonest of the mid-sized waders is the Redshank, with long orange-red legs and long black-tipped orange beak. Again, the rule for a medium-sized wader is to assume it is a Redshank until proved otherwise. In flight, the trailing white inner wing feathers (secondaries) are distinctive and enable easy identification from birds with wing bars. The Greenshank is more elegant, with a narrow neck and grey-green legs.

Two other medium-sized waders quite likely to be seen are Golden and Grey Plover. Golden Plovers breed mainly in Iceland, Scandinavia and northern Russia/Siberia, but also on northern UK moors. They can be seen here outside the breeding season in quite large groups, especially on Havergate. In non-breeding plumage they are not particularly striking, but if there is still a hint of the golden-yellow summer plumage in good light they can look spectacular.

Grey Plovers are very slightly bigger and are true Arctic breeders, mainly on the Siberian tundra. Black, white and grey in summer, the black fades outside the breeding season. They are less inclined to form flocks than other waders. Standing apart on the mudflats, they seem to have had training in social distancing.

Large waders

Two large common waders are the Black-tailed Godwit and the Curlew. Flocks of up to 1,000 Black-tailed Godwit can be seen on the mudflats off Blackheath in winter up to April or even May before heading north-east to breed. Small numbers breed on the Ouse Washes, but breeding birds are found mainly in east and central Europe. The photograph left shows the bird in its summer plumage. The rest of year it is grey-brown. The slightly smaller Bar-tailed Godwit breeds further north.

The Curlew is mottled brown and grey with a long, downturned beak and has perhaps the best-known plaintive call of all waders. Most of the UK population breeds on moorlands from the Peak District to Shetland, but the birds we see in Suffolk in winter are almost entirely from the eastern Baltic (Finland and Estonia). The birds we see on the estuary in summer are one-year-olds from the Baltic: as Curlews do not breed until two years old, there is no point in them going back east yet.

I hope that this article increases your interest in waders and other birds, and I would be pleased to help in selecting suitable binoculars and books.

Mike Swindells (mike42trees@gmail.com)

Sitting pretty at Butley Ferry

Roy Truman

Comfort is not a word normally associated with Butley Ferry. As a crossing point for walkers and cyclists, many of whom want to make their way across the river with just the briefest of stops, seating has not been seen as a priority in the past. Anyone wanting to rest for a while (including the ferryman) has had to make do with a couple of planks!

But the ferry has got busier, and both banks of the river now get a regular stream of walkers out to enjoy the tranquillity of the area. The Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (SCH AONB) has recognised the need for resting places along the Suffolk Coast Path (soon to become part of the England Coast Path) and asked (a) Would the ferry like a new bench on each side of the river? and (b) Would the ferry

volunteers be able to fit them in place? An offer of free benches was too good to miss. And to help in this way seemed a simple way of saying 'thank you' to the SCH AONB, which has given generous support to the ferry in recent years with advice and guidance leading to grant aid for various projects. We were even able to take it one step further and, rather than the benches being purchased commercially, we were able to have them built for just the material costs, representing a considerable saving to the AONB. We were able to get benches the size we needed for the sites we had and we now have three new oak benches offering unparalleled comfort for waiting passengers, relaxing ferrymen and those just passing through.

Roy Truman, Head Ferryman



Stephen Worrall and Bobby Rusack fitting the Gedgrave bench overseen by Chris Turner and demonstrating the fun to be had as a volunteer!



The Skinner family try out the Capel Bank bench watched by Ferryman Roy Truman and assistant Sue Truman.

WANTED! Trustees and other volunteers

Help us all enjoy and protect the area we love. The Association could do **so much more** if we had more hands on deck!

Become a **Trustee** and bring new ideas and fresh approaches.

Is there a favourite Alde and Ore area **walk** you would like to share with others and could organise?

Do you like managing and minuting? The Association needs an **Honorary Secretary**. Or be the **Membership Secretary** at the heart of the organisation. The records are in excellent order.

Please talk to any trustees you know or contact Alison Andrews, 01728 452660, aldeblackburn@aol.com

Ben Wardle art silent auction

Local landscape and countryside artist, Ben Wardle, has generously donated his pencil sketch *Aldeburgh I* in support of the Save Our Suffolk Estuary fundraising campaign. Ben is inspired by his days exploring East Anglia's countryside on horseback. This beautiful artwork would be priced at £495 at one of Ben's art exhibitions, comes fully framed and measures 35cm x 35cm. It can currently be viewed hanging in the Regatta restaurant on Aldeburgh High Street.

To help raise vital funds for the flood defences along the Alde and Ore estuary, *Aldeburgh I* is available to the highest bidder via a silent auction. If you would like to bid on it, please email your contact details together with your highest bid to finance@aoetrust.org by 5pm on **Monday, 14th December**.

Photo: Ben Wardle. Aldeburgh I. www.benwardlefineart.net



AOA events, 2021

Only a limited programme is available at present, but Covid-19 rules permitting:

11 or 18 April 2021, Annual General Meeting by Zoom or in person.

Friday, 14 May 2021. An interesting **walk** at RSPB Botany Farm Reserve at Snape guided by the RSPB.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO PLAN A WALK? Perhaps for early July or early September.

Email info@aldeandore.org

End July/August (to be confirmed), **Annual barbecue**.

2021 will be the Alde and Ore Association's 30th anniversary

What would you like to see to mark the year?

Have you ideas for what might go into our special anniversary Newsletter? Have you particular memories of the estuary, stories, photographs or ideas for celebration?

Please let us know what you would like your organisation to do?

Email info@aldeandore.org

Contributions are always welcome!

Please send your observations about the Association and its activities, suggestions for articles and photographs for the newsletter to the editorial team at info@aldeandore.org. Digital images should be submitted as jpg files. The newsletter is published twice a year by the Alde and Ore Association, registered charity number 1154583. Printed by Leiston Press. Our thanks go to the contributors and to Fleur Hayles, the BTO and the RSPB and Roy Truman for the use of their photographs. Please note that signed contributions may not reflect the views of the Association as a whole.