



The Alde & Ore Association

Newsletter 55 - Spring 2021



In this issue: feisty women, fossils and filmstars

Your Voice - Your Estuary

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Editor's introduction

It feels as if January and February have lasted at least a year, but I hope we can now look forward with optimism to the spring and summer. To help us on our way this newsletter offers some cheering articles including Lucy Pollard's interesting feature on her characterful grandmother, Marjorie Spring Rice, health pioneer, who lived at Iken Hall for over twenty years. John Robinson has been looking into some large holes and we meet some local stars of the film *The Dig*.

Readers' responses to articles are always welcome and we are pleased to include a piece from David Rea on gulls with some tips on possible holiday destinations once we are allowed to get out and about. And Andrew Allen shares his memories of holidays in the area during the 1950s.

This year is the 30th anniversary of the founding of the Association and we are planning events to mark the occasion, including the Photography Competition advertised on the back page. Please draw this to the attention of your family and friends as we would like a strong show of photographs reflecting all the fascinating and beautiful faces and moods of the Alde and Ore Estuary. And we would love to receive your articles, photos, memories or ideas for features to make a bumper 30th anniversary newsletter in the Autumn.

Meanwhile happy reading!

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, from 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 to 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 **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: Butley Creek, near Chillesford Crag Pit. Photo by Birgitta Bostrom.

Chairman's notes



In so many contexts, this has been called the strangest of winters. The coronavirus restrictions are necessarily limiting social and leisure activities out and about. But the extremes in weather, from idyllic sunny days enabling walks overlooking the estuary in the far distance (doing it close up on the river walls is not good walking nor good for the walls themselves)

to days of gale force winds shifting swathes of shingle up and down and in and out of the shore. Then we have had snow with freezing winds perpetuating both snow drifts and near bare but ice-covered grass and difficult walking, and at the same time wonderful and beautifully striking sights. All these have cast new insights into our local landscape. And, as ever, the skylines are an ever-changing source of wonder to many of us.

The shoreline

What lessons have been learned this winter? We are continuing to see winter surges and have been fortunate that there has been minimal overtopping except at Slaughden and Orford Quays. It has also been fortunate that the highest surge on 19 November was not accompanied by extreme winds. The lesson is that we still need to press on with ensuring river defences are renewed and, while surges such as we had in 1953 and 2013 will happen again, good river walls will mitigate likely damage. It is good the plans are being put in place. The Outline Business Case for the start of the works refurbishing the estuary walls is with the Environment Agency and we are waiting to hear about its approval and what government funding might be available.

Sea level is slowly rising, possibly 0.6 m–1 m by the year 2100. Many of us are aware that the saltings along the riverbanks are holding up well but at times seem to be covered by more tides

than they used to be; hopefully the change is still slow enough to enable nature to incorporate more silt in the growing top and so keep raising the saltings' height and resilience. But this needs monitoring.

Storms are, as we have seen, becoming more violent, but perhaps more accurately, more frequent than some decades ago. There are many members who are monitoring the shifting shingle up and down the coast for Aldeburgh and along Orford Ness. The River Defence team are sending in reports to the Environment Agency to help supplement its own regular surveys. The shingle shore south of the Aldeburgh Martello looks remarkably similar to a photograph in the Newsletter in December 2018 but with some different inroads along the track and some overtopping at the back of the beach just beyond the last of the southern rock defences, but there is still a broad stretch of shingle lying between the back and the sea. This winter has certainly shown we live on a dynamic coastline. We remain on the alert to see what happens and how the shingle might change again once westerly and south-westerly winds have resumed their dominance. It is good that the Shoreline Management Policy, currently Hold the Line, has, from 2025 been changed from No Active Intervention to Managed Realignment (which in this case would mean managed resilience using shingle) following the review and the consultation result announced last the autumn.

Planning

It is necessary to be on guard for the protection of our estuary and its place within the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the Suffolk Heritage Coast. It may be winter, but nothing gets in the way of planning applications and public hearings. With Covid a limiting factor, the entire public hearing by the National Planning Inspectorate on the Scottish Power Renewables project to make landfall for its wind farms at Thorpeness cliffs and install a massive substation at Friston covering acres of land, has continued in virtual format.



Across the Alde Estuary to Yarn Hill, February 2021. Photo by Roger Baxter.

The Association, like many local organisations and individuals, has contributed, drawing particular attention to the likely damage to the fragile coastline affecting the wider community along the coast and to the works traffic proposals that could significantly disrupt local access to the Alde and Ore area for a good number of years, as well as the many other problems others have drawn attention to.

The next Public Examination planning marathon will be for Sizewell C, starting this March or April. Individual people as well as organisations need to make their views or concerns clear at the forthcoming Public Examination. The Association will be raising its concerns about the possible impact on the coastline, currents and sedimentation flows. The construction, if built, may not have an immediate impact but will protrude beyond the shoreline for well over 100 years and shingle recycling and landing facilities may affect coastal flows. At the very least, should the overall project get approval, provision needs to be made for monitoring and mitigation in order to secure any necessary protection for the future of the local coastline, including, if need be, as far south as the Alde and Ore Estuary eastern bank of Orford Ness. SCAR (Suffolk Coast Acting for Resilience), with its concern for protection of all parts of the Suffolk coast, is also much concerned about the impacts of the Sizewell C proposals.

The Association

It is wonderful news that we now have two new Trustees: Kim Puttock, who is our Honorary Secretary, and Mark Goyder, who will work particularly on the marketing aspects. More about our Trustees in the Autumn Newsletter. Meanwhile, Trustees want to ensure that the Association is here to protect and preserve the river for the benefit of all. Please do get in touch if you think there are things we have missed or that the Association might do.

The Association will celebrate its 30th anniversary this year. It was set up 'to ensure that the character of the area continues to be protected', and that aim will always be with us; the Association needs to continue to work to that end. More on the celebrations is to come when we are clearer on what will be organised, hopefully in and around the area itself and not just virtually.

But we all have the spring to look forward to – we will have longer days and the chance of lovely spring walks and hopefully too can return to more activities in and around the estuary area. If changes to Covid restrictions allow, the Association will organise walks and a barbecue, and we have high hopes we can properly celebrate its 30th anniversary. I wish you all a good spring and summer.

Alison Andrews, Chairman, The Alde and Ore Association

THE ALDE & ORE ESTUARY TRUST

SAVE OUR SUFFOLK ESTUARY

You are no doubt aware that the Alde & Ore Estuary Trust (AOET) has been unable to hold community fundraising events in 2020. However the Trust is planning another fundraising flotilla in the summer, subject to government restrictions. The first flotilla in 2019 raised over £24,000. Further details will be shared via our website, social media and digital newsletters in due course.



This information can be found at @SOSEstuary on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, the AOET website and through newsletters. Please sign up to our newsletters via our website www.aoetrust.org if you do not already subscribe.

The Trust funded the East Suffolk Internal Drainage Board's work on the Outline Business Case for the Upper Estuary, with the aim of being awarded Flood Defence Grant in Aid from the Environment Agency. The Trust is still awaiting the outcome.

Jane Maxim

Action from the first fundraising flotilla in 2019.



Spring 2021 update

The new Alde and Ore Community Partnership (AOCP) marked its first anniversary at the end of January. The officers who served for the initial year were unanimously re-elected to serve a further year at the January meeting (Chairman Tim Beach, Vice-Chairman Frances Barnwell, Hon. Treasurer Chris Gill, Hon. Sec. Alison Andrews).

The AOCP succeeded the Alde and Ore Estuary Partnership when the Estuary Plan Strategy had been completed, and the actual work to refurbish the river walls, over some seven years, is being managed by the East Suffolk Internal Drainage Board, a risk management authority, which has the skills and capacity to organise and undertake the necessary work.

Matters have been on hold in recent months while final approval is awaited from the Environment Agency for the first stage of the estuary works to enable work to go ahead. It seems that the necessary and extremely detailed Outline Business Case has passed the close technical examination and we hope to receive approval soon. It is anticipated that there will be government money available towards the scheme.

Whilst there is the very welcome news that government national funding for flood and coastal defence is being increased from spring 2021 from £2.6 billion over the next six-year period to £5.2 billion, that money does not become available for allocation until the spring and then the estuary project should hear what its allocation is. Getting the final approval and learning of funding likely to be available also affects when works can start, as the work has to fit within the natural limitations of the different seasons and weather conditions of the year.

Meanwhile, the AOCP now has its own constitution setting out its roles as the guardian of the estuary strategy and as the line of communication with the estuary communities on all that is and will be going on. The AOCP with its new community membership has already found the involvement it now has with a representative from the County Council and two from the District Council very helpful. Most immediately this has meant being able to secure skills to help with new communications processes and a way in to deal with local problems, such as the very deteriorated state of the path on the river wall at Orford (even worse than that on parts of the Aldeburgh wall): the AOCP hopes progress can be made on this before next winter.

The AOCP is currently in the process of updating its website (www.aocp.co.uk) including adding a useful page on tide tables and tidal heights (often a matter of discussion at the time of the winter surges). It is hoped that the new livelier format will attract more regular visitors, and if anyone thinks more might be done to enhance its usefulness, please inform the Hon. Sec. (while a new communications leader is being sought).

AOCP meetings are held quarterly. The dates are on the AOCP website www.aocp.co.uk. Members of the public are welcome and are given opportunities to speak. Currently the meetings are on Zoom and you can apply to the Hon. Sec. for the Zoom link and agenda.

A. Andrews, Honorary Secretary

Keep calm and ferry on: Butley Ferry during the pandemic

In spring 2020, like everyone else in the country we ferry-people waited, with bated breath, for the starting pistol to be fired which would release us out of lockdown and into socially distanced public spaces. We had managed to get the new steps built on the Capel Bank before the lockdown, a welcome addition as too many of our passengers (and ferrymen) had come a cropper climbing the 'slippery when wet' grassy bank. During the lockdown, long after the ferry should have opened and when we were restricted to walking for exercise with one other, I received a report that the jetties were groaning under the weight of seaweed and the vegetation around the steps was reaching jungle proportions. James and Jenny Walker took a walk, carrying all of the appropriate tools, and cleared the Gedgrave jetty; Conrad Natzio and I tackled the Capel Bank with Conrad painting the hut and me attacking the tree-sized Alexanders around the steps and hacking the jetty free from bladderwrack. These are jobs which need to be done whether the ferry is running or not.

When we had the potential for a limited return to 'normal' life, albeit in groups of no more than six, outdoors, and socially distanced, I had to consider whether we could, or even should, try to operate the ferry given the restrictions likely to be in force. I personally was 'sitting on the fence', keen to do something but wary of putting anyone at risk. I consulted the volunteers, explaining what changes we would probably have to put in place and asked for their views. I was surprised by the majority response that we should try to operate that year, as long as we had the systems in place to keep everyone as safe as possible. There were a few who, for valid and extremely well-explained reasons, felt that they could not commit. Although I took the decision to open, the views of those few helped to shape the way we could operate



The starting pistol went off, but first was the small problem of the boat. The 'rule of six' meant that we could get enough people together to turn the boat over to antifoul it and turn it back again. This event is always a good time for volunteers to discuss the plans

for opening and, this done, we had only to put the boat back in the water and give it a try. A big change was that there had to be two people on duty each day rather than one, as had been the usual practice: one to row the boat and the other to deal with passengers, deal with the finances and generally keep everything organised. Coincidences happen and the BBC phoned me and asked if we would be open on the Friday (we were due to open on the Saturday) and I had just agreed to do a special opening for a group of ten cyclists on the Friday. This was the perfect opportunity to test out the procedures which we would all have to follow. With Mrs T. acting as my second, we had Kevin Birch, from BBC Look East, interviewing and filming while I rowed the cyclists across and Mrs T. gave instructions. A great piece of publicity was on the tellybox that evening and we started the 'official' season on Saturday, 25 July, fully three months late.

I think it is fair to say that we hit the ground running; passenger numbers were higher than in previous years and a second person at the ferry a great help. In some cases, a spouse, partner or friend was cajoled into this job, in others, two ferrymen shared the day and the rowing. As we were aware that some people were reluctant to touch or exchange money, we decided to operate a system of 'donations' rather than fares. We gave passengers the choice of paying normally and accepting 'sanitised' change, making a donation of their choice or paying by BACS transfer when they got home – in essence, relying on people's honesty. The majority chose to pay using the 'normal' method but a large number made donations which were usually on the generous side and the BACS transfers even more so. The ferrymen were left free from dealing with this, but they had the additional burden of having to wipe down the boat with sanitised wipes after every group or family. To make sure a social distance was applied, only two passengers, sitting in the stern of the boat, could be carried on each crossing. The ferryman and his passengers had to wear face coverings. Although the ferryman had a supply of masks on the boat available for anyone who had forgotten, or did not have one, only a handful of our passengers in the whole of the season needed to be given one to wear.

This was not a normal season but we have learned a lot from it. Our volunteers are adaptable, flexible, willing to 'give it a go' and adjust to new situations. Our passengers are enthusiastic, supportive and generous. They were constantly telling us how much they appreciated our service and that it was still running despite the restrictions placed on us. In fact, our average daily income was up 60 per cent from last year. The only downside of the season for me was that we were not able to hold our annual Ferryman's Lunch due to the restrictions placed on pubs and restaurants. There would have been much to discuss and to celebrate, not least the support that spouses, partners and friends gave to the ferrymen.

Roy Truman, Head Ferryman

Secret wanderings of 'Suffolk' gulls

David Rea

Roy Truman's excellent piece in the Autumn 2020 Newsletter made me think that perhaps AOA members might like a little more insight into the wandering lives of the various gulls we see at Aldeburgh and Orford. Some may be surprised at just how far they travel and inspired to take a closer look at these 'common' birds.

Three years ago my wife and I spotted a Herring gull on the roof of the Oakley Square fish shack. Its orange ring clearly said FOMT when I enlarged the pictures. Not having ever done this before, I started with Google and was astonished at how easily the information emerged. The lovely people at the relevant Essex bird-ringing group were delighted to hear that the bird was in Aldeburgh, having ringed it as an 'over 5 yrs old' adult at the Pitsea waste tip in 2015.

Since then we've established that Gilbert – sorry, we have grandchildren to engage in this project – is permanently resident on the Aldeburgh sea front as top bird on the fish shack and nesting each spring/summer on a chimney stack near the boating pond. His mate and their offspring are allowed to alight on the shack roof, but all other birds are driven off ... except the much bigger Black-backed gulls.

And that takes us to the next stage, because we soon noticed that a visiting Greater Black-backed gull was ringed – J32Y – and he is much more of a wanderer: ringed by a super friendly group in Norway as a pullus (chick) in 2010, he regularly commutes between Norway (where we presume he breeds) and the UK (where he winters). Being a splendid, good looking bird, he's known as Alfred the Great ... and we watch his movements on the 'Ringmerking' Norwegian website. Rather like in the days of the Saxons or the Vikings, you begin to view the North Sea and its coastline as a busy highway rather than a dangerous hazard.

Lesser Black-backed gulls also migrate and my favourite so far is AFAP who in 2010 drifted off from Orford Ness to Gloucester, then down the Iberian coast to Gibraltar and on to the Berber city of Dakhla on the Western Saharan coast before pottering back to Aldeburgh – a 10,000km round trip in 11 months. I suspect he probably goes a lot further than that too, but no one has logged his ring. I wonder if he thinks of white Saharan sand, Arab dhows, super tankers and the Straits of Gibraltar when he stands watching the dinghies on the Alde and the Ore?

Altogether we have now logged nine gulls in the Aldeburgh vicinity – Herrings, Lesser and Greater Black-backed – and my next target is to track a Black-headed gull; the Essex group have had reports of 'theirs' in Ireland, France, Spain and Portugal. The coloured leg rings make it simple to unravel their stories. Why

not give it a go – see if you can come across a journey longer than AFAP's adventure to the Western Sahara.

David Rea is an AOA member.

The British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) provides information on ringing at www.bto.org/our-science/projects/ringing



Gilbert (FOMT) and Mrs Gilbert.



AFAP.

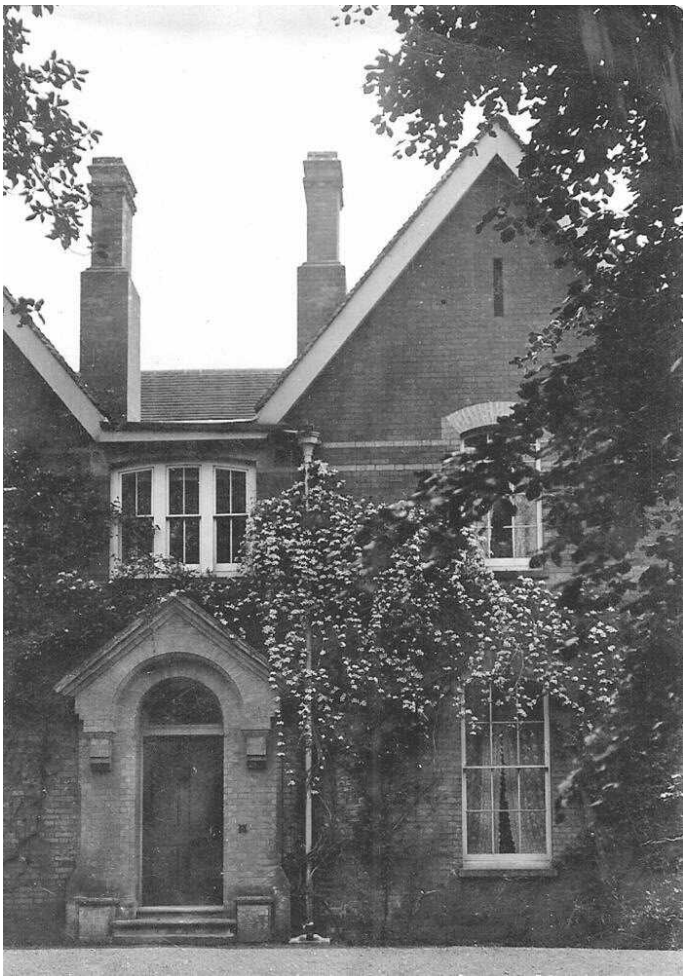


Alfred the Great (J32Y).

Margery Spring Rice at Iken Hall

Lucy Pollard

Margery Spring Rice arrived at Iken Hall in the summer of 1936, when she was in her late forties. Although she had lived most of her life in London, she was in fact returning to an area that she knew and loved: her father's family had lived in Suffolk since the 17th century, and her grandfather Newson Garrett had built the Maltings at Snape, so a good deal of her childhood had been spent in Aldeburgh, where her parents had had a house. After the breakdown of a disastrous marriage (to Dominick Spring Rice), she had been looking for a house near the Suffolk coast for several years, and in fact had had Iken Hall in her sights since 1932. In March 1936, the day after she and Dominick were granted a divorce, her widowed mother Clara Garrett died in Aldeburgh, leaving Margery without a base in the county, so she was delighted when the Iken house became available to rent. She was to remain there for twenty years, stubbornly digging in on more than one occasion when her landlord would have liked to evict her.



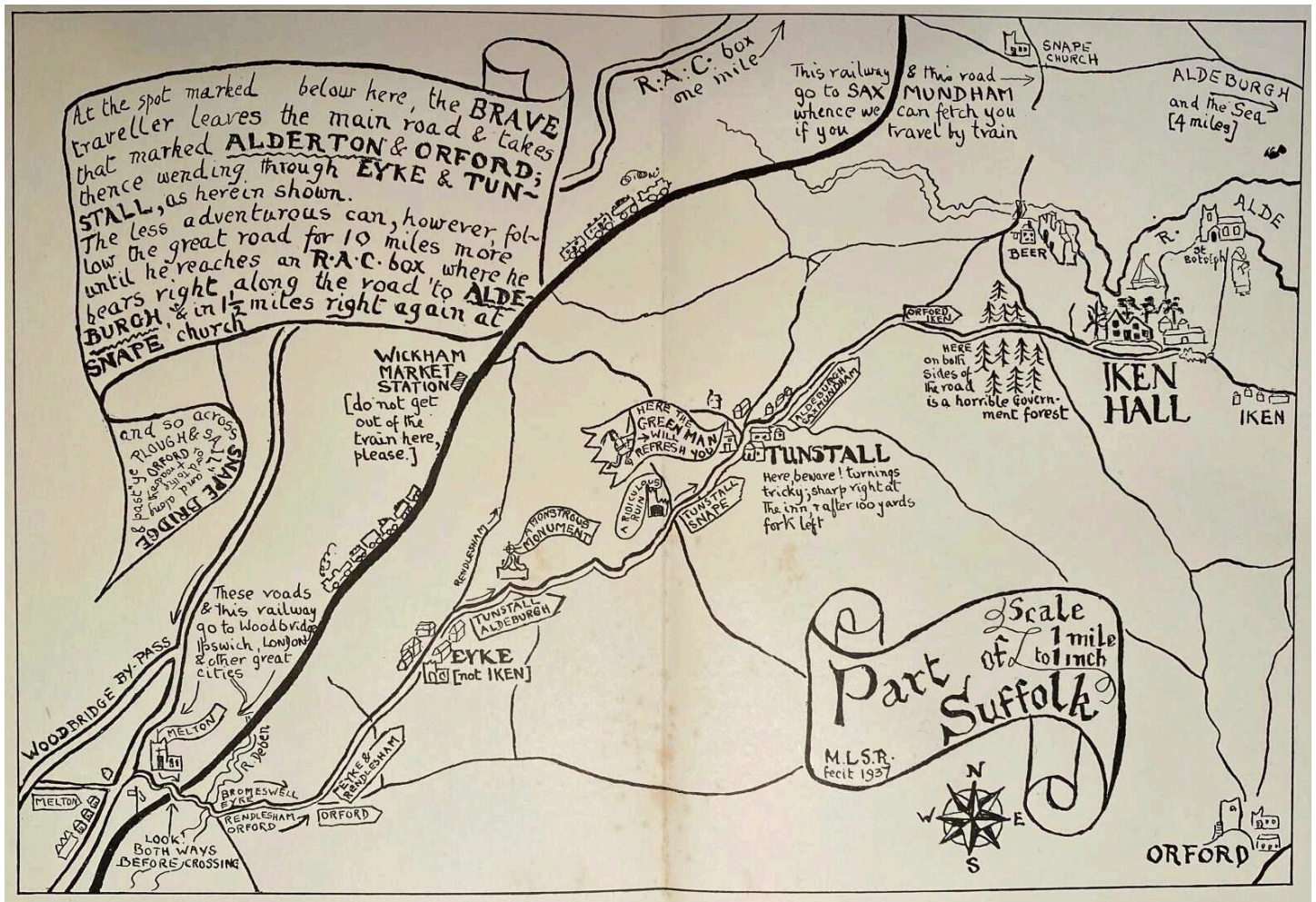
Iken Hall, west façade. Courtesy of Orford Museum.

Iken Hall – it burned down after Margery left, and the present house is a complete rebuild – consisted of a mid-19th-century

three-storey block built onto an earlier, lower house. It was lit by oil lamps until 1950, when it was wired for mains electricity, and water was pumped from a well. It was surrounded by extensive grounds, which Margery, who became an eager and knowledgeable gardener, did much to improve, among other things making a big vegetable garden and fruit cage that were to prove particularly useful during the war. But the glory of the house was its position above the river Alde, with access to the beach on the north side and bracken-covered heath all round (land which is now under cultivation).

The two sons of Margery's first marriage (to Edward Jones) had left home to start on their careers. The son and daughter of her marriage to Dominick, both in their teens, were away at boarding school, but for her son Stephen in particular, as a passionate sailor, the house at Iken offered wonderful opportunities not only for being out on the water but also for messing about with boats in one of the many outhouses (he was already building a Sharpie in the workshop at Eton). Although a seven-bedroomed house seems ridiculously large for her circumstances, Margery began at once to invite family and friends, to the extent that it was often full to bursting. Her visitors' book records over fifty visits for the year 1937, even though that year was interrupted in May by her hospitalisation for scarlet fever. Between 1936 and 1956 she acquired twelve of her eventual thirteen grandchildren, for whom the house became a holiday paradise, offering the river for sailing, swimming and mudlarking, trees for climbing, and quiet lanes for cycling.

In her youth Margery had been deeply influenced by her aunts Elizabeth Garrett Anderson and Millicent Fawcett to believe that women had no less ability to change the world than men. It had taken her some false starts to find her own vocation, but in 1924, living in Kensington and impelled by the terrible conditions she encountered among working-class women in the poorer parts of the borough, she had founded London's third contraceptive and women's health clinic. Part of the driving force behind this was the problems and griefs she had suffered in her personal life: the death of her first husband and one of her brothers in World War I, the loss of a baby daughter to meningitis, and the distress of the failure of her second marriage. All her life she dealt with grief and unhappiness by turning to action. Arriving in Suffolk, she continued her interest in women's health, travelling frequently to London to attend committee meetings for the North Kensington Women's Welfare Centre, and later being co-opted onto the health committee of Suffolk County Council. In the late thirties she was making use of the knowledge acquired in her North Kensington work to write a book, *Working-class Wives*, which came out in 1939. As an account based on interviews with the



Map made by Marjorie Spring Rice for visitors, 1937.

women themselves, often told in their own words, it was to become a classic in its field and was reissued by Virago in the 1980s.

Just after the outbreak of war in 1939, Margery endured another personal trauma, when her daughter-in-law of a few weeks was drowned at Iken in circumstances that were never entirely explained. As usual, she threw herself into activity: the war presented her with the perfect opportunity to make use of her energy and experience, and in 1941 she set up a nursery for some ten under-fives evacuated from the East End of London, who were joined for much of the time by her two oldest grandchildren. That she managed to persuade the Ministry of Health to allow this, when her garden bordered on the Iken-Orford battle training area, used for pre-D-Day tank training, is a tribute to her obstinacy and persistence. Although she had domestic and childcare help, she did all the cooking for the nursery herself as well as managing the whole operation. In later years she used to tell a story about the arrival one day of the local doctor, Robin Acheson, who came into the kitchen where she was working and asked whether she knew that there were some children sitting on the ridge of the roof, to which there was access through a door in the attic. Even in those days of no health and safety rules, and a level of freedom for children that parents today would

find unthinkable, I can't believe that four-year-olds managed this feat. I suspect the incident may have involved some older visiting children (I do remember climbing up the roof gully myself – the view from the ridge was wonderful). It was in the middle of running the nursery that Margery had to deal with another tragedy in her life, when her son Stephen, who had quit Cambridge after a few weeks to join the navy, was lost with his submarine in the Mediterranean at the end of 1942. She had also lost her much-loved sister-in-law, Petica Robertson, in a bomb explosion in Cambridge in February 1941.



Marjorie Spring Rice with nursery children, c.1941.

When the war ended, Margery cast around for something else to absorb her abundant energy. A lucky meeting with her neighbours Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears, who had returned from the United States and were living in the Old Mill at Snape, led to some years of close friendship. Margery enlisted their help in founding the Suffolk Rural Music School in memory of Stephen, and when they embarked on founding the Aldeburgh Festival in 1947–8 she threw herself into organising people, making arrangements and giving practical help. She remained on the Aldeburgh Festival Committee for sixteen years. Britten's opera for children, *Let's Make an Opera*, is set in the Iken Hall dining room, which had a conveniently large fireplace. Britten was also supportive of another of the causes she espoused, that of keeping open footpaths that local landowners wanted to close. In a 1946 letter to a friend, Margery describes trying to walk a closed path with Britten and Ursula Nettleship (trainer of the Aldeburgh Festival choir) and encountering the furious landowner: 'Ben was so angry that there was *nearly* a fight'.

In the post-war period contraception was gradually becoming a less taboo subject, and Margery was delighted when in 1955 the Minister of Health visited the North Kensington clinic, an event that marked the beginning of its coming in from the cold. She had always been liberal in her views: for someone who tended to speak her mind without regard to tact, she had tried, sometimes surreptitiously, to widen access to contraceptive advice to unmarried women, as well as involving men alongside women in the work of the clinic. It took years for society to catch up with her!

By the mid-1950s Margery was beginning to tire from her incessant work as activist and grandmother, and to find the isolation of winters at Iken difficult. With enormous reluctance, and under a certain amount of family pressure, she made the decision to move to Aldeburgh, where she bought one of the houses on Park Road that had been built by her grandfather Newson. Apart from two rather unhappy years spent in Oxfordshire with her daughter's family, she remained in Aldeburgh, latterly in a flat on the Crag Path, until her death in 1970.



At the Coronation celebration in Iken village, 1953. Marjorie Spring Rice with the author and her younger brothers. Courtesy of John Tyrrell.

Lucy Pollard is a retired librarian, book indexer and teacher. As well as her biography of her grandmother, Margery Spring Rice, she has written about early modern travellers to Greece.

Lucy Pollard, *Margery Spring Rice: Pioneer of Women's Health in the Early Twentieth Century*, Open Books Publishers, 2020. Available in hardback, paperback and digital formats. www.openbookpublishers.com



Book cover. Margery pushing a young friend along Crag Path, Aldeburgh, 1968. Drawing by Christopher Ellis (1968).

Crag pits around the Alde and Ore area

John Robinson

'Fields on the red marl through this district are full of old deep marl pits', wrote the great geologist William Buckland, DD, the Dean of Westminster, in 1849.¹ And when walking around the Alde and Ore environs, it is hard to escape the hollows, depressions and pits that occur with some frequency in the landscape.

Marling is the process of adding chalk or chalky clay to neutralise acid soils and lighten clayey soils, although the term 'marling' can be used to describe any process of mixing sub-soil with topsoil. In the area of the Alde and Ore Estuary, the sub-soil is crag. 'Crag' is an East Anglian word for shells and is a term used throughout the region for any shelly, pebbly sands. 'Suffolk Crag' refers to the two types of crag found in Suffolk, Red Crag and Coralline Crag. The Red Crag occurs in an approximately triangular shape with its base running between Walton-on-the-Naze and Sudbury and its point at Iken. The Coralline Crag, which is found exclusively in Suffolk, occurs as an elongated ridge running SSW to NNE and extending approximately from Boyton in the south to just north of Aldeburgh (see historical map below) The depth of the Coralline Crag deposit is up to 15 to 20 metres but thinning out towards the edges of the ridge.

Coralline Crag is a creamy-golden, sandy limestone, full of fossil

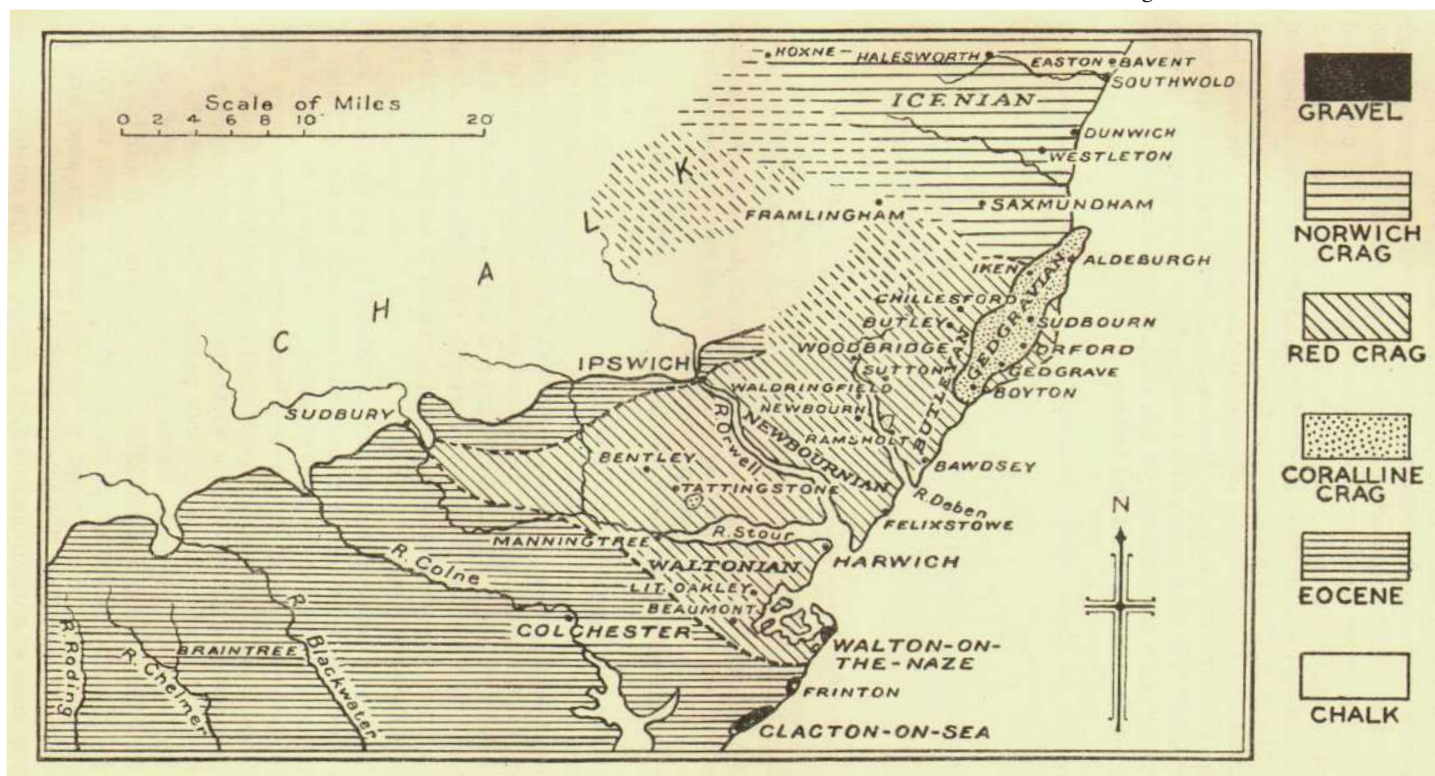
shells. When first studied in the early nineteenth century, it was thought to be the fossilised remains of a coral reef. In 1847, Mr Hugh Raynbird wrote:

It is a ferruginous (containing iron) sand, full of shells, and was once much used as a dressing for clay lands... At Aldborough [sic] and Orford the crag becomes coralline, and is often a complete coral reef.²

Later studies showed that, in fact, no coral remains are present in the crag, and it is actually made up of fragments of molluscan shells and the fossilised skeletons of bryozoas (tiny marine invertebrates, otherwise known as moss animals) (see photo p. 12). Coralline Crag was laid down between 4.2 and 2.3 million years ago in a warm sea, whereas the Red Crag was laid down over the Coralline Crag in a cold sea commensurate with cooling of the climate that presaged the ice age. The crag beds contain fossilised remains of large quadrupeds and the bones and teeth of whales and sharks and other fish.

Raynbird continues,

The admixture of the subsoil with the surface has more than anything else contributed to place the cultivation of the light lands of Norfolk and Suffolk in the first rank in the scale of Farming.³



Geological map of the Crag district of East Anglia. From C.P. Chatwin, *East Anglia and Adjoining Areas: British Regional Geology*, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1954, p.43.



Carved block of Corraline Crag showing fossils of bryzoas (moss animals), tower of St Peter's Church, Chillesford.

The practice of spreading substances on top of the soil to improve its suitability for agricultural purposes goes back to pre-Roman times. The importance of adding calcareous substances to the soil was known by the Greeks, the Gauls and the Britons. The Roman scholar Varro saw labourers on the banks of the Rhine in Germany fertilising the land with marl. The practice of marling reached its height of popularity in the eighteenth century. Its adoption was not confined to Europe: in the later part of that century, farmers in the southern states of America were encouraged to adopt the practice to revive the worn-out tobacco fields of Virginia and Maryland. The extraction of crag should not be confused with the extraction of so-called coprolites, which were the subject of a spectacular but short-lived boom industry in Suffolk in the nineteenth century when it was discovered that, when ground to a powder and mixed with sulphuric acid, they made a highly effective fertiliser.⁴

It is claimed by many that the beneficial effects of crag were accidentally discovered by a farmer at Levington, near the River Orwell, who in 1718, being short of dung, spread several loads of crag over part of a field, which, to his surprise, yielded a much better crop than those parts which he had covered with dung.

The usual method of extracting the crag was to open up an excavation in an area close to the fields that were to be improved. The excavation would be deep enough to remove the soils overlying the beneficial deposits below, with one side sloped shallow enough to allow a horse and cart to enter. The overburden to be removed was known as the 'fee' or the 'rip'. The crag material was then loaded into the cart and hauled to wherever it was needed and spread over the surface of the soil. The action of frost and rain helped to break down the material into small particles.

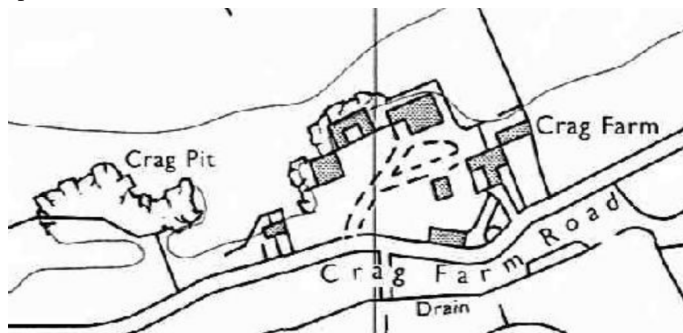
The physical work in opening up crag pits was normally carried out by the farm hands during otherwise quiet periods after harvest. However, on occasion, gangs would be hired specifically

for the purpose. E.W. Overman writes in 1842:

A man.....must have sufficient force of horses, this will enable him to clay his land; he will always find men ready to fill and spread at 3d. per load – costing the small sum of 10s. per acre for permanent improvement of the land.⁵

This could be dangerous work. Once the excavation had reached the base of the crag, the vertical face of the pit would be undermined at the bottom of the excavation. Clay wedges, shod with iron, were then driven into the face at the top of the seam until the crag fell into the pit, from where it was loaded into carts.

Written records are scarce, but the evidence of the processes of creating crag pits is found in the place names that appear on present-day maps such as Marling Field, Chalk-Pit Green and Crag-Pit Farm. Depressions labelled 'clay pit', or 'sand pit', are often likely to be crag pits, illustrating the variable nature of the deposits. The physical evidence can be seen in the form of unexplained excavations, often providing homes for sand martins, which burrow nests into the vertical sides. Many pits have now been filled in and some, including the very large Crag Farm Pit, Sudbourne, and Aldeburgh Crag Pit, are now sites of special scientific interest. Tom Williamson, in his excellent book,



Crag pits were features significant enough to lend their name to property and roads.



Sandlands, has identified the locations of 51 crag pits in the farms adjacent to the rivers Alde and Ore and Butley Creek.⁶

Unlike manuring, which needs to be carried out annually, the process of marling was a one-off occurrence, with benefits that



St. John the Baptist, Wantisden. cc-by-sa/2.0 - © Keith Evans - geograph.org.uk/pl/4062136.

lasted for many years. How it worked was not fully understood when it first started to be applied. Adding crag to the surface of the soil could be seen to improve the structure of the soil, requiring less quantities of manure to be applied – ‘earths which are the cause of the barrenness of one soil, may greatly improve another of an opposite quality, when mixed with it’;⁷ however, it was not realised that most

fossil remains have a high element of phosphate, and that this provided the cheapest form of fertiliser apart from animal manure.

Coralline Crag, when cemented as a limestone, was sometimes used as a building material. The best examples are the Church of St. John the Baptist, Wantisden (see photo left), and St. Peter’s Church, Chillesford, whose towers were built with sawn blocks of it during the mid-fourteenth century. There is a large crag pit next to Chillesford Church (see photo above) but it is now thought that it was not the source of the church tower’s building material. Where Red Crag appears as sand, it has been used as building mortar in many churches. Occasionally, it has been cemented by iron oxides to form an ironstone, and this has been used in building, most notably in the church of St. Mary of the Assumption, Ufford.

While the principles of marling would still apply today, most soil improvement is carried out nowadays by applying imported lime to the soil.

John Robinson is a member of the Alde and Ore Association.

¹ W. Buckland, ‘On the Causes of the General Presence of Phosphates...’, *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society of England*, 10, p.520, 1849; ² H. Raynbird, ‘On the Farming of Suffolk’, *J.R. Agric. Soc. Eng.*, 8, p.264, 1847; ³ *ibid*, p.265; ⁴ Suffolk’s ‘gold rush’ was described in an article in the *AOA Newsletter*, Autumn 1997. Although called coprolites – the fossilised excreta of animals that died many millions of years ago – Suffolk’s coprolite industry mainly extracted phosphatic nodules found in a layer between the Red Crag and London Clay. ⁵ F.W. Overman, ‘On Claying or Marling Land’ *J.R. Agric. Soc. Eng.*, 3, pp.235–6, 1842; ⁶ T. Williamson, *Sandlands: The Suffolk Coasts and Heaths*, Windgather, 2005; ⁷ Comment on a letter from C. Charnock ‘Application of Blue Shale to the Surface of Land’, *J.R. Agric. Soc. Eng.*, 3, p.162, 1842.

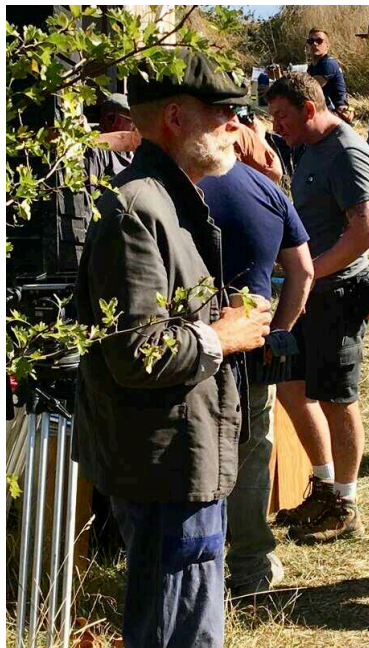
The real stars of *The Dig*: Butley Ferry and its team

Roy Truman

The 29th of January saw the release of *The Dig*, a fictionalised account of the discovery of the Sutton Hoo treasures, on the land owned by Mrs Edith Pretty, by the local archaeologist Basil Brown. Many members of the AOA will have, by now, seen the film, which is available on Netflix. It has been difficult to escape the publicity it has been given on local and national television and radio and in the review pages of all the national daily papers. Its importance for us locally was, of course, the choice of Butley Ferry as one of the filming sites.

It was thrilling to see the ferry site, and one of our own ferry-men, Stephen Worrall, in the opening scenes of the film. And for the sharp-eyed, a brief glimpse of one of our lady ferrymen, Teresa Aslett, in a following scene. These short but important scenes took a full day of filming and represent just a fraction of the filming and preparation. Sadly, a lot of beautiful footage ended up on the cutting room floor, but we are represented and we're proud of it. Boyton Dock gets more exposure than was planned (and in one scene exposure is certainly the right word). Until the director, Simon Stone, came to visit the ferry, he had not been aware of Boyton Dock's existence and the storyline of the Spitfire aircraft crashing into the water near the dock and the recovery of the pilot's body was written in especially to take advantage of the setting. A number of clips of the saltings and the river were shown, but with care taken not to include any features which did not belong.

It is well known that a field in Surrey was the substitute for the real Sutton Hoo site, but the film will be remembered, apart from the superb acting of Ralph Fiennes and Carey Mulligan, for the Suffolk scenery. For those of us who know the area well, it will not have escaped attention that there were a few odd happenings verg-



ing on time travel taking place. To travel from Sutton Hoo to Boyton Dock in a matter of seconds to dive into the beautifully clear waters of the Butley River was certainly quite impressive. To repeat the feat to make love to Lily James (Peggy) was much more understandable. Edith's son, Robert, made a pretty impressive cycle ride to Rickingham on a child's bike to see Basil. Get him signed up for the next Tour de France.

Butley Ferry has received publicity in the press and on tourist information websites, and it will be interesting to see, when we are able to start operations in the coming season as soon as Covid permits, if we have visitors who are there because of the filming. There is a whole industry around visiting film sites and being photographed with the actors. We will be ready for them.

Stephen, Teresa, I've had an idea ... !

Roy Truman, Head Ferryman

Stephen trying to memorise his lines in a Suffolk accent and Teresa and Stephen in their trailer at the filming base.



The Alde and Ore Association Annual General Meeting 2021

The AGM will be held on Zoom on **Thursday, 15 April 2021, at 6.30 p.m.**

Papers will be sent to members by the end of March by hard copy or by email where we have those addresses. The papers will be on the website www.aldeandore.org. If you wish to attend please let the Hon. Sec., Kim Puttock, (info@aldeandore.org) have your email address to receive the Zoom invitation.

Personal memories of the Alde and Ore

Andrew Allen

I have belonged to the Alde and Ore Association for years, though I have not visited the area for over a decade. But I feel I know every inch of the river because of the many holidays I spent there, more than 60 years ago.

My parents had been visiting Aldeburgh all their lives. They remembered when there was grass between the Martello Tower and the sea, and they had once stayed in the old whaler called Ionia which was on the mud along the river wall near Slaughden.

From an early age I sailed with my family on Cable's big old boat Islander, which I think had been to Dunkirk to evacuate troops. I was allowed to hold the tiller and when it went about it took several seconds to respond. We sailed to Shingle Street and to Iken. Mr Cable told us about taking Benjamin Britten out in a boat so he could experience first hand the sights and sounds of the water and the bird life.

I also remember visiting Deerfoot, a friend's houseboat, in 1952, which was on the river wall near the Ionia. When I next visited it, it had been moved by the flood and was then adjacent to the Slaughden road!

From about 1956, my father rented a house on Crag Path for two weeks every summer, near the coast guard lookout. A friend came with us and he and I spent a lot of our time on Slaughden Quay hoping that David Cable (or one of the other boatmen, Jumbo Ward, Fred Cane or Ruben Wood) would give us jobs to do. David used to point to a moored yacht and say 'you see that boat over there, the one with the mast ...' and from this description we were supposed to row out, cheating the tide, go aboard, and pump the bilges or something similar. It was heaven for us!

Several times each summer we hired a lugsail dinghy, and were careful to always sail against the tide, so that it would bring us home. But on one memorable occasion, the breeze was strong from the south and we risked sailing with the tide. We had been sailing about half an hour when it suddenly started to pour with rain and the wind dropped completely. We could do nothing but drift downstream with the tide, away from home. After a while the wind returned, but it had turned through 180 degrees and was blowing with the tide. We guessed we were about half way to Orford so decided to go on rather than trying to sailing back against wind and tide. But it took us another hour even though we were running before the wind. We arrived at Orford cold and hungry, so decided to get fish and chips as soon as the shop



The Ionia, also known as Iona.

opened and then set off back when the tide slackened about 6.30.

We were preparing to sail back when John Cable (the boatman who had hired us our boat) sailed past on his way home, and waved to us. It was good to know that he knew our whereabouts, we just hoped he wouldn't be too cross with us when we got back. And anyhow, he could have offered us a tow!

The next two hours were the most memorable in my sailing life. The wind was strong and steady force 3, and we had to tack all the way in our little boat, getting as far as possible on every tack but not going too close to the muddy edges and getting stuck. We took it in turns to helm, and the time sped by, it was so exhilarating. From time to time we would pee in the bailer, and steam would rise! If we put a hand overboard, the river felt warm! But we were young and fit and in our element! Slowly the skyline of Aldeburgh got nearer, and the Martello tower, and then the yacht club, and then Slaughden Quay itself. We stumbled out of the boat, our legs hardly working, and pulled it up the beach. We saw John the boatman striding towards, a broad grin on his face. 'I reckon you made record time there' he said in his Suffolk drawl, 'and had a grand sail'. We apologised for keeping him at work till 8.30p.m, but he just laughed and said 'I took the precaution of telling your parents that you'd be a bit late back. I thought they might have worried, but I told them you were as safe as any sailors on this river!' Thanks to that our parental reproof was only mild.

I am almost afraid to visit the area again lest I am disappointed that the place does not live up to my memories! I now live across the country, but it is on my 'bucket list'. And I have never been on the Butley Ferry, or to Havergate Island!

Thank you, the Alde and Ore Association. As well as loving to keep in touch with the area, I am very interested in your aims of protecting and preserving this beautiful area.

Andrew Allen is an AOA member.

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



THE ALDE & ORE ASSOCIATION
Your Voice – Your Estuary



30th Anniversary PHOTOGRAPHY COMPETITION

FREE TO ENTER

Calling amateur photographers of all ages!
Send us your photos.

Prizes awarded for best photos taken around
the Alde and Ore Estuary.

Categories for children and adults.

Deadline: 30 July 2021

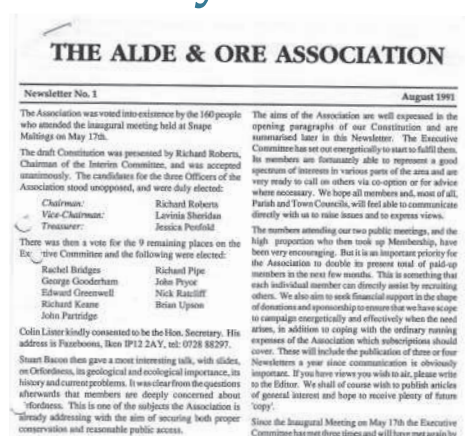
Entry forms and full details on our website:

www.aldeandore.org

The Association's 30th anniversary

The Association will be 30 years old in May 2021. We will be marking the anniversary with events and activities throughout the summer and autumn including the Photography Competition (above) but we would like to receive suggestions from you for celebrations.

The Autumn Newsletter will be a bumper anniversary issue. Please send your memories of the estuary, stories, articles and photographs for publication. Email info@aldeandore.org



Association events, 2021

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

Butley Ferry starts the season on Saturday, 6 April, 11a.m.-4p.m. see www.aldeandore.org Butley Ferry.

Annual General Meeting: Thursday, 15 April, at 6.30 p.m. by Zoom (see page 14).

Walks: Friday, 14 May 2020. An interesting walk at RSPB Botany Farm Reserve at Snape guided by the RSPB. Members will be emailed if it is possible to go ahead.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO PLAN A WALK? Perhaps for early July or early September. Email info@aldeandore.org

Annual Barbecue: August/end July date and place on the estuary to be confirmed

30th anniversary events: later in the year to be decided as and when Covid rules permit.