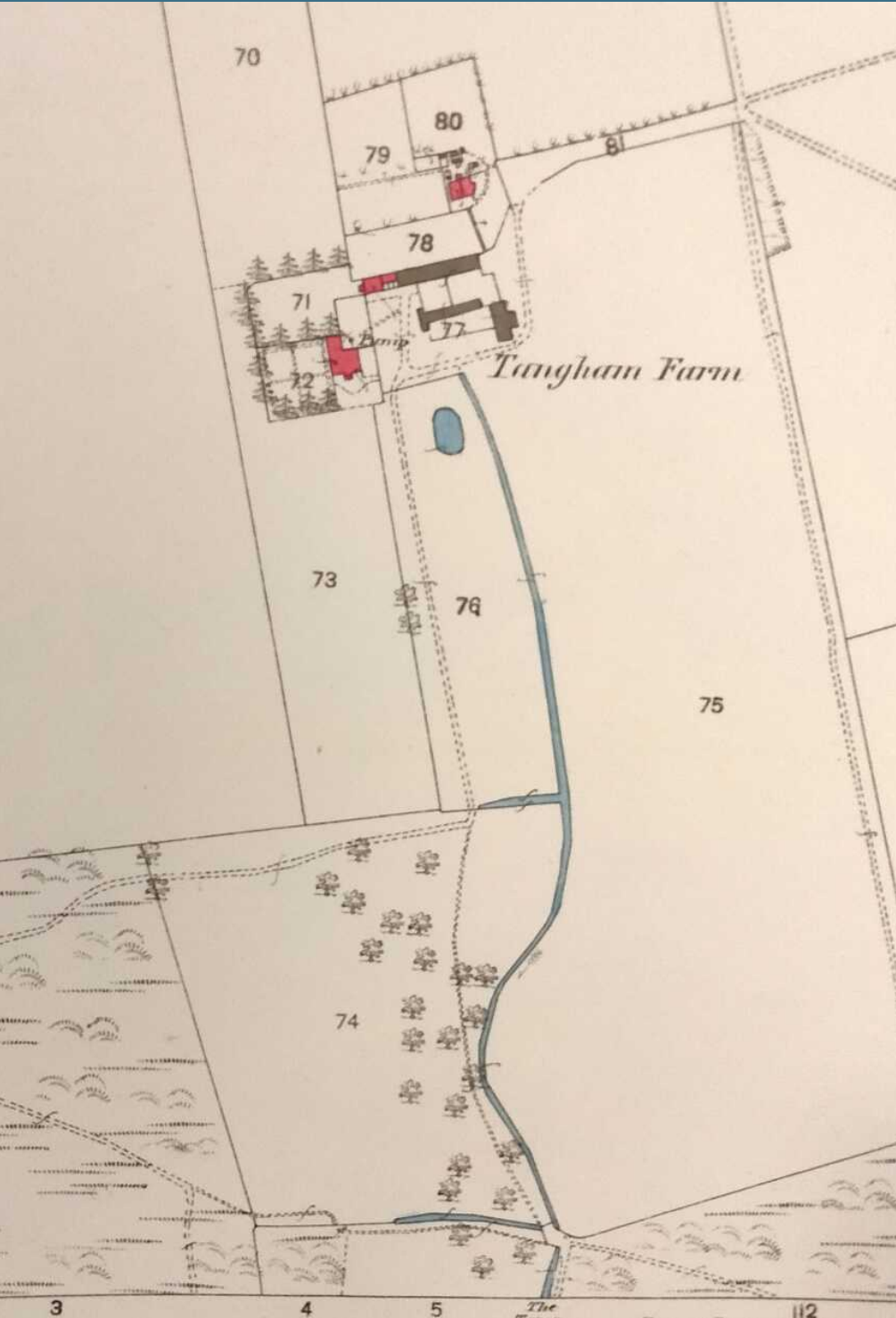




# The Alde & Ore Association

Newsletter 64 - Autumn 2025

In this issue: maps, mansions and meanderings.



Your Voice - Your Estuary

# Contents

Chairman's notes	3
Alde & Ore Community Partnership	4
Alde & Ore Estuary Trust	4
The ferry on the telly, <i>Roy Truman</i>	5
Blackheath House, <i>Colin Chamberlain</i>	6
Water monitoring	10
The SUP: another way to enjoy the estuary, <i>Sarah Dudgeon and Max Livingstone- Learmonth</i>	11
Annual barbecue	12
The Tang, <i>John Robinson</i>	14
New wetlands at White House Farm, <i>Alison Andrews</i>	18
Navigating chaos on an industrialised coast, <i>Mark Goyder</i>	20
Christmas cards	24

# Editor's introduction

According to Kahlil Gibran, 'Nature smiles in spring, laughs in summer and yawns in autumn'. I'm not sure about the last of these – as I write this, Storm Amy rampages around the country. Best to stay inside and enjoy a good read.

This issue features a timely article by Colin Chamberlain about Blackheath House, the setting for this year's very successful barbecue. John Robinson has been following on foot and on old maps a less familiar local river, the Tang. And Mark Goyder has written an update on the energy projects in our area, a follow-up to his article last year. Head Ferryman Roy Truman has been on TV again (rumours that he is in line to be the next James Bond may have been exaggerated). And Sarah Dudgeon and Max Livingstone-Learmonth share their enthusiasm for stand-up paddleboarding.

As always, we would love to receive your enthusiasms, articles and photos to share with members.

*Monica Allen*  
Editor, [newsletter@aldeandore.org](mailto:newsletter@aldeandore.org)

## An estuary glossary

### **The Alde & Ore Association [www.aldeandore.org](http://www.aldeandore.org)**

The 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 the benefit to all and works by making the voice of the river heard. All matters include seeking to influence government policies that may affect the estuary, scrutinising planning proposals, and activities such as the ferry, walks, walk booklets and more.

### **The Alde & Ore Community Partnership [www.aocp.co.uk](http://www.aocp.co.uk)**

The AOCP works with the community to help deliver the Estuary Plan now that it has entered the implementation phase. The Partnership involves the whole community, with every parish bordering the rivers represented together with county and district councillors, businesses, the East Suffolk Water Management Board, and the Alde and Ore Association. The Partnership will also continue to work with national agencies including Natural England and the Environment Agency and locally with Coastal Partnership East.

### **The Alde & Ore Estuary Trust [www.aoetrust.org](http://www.aoetrust.org)**

The AOET is a registered charity whose role is to raise the funds needed, where government funds are not available, to deliver the Estuary Plan. This will be achieved through a combination of donations, grants and charitable foundation awards that support flood and environmental defence work. Contributions from community supporters, however small, are also vital to this project. Donations to the AOET enabled an outline business case to be completed to secure government match funding to deliver the Phase 1 works within the Estuary Plan. Further donations are urgently needed to complete Phase 2.

### **The East Suffolk Water Management Board [www.wlma.org.uk/east-suffolk-idb/home/](http://www.wlma.org.uk/east-suffolk-idb/home/)**

ESWMB is a Flood Risk Management Authority that carries responsibility for implementation and delivery of the construction works for upgrading the river walls in line with the resilience approach in the Estuary Plan. ESWMB also works with the Environment Agency to obtain necessary approvals and access government funds.

Front cover: sections of OS map 1881 (courtesy of the British Library), see article on pp. 14–17.

## Chairman's notes

After seemingly weeks of long hot days with gentle breezes, we are now alternately battered by furious winds, drenched in sudden extreme downpours, and in between, seeing the Alde river a totally flat calm, a deep steely blue in the early morning sun with a very high tide lapping the saltings. We have a beautiful landscape and it needs our constant attention to ensure its continuation and the joy it gives us, whether on the water or walking beside it.

There is discussion now about whether rivers are alive or living beings and merit becoming legal entities to help ensure that they are not trampled down while people use them with no thought of avoiding pollution, destroying banks and marshes, drowning out the peace with excessive noise, using them simply as a dumping ground, or not realising that eventually many things end up in rivers.

We could say the same of climate change. How many turn off their machines rather than leave them on standby? How many take care not to leave taps running while expensively cleaned water simply runs away? On the other hand, how many take the easy route of washing everything down the drain – out of sight, out of mind – unaware, or uncaring, about the build-up of fat or bleach, which then affects the efficacy of our drainage and sewage systems and the health of the water courses.

We are fortunate that the Alde and Ore does not have the substantial water treatment plants that elsewhere overflow at times of high rainfall and raise the level of noxious elements in the river. But we need to keep an eye on this by regular monitoring: a constant eye is a far better safeguard making us ready to catch a problem before it becomes too big. It is good that now we have a great team monitoring the quality of the water.

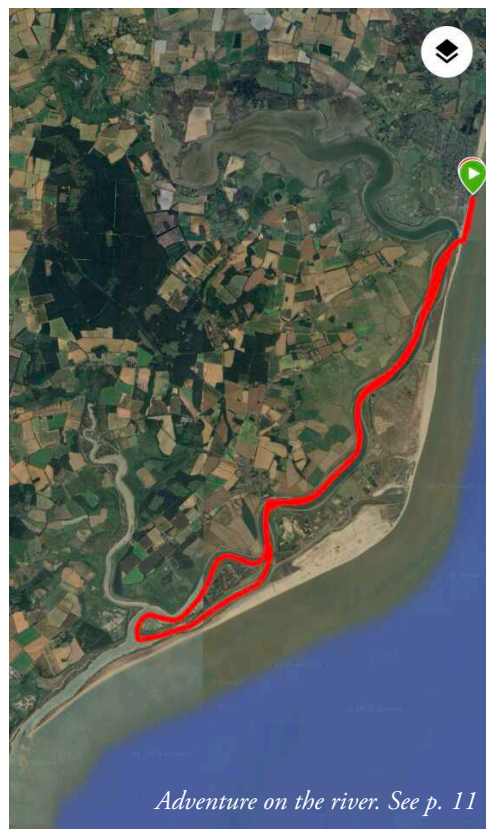
Visiting a water treatment plant, as well as being interesting to see how what people unthinkingly put into drains is dealt with, really brings home the fact that cardboard, wet wipes, plastics and much more not only block the drains but must be removed before the water treatment process can start. We are very lucky here that generally our rivers carry very little rubbish that could seriously damage the river environment.

The environment can be damaged in other ways too. Mark's article (p. 20) updates us on what is happening so close to the Alde, Ore and Butley rivers; we need to be watchful to prevent damage, hence the Association submitted comments in relation to the forthcoming planning hearing about Sea Link on the impact on the landscape of massive converter stations, on light, obstacles to access, losing ease of access to enjoy the area.

We also help as guardians of the river walls and try to ensure that the necessary repairs and strengthening are done. Achieving this is not easy now when we have both the government unsure of what funds to expend and developments like Sizewell C that completely change the costs of manpower or resources. The estuary plan that was drawn up to begin in the upper estuary has

had to be revised to start with about half the funding planned. We will have to find the best ways to work our way down all the estuary and increase the resilience where it is needed.

Meanwhile, until, if ever, rivers become legal entities, as a community the Association will continue to do all it can to be the voice of the estuary.



*Adventure on the river. See p. 11*

### On the bright side

But there is always so much activity, adventure and enjoyment to be had around the estuary. While the summer heat shortened flowering times, it seemed to deepen the rich colours of sea lavender and sea pink. In August, the annual barbecue could not have been in a more wonderful setting, on the most perfect sunny day with a refreshing light breeze, the river sparkling, broad with the high tide, and eating the delicious food that Suffolk is so good at producing.

Many children have learned to sail or increased their skills during the summer whether at Slaughden, Orford or Aldeburgh, some in club courses and some on the special days laid on for local schools, so they can see a new aspect of the area they live in and develop skills and confidence.

And so many people have enjoyed being in and on the river in a great variety of craft, and long walks along the river embankments, refreshed in the wind, watching so many species of birds and wildlife: godwit, even whimbrel and curlew and the occasional osprey, changing with each passing season and simply revelling in the ever-changing sky scapes. As well as the beautiful setting sun, the bright clear skies and so many different cloud formations, from wispy threads to towering cumulonimbus, are a constant delight.

May we all have a good autumn and winter.

*Alison Andrews, Chairman, Alde & Ore Association*



Since the last newsletter, the AOCIP met in March and heard that the review of costings for the Upper Estuary Plan showed an almost doubling of the costs assessed at the time of the flood and grant application in 2023. A decision was therefore taken to modify the project and seek permission to do only two, not four, flood cells. This would at least start the protection going at the head of the estuary at Snape Maltings and Snape Village. The increase in costs reflected more extensive construction works and rises in costs generally with energy prices and the Ukraine war, which affect the country as a whole, but also the doubling of costs locally for earth-moving construction staff and clay as a result of the start of the Sizewell C works.

Approval from the Environment Agency for this amended project has been awaited but recent indications are not looking positive. AOCIP are seeking more information from the EA.

Whatever the outcome of the request for the amended project, the AOCIP are already starting to plan the 10-year review of the Estuary Plan, and this could help form the basis for working out the next steps to maintain the resilience of the estuary defences. All this is planned to be discussed at the next AOCIP meeting, hopefully around the end of October 2025.

*Alison Andrews, Hon. Sec.*

## THE ALDE & ORE ESTUARY TRUST



PRESERVE . IMPROVE . PROTECT

The East Suffolk Water Management Board has been involved in a court case concerning stockpiling clay on agricultural land in the Iken flood cell. Following a long investigation by the Environment Agency, the result is a small fine (£4k) and costs (£15.5k) for not having the correct permit to set up and operate two clean clay piles intended as construction material for repairing breaches in the estuary walls and reinstating the river wall defences in the Iken flood cell. No remediation order was made by the court, which means that the material can stay where it is and remains ready for use to repair the walls. This case has seriously hampered the community attempts to protect the estuary from flooding.

In a press release, the ESWMB said the following:

'In 2016 the Board had arranged with the EA and local partners to source and stockpile clay in the Alde and Ore Estuary at no cost to the taxpayer, which was planned to be used for sealing breaches in the EA's estuary river wall defences and ultimately for reinstating those defences. This material has

been categorised by the EA as fit for purpose, but the Board has not been able to retrospectively secure a bespoke waste licence from the EA to use the material for the purposes it was intended, despite several attempts to do so. The EA have also stated that they would prefer the material to stay where it is so as not to cause any environmental upheaval...

'Yet after over 7 years since the start of the EA's investigation, the flood risk still remains to people, property, public infrastructure and wildlife, more so than ever. So much so that the EA themselves recognised this in 2022 and made available a grant of £11m...so the Board could start to prepare detailed plans to reinstate the same EA defences in the upper Alde and Ore estuary. This work has been done; however, the delivery phase of the project has not been able to start until the Waste License Investigation and Court Case had concluded, and due to the considerable time it takes to get all the necessary permitting in place from the EA.'

The Aldeburgh Bookshop has once again organised the production of two beautiful Christmas cards for you to buy – see the cards on p. 24.

# The Ferry on the telly!

## Roy Truman

When it comes to being featured on television, our little boat has always played second fiddle to Walberswick Ferry at Southwold. Don't get me wrong, this is not a complaint. Dani Church rows a bigger boat and carries a huge number of passengers every season. It is well known, extremely popular and easily accessible so it is understandable that both Susan Calman and Kate Humble have included Dani and her ferry in their travelogues. You can park close by, have an ice cream, cross the river on the ferry, have a cuppa on the other side and back to the car using the ferry or, if you are feeling like a little exercise, walk back using the bridge, which is just a couple of hundred metres away. A really nice day out for anyone on holiday in the area.

Ours, on the other hand, is miles from the nearest parking, with no facilities (bushes for the desperate) and a long walk or cycle ride to get anywhere with any chance of refreshment. So it came as a huge surprise when I was contacted by a production company making a series of programmes for Channel 5 asking if they could include a piece on the ferry. I gave it three seconds of serious consideration before agreeing. You mustn't appear too eager. I was told that a 'celebrity presenter' would turn up at the ferry, talk about it, have a ride and Bob's your uncle, instant stardom for the ferry. And then comes the organisation. I was not, under any circumstances, to tell in advance who the 'sleb' would be as it was not unknown for hordes of adoring fans to turn up. It was, in fact, JB Gill of the boy band JLS, who had also done very well in Strictly Come Dancing last year, had a TV farming programme (he is also a farmer) and appears on Songs of Praise. It's good to have more than one string to your bow. Oh, and can you send us proof of insurance before we let him risk life and limb. I felt that we were pretty safe from hordes of young ladies so I didn't arrange any security guards.

The day before filming the film crew came down to the ferry to recce, plan and devise a storyline. Just to add to the authentic ferry atmosphere, they had to walk to the ferry carrying their equipment, although they were very kindly given permission to park their van at Ferry Farm. JB (Ben to his friends) was not told where he was going or what he would see. And so, the next day, he and the film crew arrived by walking along the footpath from Ferry Farm, the river and the ferry hidden from view behind the river wall.

It was a genuine look of surprise on his face as he looked along the river and was introduced to me and told of our enterprise. It took just a few seconds to realise that this was an intelligent and inquisitive person who, over

the two hours of filming fired questions at me constantly, wanting to know the history of the ferry and the area. He was skilled at his job and made me feel at ease in front of the camera. As well as filming to their plan, he wanted to find out about the river and, seeing me tie up the boat to the jetty, asked me to teach him how to tie the knot (a clove hitch), and he was genuinely pleased when he was able to do it.

There was so much more filmed and recorded than actually appeared on the programme. The final edit, which I didn't see until it was broadcast, felt to me like an excellent representation of a day in the life of the ferry. Will it boost our passenger numbers? Probably not, although we did have a group of ten people training for a charity walk who came down because they had seen the programme. We are still no nearer to civilisation. Still have no facilities and are only there for people who are making an effort and are on a journey. Five minutes of fame then back to normal!

At the end of our piece, we made a link to JB's next port of call. The Longshed in Woodbridge and the building of the Sutton Hoo Burial Ship. And then I was on the telly again. Does that make me a 'sleb'? No one has asked for a selfie yet, but surely, given time...

(The programme is Episode 3 of the series Coastal Adventures, available on catch-up on Channel 5).

Roy Truman, Head Ferryman (Available for film, TV or 'Strictly')



*Roy and Ben.*

# Blackheath House: contrasting architectural styles over time

## Colin Chamberlain with John Dunthorne

*Members of the Association attending this year's Annual Barbecue in August were able to enjoy the glorious riverside setting of Blackheath House now generally thought of as the 'gem' of the Alde and Ore Estuary (see report of the Barbecue on p. 12). By kind permission of its owner, Lady Patty Hopkins, members were able to picnic and gaze across the mile-wide estuary towards the southern bank of the river with Iken and its little church. It is entirely apt that this architecturally extraordinary house is now in the possession of an internationally recognised architect, Lady Hopkins, who with her late husband Sir Michael, transformed this most complicated of houses, which has been refashioned in contrasting styles at different times.*

A rare 19th-century photograph, probably taken in the 1880s and now in the possession of Lady Hopkins, shows what is believed to be the former Blackheath Villa, probably built in the 1830s with what she assumes is the tower of a family chapel behind other flint structures, remnants of which are still standing behind the main house today (Fig. 1). An 1886 Ordnance Survey map shows their position. It also shows a pontoon on the shore, indicating just how long boats have been used by the owners of Blackheath, as a pontoon still stands there today.

Surrounding Blackheath in the 19th century, but owned separately, was to the north the manor of Friston with its ancient hall, church and several hundred cottagers and, to the east, the now 'lost' parish of Hazlewood with its own church and almost 100 cottagers. Friston Manor had long been owned by a branch

of the wealthy Wentworth family, which had large estates not only in Suffolk but also in many other parts of the country, although the principal family seat was at Wentworth Castle in Yorkshire. The family had aristocratic roots and amongst its most distinguished ancestors was the unfortunate minister to Charles I, the first Earl of Strafford, who was executed in 1641.

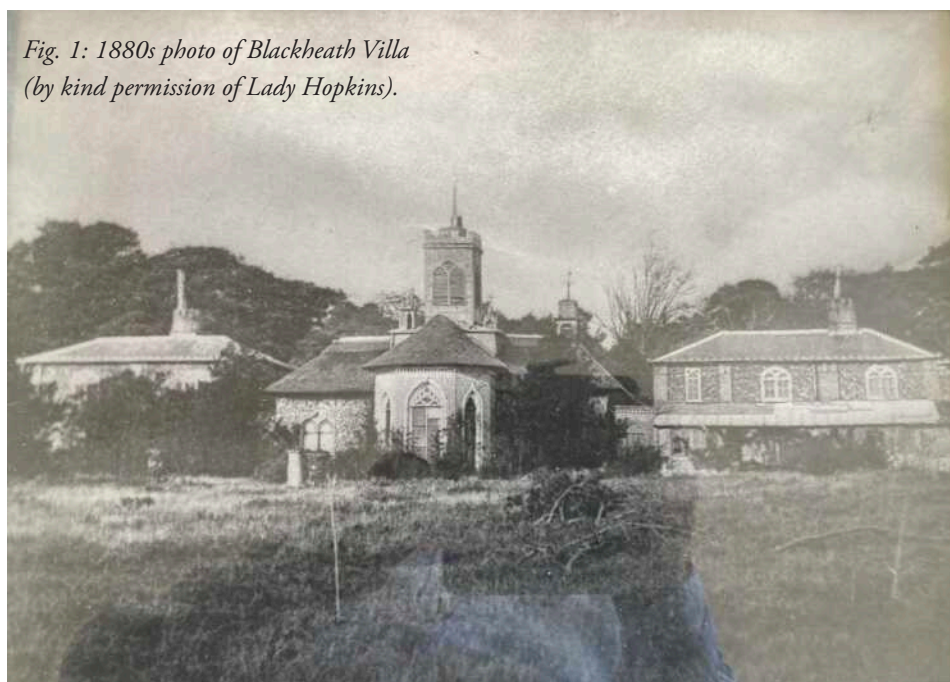
### *The 1886–88 mansion*

It was perhaps inevitable that Blackheath would eventually fall into the hands of the Wentworth Family. Thomas Wentworth (or Vernon-Wentworth as he styled himself), the Lord of the Manor of Friston, purchased the Blackheath estate in 1886 with a view to building a big house suitable for, as he saw it, his station in life. The house was built at the end of a long boom in building large Victorian country properties.<sup>1</sup> The attractions of the estate included not just the idyllic setting of the site, behind growing tree plantations, but also the abundant opportunities for shooting and wildfowling. For the task, he employed the well-respected Ipswich architect Edward Fernley Bisshopp (1850–1921), whose work is to be found throughout Suffolk including in a restoration of St Peter and St Paul's Church in Aldeburgh in 1891. His brief at Blackheath was to demolish Blackheath Villa and build a large mansion slightly in front. Constructed in the years 1886–88 in the popular Anglo-Dutch style in Suffolk red brick with decorative stone quoins (Fig. 2), it was a two-storey building with very high ceilings and built with such mass that it was easy

to think it had more floors. It was built around a grand colonnaded central gallery much of it in Havana cedar, with a rooftop atrium above, a massive oak staircase, grand bedrooms on the upper floor wainscoted in oak, all a perfect backdrop for the grand piano and palm trees which dominated the hall as seen in Fig. 4 on page 8. The upper floor gallery was a layout popularised by Charles Barry in the 1860s at the Reform Club in Pall Mall in London to encourage social circulation.

Additionally, the fashion in the 1880s was for polychromatic exteriors to have highly decorated facades, in this case with deep, curved bay windows, which resulted in the much commented upon 'over-exuberant' character. The façade is reminiscent of

*Fig. 1: 1880s photo of Blackheath Villa  
(by kind permission of Lady Hopkins).*



*Fig. 2: Bisshopp's mansion of 1886-88 as seen from the river (south facade).*



Norman Shaw's building at No. 1 St James Street, London built in 1881–82 in red brick with ornamental brick panels and stone bands. A 50-foot high rather carbuncular Italian-style water tower with an eccentric bartizan turret was built at the north-west corner of the main block, with a front door entrance underneath, (as seen in Fig. 3) and a northern wing for servants' accommodation behind. Bisshopp was a well-known enthusiast for fauna and flora and had great artistic ability in representing them in elaborate mouldings and he incorporated some into Blackheath's exterior facades. He also built Blackheath's three entrance lodges: the East, Middle and West, the last of which newly connected the house to the Snape–Aldeburgh road via the current mile-long drive. Previously, access was apparently from Snape and the now disappeared village of Hazlewood using stretches of the Sailors' Path.

As Thomas Vernon-Wentworth owned Wentworth Castle and property in Scotland, Blackheath was primarily used as a sporting estate for the entertainment of honoured and local guests. When he died in 1902, his estates were split between his two sons with the younger, Frederick Charles Vernon-Wentworth, inheriting Blackheath and the manor of Friston. In the Great War he served in the army achieving the rank of major although he always appears to have been known as 'captain'. As he did not have other estates, he most likely spent more time in Blackheath enjoying its undoubted pleasures. However, the effects of the war, the drift of labour from the land and post-war increases in prices and particularly taxation meant there were increasing financial pressures which made agricultural estates

less economically viable. During World War II the house was requisitioned by the army and the family were obliged to leave for the duration, only to find when they returned after the war that their house was in a poor or 'sad' state as the Vernon-Wentworths put it.

### *The reaction against Victoriana*

As a result of the post-war austerity felt by everyone in Britain, Victorian styles fell out of favour giving

way to simpler and more utilitarian designs. Blackheath seemed heavy and old fashioned and out of keeping with post-war needs. Frederick Charles died in 1947 and the Blackheath estate was inherited by his son Charles John. Many large landowners in the 1950s found the challenges of restoration too much and decided to reduce their ancestral homes or demolish them altogether. Within the same five-year period in the 1950s many of the grandest neighbouring houses to Blackheath were demolished by their owners: Sudbourne Hall (1951), Rendlesham Hall (1949), which was of a similar design to Blackheath, Campsea Ashe High House (1953) and three houses around Woodbridge, Bredfield House (1950), and a little later, also near Woodbridge, Boulge Hall (1955) and Ufford Place (1956). Demolitions after World War II were more common than after the Great War and represent the greatest loss to East Suffolk's then very special country house heritage.<sup>2</sup>

*Fig. 3: Exterior of Bisshopp's west façade of 1886–88*

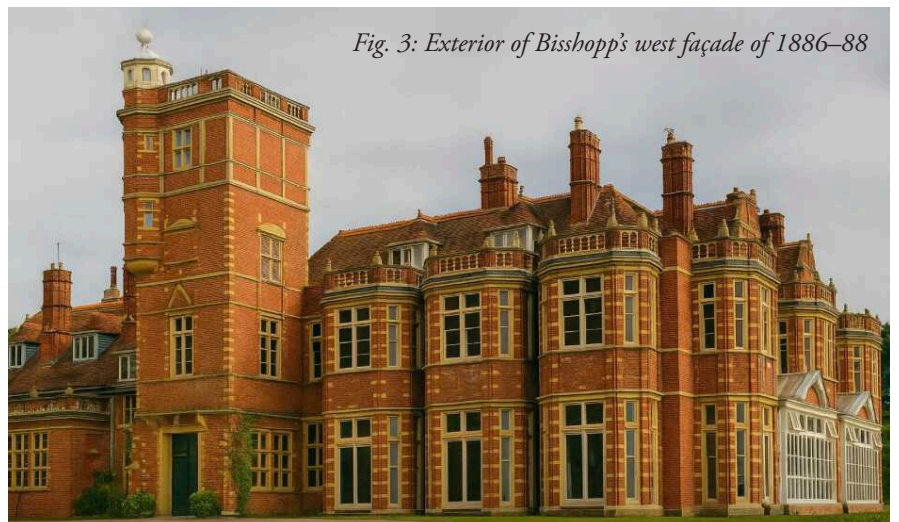




Fig. 4: Bishopp's grand hall.

Charles John Vernon-Wentworth and his wife, however, were determined not only to save their house from demolition but also, in keeping with the times, remove what they saw as its Victorian external excesses, particularly the highly decorated curved bays and the Anglo-Dutch-style dormers which by the 1950s were sadly out of fashion. However, they wished to reduce the size of the building by demolishing the water tower (which was no longer needed) and some of the servants' accommodation in the northern wing at the back of the house and so reduce the building to a simplified core. It was no doubt all intended to produce savings in maintenance costs in the more straightened 1950s.

The eminent post-war architect Raymond Erith (1904–73) based in Dedham in Essex, who was described 'as one of the few genuine classical designers in Britain' and was later joined by Quinlan Terry as a partner and went on next to remodel Nos 10, 11 and 12 Downing Street, was engaged in 1957 to put up a scheme for reducing and remodelling Blackheath's exterior. It appears he made some suggestions for refashioning parts of the interior as well but these were not accepted.<sup>3</sup> He had experience of putting forward schemes for the reduction of large houses in the area such as at Tendring Hall designed by Sir John Soane on the River Stour, although unfortunately the scheme was too much for the owners and the building was demolished instead in 1953. Mrs

Audrey Vernon-Wentworth apparently took Erith up to the top of the water tower at Blackheath and pointed out the rectangular core of the house defined by the main roof: her instruction to Erith was that only this was to be retained, its facades reclad in plain brick in the then fashionable neo-Georgian style with sash windows, and the rest of the house was to be demolished although a new garage yard at the back of the house was created using some parts of the otherwise demolished north wing.

Not everything in the elevations was to be lost: the original rainwater heads and down-pipes were retained. Most of the original chimneys were kept but stuccoed to avoid a clash of contrasting brickwork. Erith included decorative stone detail in the string and sill courses and in the corners and window heads which were grooved to represent white brick voussoirs or arches. Erith was asked to create a door in the south elevation facing the river allowing access to the lawn below leading down to the water's edge. This presented a problem in that the very high ceilings of the original mansion necessitated a very tall door if everything was to be kept in proportion. Erith solved this with an outsized fanlight window over the south elevation doors and surrounding them with stone columns and lintels which gave the doors a human scale.

Erith had proposed a new roof over the central hall but this was not taken up and the untouched Victorian interior must have seemed incongruously at odds with the new Georgian exterior. Erith was not involved in managing the building project and the family dealt directly with the builders. It would seem therefore that the family made good use of Erith's high architectural skills but closed their chequebook to him when it came to implementation. The refashioned classical look of the house since 1957 is pictured in Fig. 6 at the end of this article.

#### *The Hopkins' refashioning of the interior*

Mrs Audrey Wentworth (the Vernon was dropped at some point) survived her husband and in 1998 after her death Blackheath House and estate were offered for sale by Savills the estate agents on behalf of the executors. Impressive sales particulars were issued describing the house and its estate cottages and the various lots available. The main house and some 500 acres together with the drive from West Lodge were acquired by the internationally renowned architects Sir Michael and Lady Patty Hopkins who were pioneers of the High Tech style of architecture and whose work included the Mound Stand at Lord's Cricket Ground, Glyndebourne Opera House, Portcullis House and Westminster Underground Station and many other famous contemporary buildings.

Whilst Audrey Wentworth and her husband had tackled the exterior of the house, the Hopkins set about mostly

remodelling the Victorian interior, which no doubt cried out for modernisation to the architectural couple. A very large ground floor area was created by taking down the internal walls on the



*Fig. 5: Interior after the Hopkins' remodelling.*

south side, opening up splendid interior views of the river and allowing the sun to pour into the centre of the house. The ceiling was now supported by pillars in the centre of the room (Fig. 5). The 1886–88 oak staircase to the first floor was removed and a more modern wooden spiral staircase erected in a much lighter wood. The ground and first floors of the saloon were refashioned by removing the oak panelling and making the first floor landing larger and more rounded in shape allowing people to be sociable and observe what was happening on the ground floor. The kitchens and day rooms located on the west, east and north sides of the ground floor were altered with doorways created so that these rooms could be accessed from room to room *enfilade* style. A new north entrance to the house was opened up opposite the south entrance on the ground floor. The overall effect is of a large family house with high ceilings well adapted to entertaining on a large scale and displaying an array of much-loved furniture and pictures.

Today, the house remains the centrepiece of the Blackheath estate, surrounded by a collection of cottages in the occupation of the Hopkins family. Happily, in the safe ownership of the Hopkins family the house and its estate remain the 'gem' on the Alde they have always been.

#### *References*

- <sup>1</sup> 'A Country House Analysis' at p.9 in Mark Girouard, *The Victorian Country House* (1979).
- <sup>2</sup> W.M. Roberts, *Lost Country Houses of Suffolk* (2010).
- <sup>3</sup> Lucy Archer, *Raymond Erith, Architect* (1985).



*Fig.6. Blackheath House from the river today.*

# Water quality testing update

## Miv Hall

During the past six months, the water testing team have been concentrating on finding ways to present our growing body of data to as wide an audience as possible. Closest to home, we have developed our own webpage giving summary data on a quarterly basis along with an explanation of the work of the group and how to interpret the results. The charts below give a preview of what can be found on the new water monitoring page on the AOA website.

Further afield we are sharing our data with interested parish councils, Aldeburgh Town Council, New Orford Town Trust and interested local organisations such as Aldeburgh Yacht Club. We greatly appreciate the financial assistance given to enable us to continue our work for another two years.

In line with predictions by climate scientists, the UK has experienced another cycle of record climate extremes, manifesting this year as one of the six lowest spring rainfalls since 1836. Spring sunshine also broke records this year coming in at 653.3 hours, the highest since records began in 1910. Although there appears to be no immediate impact on our water quality, we might expect changes in the river ecosystem over time and our data will be a useful tool in evaluating any change taking place.

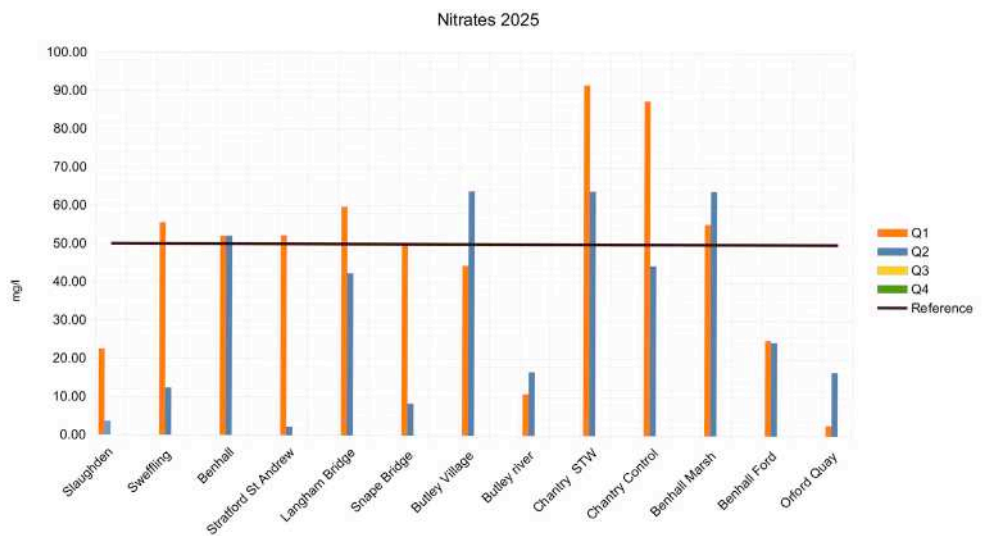
Whilst on the subject of breaking records, the Independent Water Commission, mentioned in the last newsletter, has convened, taken evidence and produced a 464-page report on the UK water industry in July this year – a mere 10 months from being set up. Quite an impressive achievement for such a complex task.

Amongst its proposals and recommendations are:

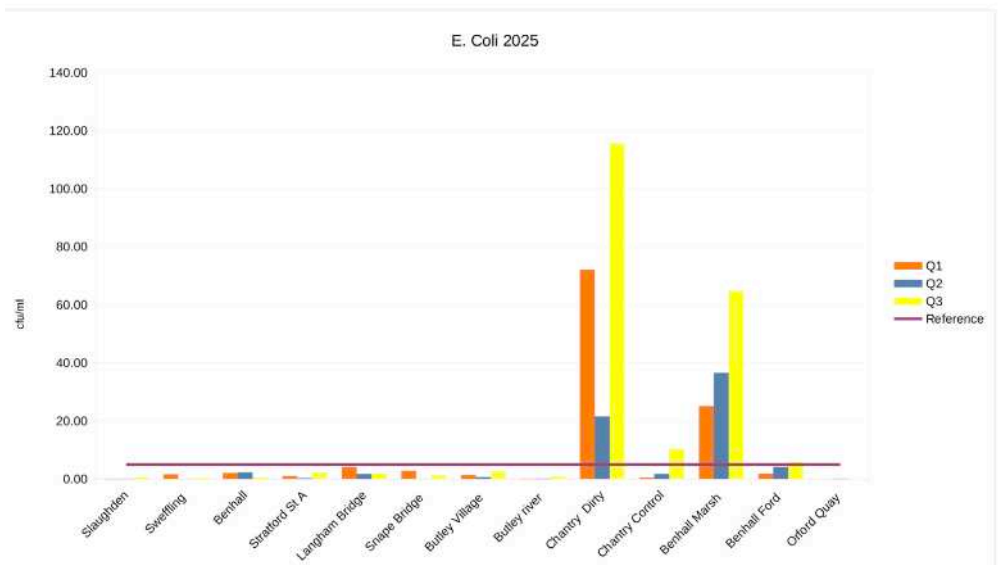
- scrapping Ofwat and replacing it with a more integrated system of regulation
- establishing nine new regional water authorities responsive to local needs
- creating a 25-year National Water Strategy
- improved corporate governance and condition of critical infrastructure

- other measures by reform across strategic planning, legislative framework, water company structures, environmental performance and public health.

The Government appears to have been enthusiastic in accepting the report and has moved quickly to endorse the abolition of Ofwat and replace it with a regulator that will take on environmental regulation specific to the water industry from the Environment Agency. Much will depend on how quickly these changes can be accomplished.



Measurement units: milligrams per litre of sampled water (mg/l). Reference: UK standard of maximum of 50 mg/l for nitrate in drinking water.



Measurement units: colony forming units per 1ml of sampled water (Cfu/ml). Reference: international standard of 500 Cfu/100ml (5 Cfu/ml), below which the water quality is classified as Excellent. Above 900 Cfu indicates unsuitable for bathing.

# The SUP: another way to enjoy the estuary

## Sarah Dudgeon and Max Livingstone-Learmonth

As lapsed sailors, we have grown to love excursions on stand-up paddleboards (SUPs) as an alternative way of being out on the River Alde, and enjoying the beautiful environment in an even more peaceful way.

Our boards are basic inflatables, which means that the strength of wind and tide far exceed any aspirations of paddle power that we might have. But this adds to the sense of anticipation and adventure because you can't just go 'on demand', you are subject to the elements – even more so than sailing. We enjoy constructing excursions, looking days or weeks ahead for an alignment of an alternative 'holy trinity': tide, wind and ideally sunrise. While dawn is not strictly essential, the wind is usually gentler early, of course, and it is hard to beat the sight of huge Suffolk skies over the water as the sun comes up.

Over the last few years, we have enjoyed a couple of dawn paddles from Snape Bridge to Orford, taking in the dreamy haze from the Maltings to Iken Church with just the odd seal for company, followed by the huge, often turbulent, body of water past Little Japan, until the tranquility of the Creek, the home-coming feel through the moorings to Aldeburgh Yacht Club, and finally the brief sense of raw wilderness down towards Orford.

Out and back routes are particularly challenging because you need to time your route around a low or high tide at the furthest point, and you need a very light wind throughout or an incredibly fortuitous 180 degree wind change at the right moment. So we are delighted to have completed our first excursion from Aldeburgh round Havergate Island and back this summer.

Initially contemplating conditions for a potter on the sea, mission creep set in at the planning stages when we realised that we could

set off on the sea at dawn on a slack low tide, cross over the wall at AYC onto the river and continue down to Orford, before trying to hit Dove Point 2.5–3 hours later just as the tide turned to help us for the return journey. And all of this, very much on the basis of the softest south wind for a few weeks.

In the event, the wind wasn't quite as gentle as hoped for or forecast, so the wind-against-tide choppiness was quite a challenge all the way to Orford, and our arms and shoulders were complaining. We should also have allowed more time for photos, because the wind would catch the bow of the board and float us into a spin as we scabbled with the camera in waterproof case. But these are nice problems to have when you're out enjoying the serenity with the waking birds.

We were therefore a bit behind schedule passing Orford, but once in the lee of Havergate Island, the water was the silkiest of the whole excursion and blissfully peaceful. In spite of the tide therefore turning a bit early for us, we battled our way around Dove Point and could then finally relax as the tide and wind, now working behind us in tandem, floated us along effortlessly.

We touched down in Orford for a brief rest and some top-up breakfast – a bacon and egg sandwich has never tasted so good. And this set us up perfectly for a serene paddle home, with a handful of boats mobilising in Orford and Aldeburgh for company, and a final surf-paddle leg on the rapidly enlivening sea.

It's a privilege to be out on the water experiencing the wonderful environment we have here – in summary, Alde & Awe.

Excursion stats: 5.45 a.m. departure, 16.66 miles, 5 hours 24 minutes, 2 euphoric paddlers. See route map on page 4.



*Rounding Dove Point.*



*Heading back north towards Aldeburgh.*

# The annual barbecue 2025

This year's members' barbecue was held on 10 August, a beautiful sunny day, matching the stunning location of Blackheath House, where Lady Hopkins had very kindly once again allowed nearly 130 members to eat, drink and be merry on the banks of the Alde.

A few people enjoyed the gentle sail up the river landing close to the picnic site while everyone else parked near the house and wandered down through the grounds to the riverbank. The heather was in full bloom and the views across the sparkling estuary were clear.

Gerard King of Salter & King, Craft Butchers once again provided at cost the hog roast pulled pork, delicious with apple sauce in a bun, which the Salter & King team, in eye-catching shirts, served with aplomb. Tasty salads and delicious desserts

were also on the menu, and as always we used compostable plates and reusable cutlery. Many thanks are due to the trustees who organised the marquee, food and the bar, and to the team of parking organisers, servers, baristas and clearer-uppers. Gerard's generosity enables the Association to pass on funds to the Alde and Ore embankment improvement project.

Our Chairman, Alison, thanked everyone involved in organising and running the event and reported briefly on the current position with the river walls repairs. She expressed our gratitude to Lady Hopkins for yet again enabling so many, from babies to octagenarians, to enjoy being by the river chatting and meeting with friends old and new.

A most enjoyable occasion.





# The Tang: a little-known tributary of the Butley River

John Robinson

In addition to our much-loved rivers Alde, Ore and Butley, there is another watercourse, which, although smaller in size, is worthy of consideration by anyone interested in the history of the area.

The Tang is a tributary of Butley River, entering approximately 100m south of the Butley Ferry and 600m north of Boyton Dock. With a total length of just 5.5km from source to outfall, it rises in the high ground of Rendlesham Forest, from a small area of boggy ground, at about the 12–15m contour, south of what used to be Tangham Manor, was then Tangham Farm and is now Tangham House. It flows as a trickling stream, the banks stained orange by bacteria that have oxidised iron from groundwater and from the tannins in the pine wood.

The flow is in a southern direction to an area known as Scotland Fens, where it turns east and continues sluggishly at about 5m

above sea level, through a boggy area, before passing under the road from Hollesley to Capel St. Andrew, a crossing shown on historic maps as a ford. The stream then flows north-easterly in a heavily wooded valley, through Valley Farm (Fig. 1), passing north of the almshouses and church of Boyton and the centre of the village, from where it follows a large meander, absorbing a minor tributary coming from the area of Butley Abbey, before heading through low pasture about a metre below sea level to Butley Ferry Farm. This part of the stream defines the boundary between the parishes of Boyton to the south and Capel St. Andrew and Butley to the north. The stream then turns to the east and flows through reed beds into the long delf (a man-made main drainage ditch) behind the river wall of Butley River (Fig. 2), entering through a sluice that prevents high tides from flowing up the course of the stream.



*Fig. 1: Footbridge and V-notch weir at Valley Farm. Weirs such as this are often constructed on rivers and streams to enable the rate of flow to be measured.*



*Fig. 2: The Tang entering the delf behind the river wall of Butley River.*

## *Farming on the Sandlings: from heathland to forest*

At the beginning of the 16th century, there were about three sheep to every human being in England. Tangham Manor and later, Tangham Farm stood alone in a vast, open sheepwalk (heath), straddling the landmass between the Deben and the Alde. Isolated farmsteads such as this were often the property of absentee owners, existing as outlying parts of Sandlings estates, or they were in single ownership, as it was relatively easy for individuals to acquire such places because the price of the poor land was so low. Farmsteads and isolated hamlets were often located close to good supplies of water, often at the head of small streams occurring at the boundary between London clay and the overlying sands and gravels. Although the soil was poor, the farm would have prospered from the sheep, known as the 'golden hoofs' of the Sandlings, which roamed on the open heaths.

The landed estate of the 18th and early 19th centuries was a closely integrated system. Estates on the Sandlings contained heathland, arable land, drained marsh or lowland pasture and, sometimes, an expanse of saltmarsh. The poor acid character of the soil in the heathlands, coupled with constant grazing by sheep and other livestock, favoured the development of a characteristic vegetation, dominated by various combinations of ling, bell heather, gorse and broom.



Fig. 3: The ponds, dug as water holes for sheep, are still in existence.

Tracing the route of the stream down through the forest reveals three small, overgrown ponds between its source and Scotland Fens (Fig. 3). Although sheep can go for a long time without water, it was normal to provide ponds as animal watering holes. It is notable that this summer, whereas many streams and rivers have dried up from lack of rainfall, a low but significant flow remained in the Tang, even in mid-August.

According to Suffolk Heritage Explorer,<sup>1</sup> Tangham Farm is thought to have been established in approximately 1800. It is first depicted on a map of 1824–5 by Bryant. On that and subsequent maps it is depicted as three or four separate buildings spaced around an internal farmyard. It can reasonably be assumed that these comprise a farmhouse, barn and one or two outbuildings, whose layout changes with the different circumstances of the farm. *Farmsteads in the Suffolk Countryside Project* mentions the farm but provides little detail.<sup>2</sup>

When cheap wool began to be imported from Australia in the late 19th century, the farm's fortunes must have suffered, and it is likely that it reverted to residential occupation, while retaining the farm name. The sheepwalks were abandoned, and the great estate owners, who controlled most of the Sandlings, sought to find something profitable to do with the vast acreage. The 5th Baron Rendlesham (1840–1911), who owned much the area, while also owning estates in Durham, Essex, the West Indies and elsewhere, after an unsuccessful venture in farming lupins, a restorative fallow crop, turned to shooting, and started planting up the Tangham Walks to provide cover for game birds. The result was Tangham Forest, much of which was destroyed by fire during World War I.

In 1920, the barren heath was sold for £3–4 per acre to the newly established Forestry Commission, created to address the shortage of timber after World War I. The commission established a tree nursery just below Tangham Farm to the east of the Tang, and planted Scots and Corsican pine and Douglas fir trees to form Rendlesham Forest, enveloping the hamlet of Tangham in the process. Cricket bat willows were planted along the Tang. Planting was done entirely by hand, mostly by women, after the heath had been horse ploughed. The timber was destined to be

used as pit props and telegraph poles. Beech trees were used to infill gaps amongst the conifers. The forest was badly damaged during the hurricane of 1987, losing approximately one million trees.

### *Tangham Manor and the Tang on historic maps*

The manor is known to have been in the ownership of John de Tangham in 1327. Copinger states that Tangham Manor, part of the manor of Butley, was in the possession of Anne of Cleves, one of many properties gifted to her by Henry VIII, as settlement following the annulment of their marriage.<sup>3</sup>

#### *Radulph Agas map c.1594*

Commissioned by Robert Forthe, the owner of Tangham Manor, from cartographer Radulph Agas to resolve a boundary dispute, this extraordinary map on vellum is about the size of a card table. It features Tangham Manor and the manorial lands to the immediate south and west, with the sinuous course of the Tang, shown in muddy mauve, flowing south, together with roads and tracks, shown in brown, and particular features in the landscape.

In the small segment shown in Fig. 4, the manor house, in the upper-right sector of the map, is surrounded by a square moat (also in mauve), outside of which are paddocks and vegetable plots. Suffolk Heritage Explorer identifies the building to the left of the house as a church or viewing tower.<sup>4</sup> A barn is shown in the paddock to the right, behind which is a large farm animal, identified by Fenwick and Harrup<sup>5</sup> as a bull, although the apparent presence of an udder suggests otherwise. In front of the house are two other animals, the smaller of which could be a hen or a duck, the larger being an unidentifiable quadruped but possibly a pig.



Fig. 4: Agas map, 1594. (Courtesy of the British Library). This section shown is tiny – about a quarter of the size of a beer mat.

Towards the bottom of the map, a road is clearly labelled 'Boyton to Woodbridge' and another 'Shottisham to Boyton'. Also mentioned is the Portway, an ancient highway joining market towns, leading to the ferry across Butley River in its original position near Boyton Dock. In the left sector of the map is a road leading north-west to south-east labelled Eyke to Hollesley.

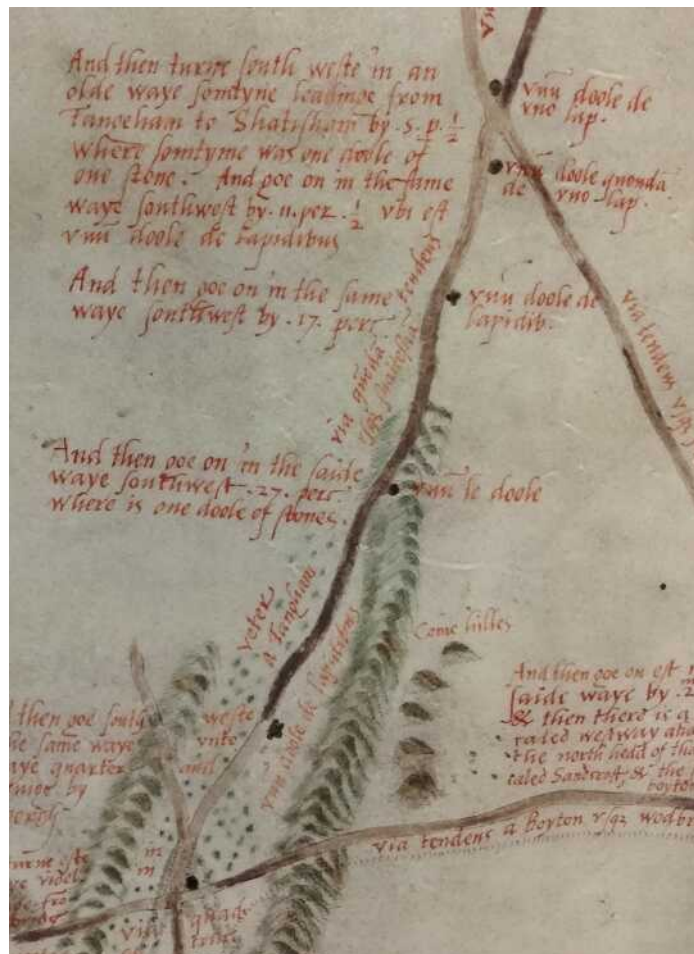


Fig. 5: Agas map, 1594. Detail of barrow mounds. (Courtesy of the British Library).

In the bottom-left sector of the Agas map (Fig. 5) is a detail showing five 'hilles', which are thought to be round barrows. The badly damaged barrows were located by Fenwick in 1980 and surveyed in 1987. Another barrow located south-west of Tangham House was investigated in 1962 and 1977 and was shown to be a bowl barrow with surrounding ditch. On the Agas map this appears as a single isolated mound. It is shown on modern day maps as a 'tumulus', and is described in the Suffolk Heritage Explorer as Tangham Mount<sup>6</sup>. Pottery fragments found in these barrows are of Scandinavian origin and date the mounds to the Bronze Age.

#### 18th-and 19th-century maps

A Suffolk Hundreds map, circa 1742, shows the Tang extending as far as Boyton church only. Hodskinson's high-quality map of 1783 (Fig. 6) shows the site of Tangham Manor, occupied simply by a house, while Bryant's map of 1824–25 shows the site occupied by Tangham Farm. Both Hodskinson's and Bryant's maps show

the Tang extending only as far as Scotland Fens. It is likely that this was the limit to which the tidal waters reached at high tide at times when the waters were not held back by a sluice. Fenwick & Harrup describe how, prior to the construction of the sluice, the stream was saltwater as far as Boyton Church.<sup>7</sup>

#### Ordnance Survey maps, 1881

The 1881 one-inch OS map shows Tangham Farm and the Tang following a course more or less as it does today, with the source just below the farm buildings. The 1881 six-inch OS map shows the group of buildings at the head of the Tang still named as Tangham Farm (Fig. 7). The main building, today called Tangham House, was constructed in about 1874 and is the large L-shaped building shown on the map in red. The red section of the large building behind was the old stables and tack room. The black section was the old pigsties. The moat that is such a feature of the Agas map is not shown here and no trace remains today, so it was probably infilled on the demise of the manor house.

At the confluence with Butley River, the six-inch map shows the stream flowing into a long delf behind the river wall, and then into Butley River via a sluice, the position of the sluice being virtually coincident with that of Butley Ferry (see map on front cover).

#### The sluice and river walls

The construction of the sluice leading to Butley River, together with the raising of the river walls, would have had a significant effect on the land behind, effectively turning it from saltmarsh, regularly inundated by spring tides, to the grazing marsh and coastal pasture we see today. The Tang itself would have changed from a saltwater tidal inlet to a freshwater stream.

Before the construction of the sluice, and to a certain extent after, the lower reaches of the Tang would have been navigable by small, flat-bottomed boats, used by reed cutters, fishermen, wildfowlers and others.

The construction of river walls commenced generally in phases from the 12th century, with reclamations around Orford being carried out by the 1160s. Saltmarshes were embanked at Bawdsey and Butley in the 1520s and 30s by the monks at Butley Priory. Simple flap sluices, which opened at low tide but were held shut by water pressure when the tide was high, started to be constructed from the 1590s. The process of reclamation was, however, long and complex and can only be partially reconstructed from historic maps.

Responsibility for the upkeep of minor watercourses remained with individual owners and occupiers. Early sluices could be repeatedly damaged by storm surges and blocked by silting. Constant repairs and refurbishment were needed. The benefits however, in terms of creating good grazing ground, made it worth the investment. The existing sluice was constructed in 1978–1980, replacing earlier versions which had themselves undergone several phases of replacement and refurbishment.

In 1932, the Butley Ferry boat was damaged after getting caught



Fig. 6: Hodskinson map, 1783, shows the site of Tangham Manor, now occupied by a house. (Courtesy of the British Library).

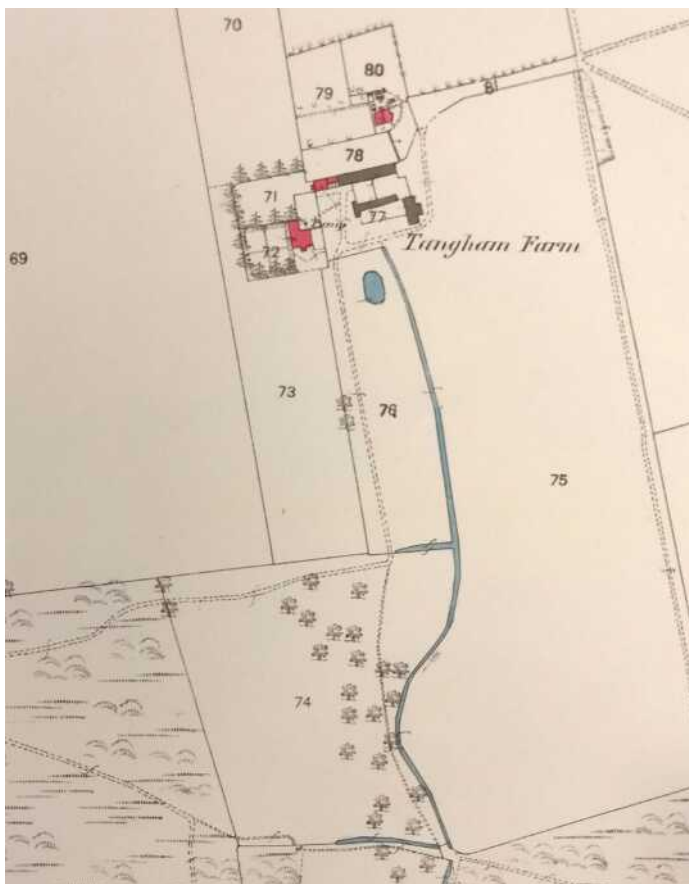


Fig. 7: Six-inch OS map, 1881, showing Tangham Farm with the existing Tangham House, in red, with farm outbuildings. (Courtesy of the British Library).

in the sluice, resulting in the demise of the ferry service until it was revived in 1993. The O.S. map of 1972 shows that the position of the sluice was moved south to its current location.

### Watermills

This part of Suffolk is a land of small, sluggish streams which nowadays would seem unlikely to have sufficient flow to power a watermill. Rising sea levels, however, have slowed flows in streams and ploughing the land has silted up watercourses. Mills were sometimes constructed on minor streams, with sluice gates built to hold back the water for several hours until a sufficient head had built up to power the mill's machinery. Fenwick and Harrup have identified the site of such a watermill on the tributary of the Tang, just south of Butley Abbey, close to the Capel to Butley Road. The authors comment that the water of the tributary was diverted, to increase the flow to the mill serving Butley Abbey, thereby resulting in the demise of the mill on the Tang tributary.

The same authors have also identified that a watermill once existed along the Tang, south of Butley Ferry farm, opposite Burrow Hill. This was a tide mill, reliant on water retained upstream on the incoming tide to drive the water wheel on the outgoing tide. The mill would therefore have gone out of use once the sluice to Butley River was built.

Neither of the mills are shown on the Suffolk Hundreds and Mills map of 1742, although that map does show the watermill at the head of Butley River. It is likely, therefore, that both the mills on the Tang were of considerable antiquity, possibly contemporary with the existence of Tangham Manor.

Nowadays, walking through the forest along the banks of the Tang, listening for the nightingales and enjoying the peacefulness afforded by the dense tree planting, it is difficult to imagine a time when the landscape comprised acre after acre of heathland, with sheep nibbling on the heather, and when the Tang was an open feature of the landscape.

### References

- <sup>1</sup> Suffolk Heritage Explorer, Monument record CSA 010 Tangham Farm, <https://suffolkher.esdm.co.uk/Monument/MSF2214>.
- <sup>2</sup> Campbell, G. & McSorley, G. 2019. SCCAS: Farmsteads in the Suffolk Countryside Project, Farmstead record CSA 059, <https://heritage.suffolk.gov.uk/Monument/MSF39057>.
- <sup>3</sup> W.A. & H.B. Copinger, *The Manors of Suffolk* Vol. IV (1905).
- <sup>4</sup> Suffolk Heritage Explorer, Monument record CSA 023 Tangham House, <https://heritage.suffolk.gov.uk/Monument/MSF21476>
- <sup>5</sup> V. Fenwick & V. Harrup, *Untold Tales from the Suffolk Sandlings* (2009).
- <sup>6</sup> Suffolk Heritage Explorer, Monument record CSA 002 Tangham Mount, <https://heritage.suffolk.gov.uk/Monument/MSF13>.
- <sup>7</sup> V. Fenwick & V. Harrup, *ibid*.

# New wetlands at White House Farm

Alison Andrews



*River Alde at White House Farm.*

White House Farm nestles in the Upper Alde valley, with little valleys, woods and pastures appearing by turn, giving a secret and elusive effect.

The afternoon of 11 May saw a wonderful walk led by Jason Gaythorne-Hardy around White House Farm with about 30 Association members. The crown of the visit was to be the recently created wetlands, but as we walked into many corners of the farm we saw a cornucopia of different habitats, woods and grass lands, dry and wet, some manmade, some natural, some playing to the strengths of the natural features. We also gained an insight into the hugely varied life and responsibilities of stewarding the landscape, one of several sub-catchments of the Upper Alde.

Jason commented on the effects of climate change here and elsewhere: what vegetation used to do well, what might be doing better, changes in wildlife. Jason's motivation was to farm and manage the land to reduce this stress and restore a healthier environment. At the top of the track, Five Ways, on the left the modern woodland, and, to the right, pasture, headed at the top of the slope by a small woodland of oaks with an understory of hornbeam and hazelwood reflecting traditional planting.

We emerged into parkland with magnificently tall stag trees and edged all round with white hawthorn blossom at its most fulsome. Looking westward, in former times the area near the great house, Glemham House, had been the linen ground, for drying all the laundry, and by the house there was a ring of trees, shrubland and vegetable gardens designed to block out the north/northeast wind and create a microclimate. Far over to the south-west was a landscaped lake created in the 18th or 19th centuries, filled by a small tributary leading into the Upper Alde. Immediately behind us, a large pond had been dug out just last year at the top of the hill where the clay was very thick: it would provide not only new habitats for wildlife but also a water reservoir for use in future dry years.

We passed the double oak, a tree of immense antiquity, then downwards and back east through what had been an oak and poplar wood that had been sold for timber in the fifties and replaced by Douglas fir and larch, which was advised at the time. The woodland and field area were also home to green and greater spotted woodpeckers and sometimes a lesser spotted one. Also to be found in the whole area were fallow deer in the autumn, muntjac and now Chinese water deer were coming too as they were spreading throughout the county. We moved on round to the left to an area with thick-trunked sweet chestnuts planted two or three centuries earlier, some with stag heads but having new strong sideways trunks growing from the base, with bluebells beneath their canopy. The landscape was so varied, reflecting not just planting patterns in different eras and natural growth but also the diverse range of soil types in a small area from loam to sand to heavy clay, and the availability of water.

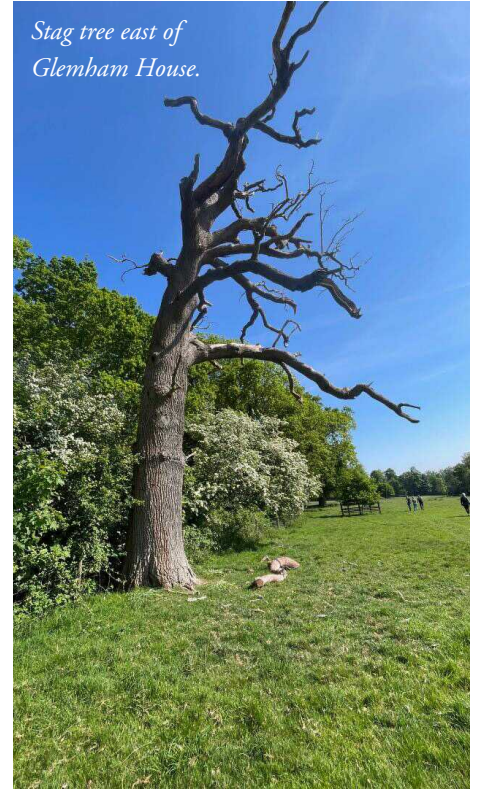
Then we passed down through pastures growing on quite acidic sandy land where Jason was experimenting with alternating areas for grazing and cutting for hay, which was having an impact on the seasonality of flowers and the availability of nectar. He also mentioned the work on testing eight different ways of hedge management and headland margins. All these different land uses and methods were seeking to ensure the landscape of East Suffolk.

Coming back on our circular route nearer to the farm, past the longest picnic table in the UK and towards the grazing sheep into the lower lying land, we saw the new wetlands. Historically, the fields there had been prone to flooding and often stayed waterlogged for months. Some 7–8 years ago test excavations had revealed 5-foot depths of peat with solid sand beds below: it therefore proved possible to create wetlands which retained water and did not dry out. So, taking advantage of that natural surface geology, scrapes and lakes were dug out to create water areas fringed with reed beds. This wetland area lies above the river Alde, which runs, almost imperceptibly slowly, beyond the wetlands

*Gleham House.*



*Stag tree east of  
Gleham House.*



down some 3–6 feet lower. We could see the different varieties of vegetation already establishing there. There are plans to extend the wetlands further along the valley bottom. Work so far has already seen as a result of the existence of scrapes and lakes a great variety of bird life – reed buntings, snipe, kingfishers, herons, numbers of waders – as well as a great range of species of wetland plants.

All in all, the whole farm is a kaleidoscope of landscapes and habitats with enormous richness of different plants: it is very much a living and developing landscape to sustain the farm, nurturing its natural strengths and characteristics, and being mindful of climate change and all the challenges that brings to the natural landscape. A real treasure of an afternoon and revelation of just a small part of the Upper Alde valley.



*New wetland.*



*Association members and Jason Gathorne-Hardy (right) above Holly Tree Field.*

# Navigating chaos on an industrialised coast

## What it means for the Alde and Ore and those who treasure it

### Mark Goyder

Years ago my wife introduced me to a game which helped while away long car journeys. It was an extension of cricket, with the runs scored determined by the number of legs suggested by the names of pubs we passed. Thus the Duke of Wellington was worth two runs. The Three Musketeers would be worth six. Imagine her cry of triumph when she was able to recover from a losing position by spotting a pub called The French Revolution. Later with our own children we used to play a board game entitled The London Game, where one's ability to win by delaying opponents depended on one's store of 'Close Station' cards.

Those living around the Alde and Ore may need to console themselves by inventing similar games. Everywhere they will be encountering road closures, orange-jacketed surveyors, diggers and trailers, speed restrictions, temporary traffic lights, single-file traffic, and heavy goods vehicles discharging machinery. Summer visitors seem to assume that all the disruption is attributable to Sizewell C. Few are aware of the other projects.

In our Autumn 2024 issue I described the state of play with both Sizewell C and the five renewable energy projects. A year on, here's an update, starting with Sizewell C.

#### *Sizewell C*

The Final Investment Decision has been made. According to the Sizewell C leadership:

- The project is estimated to cost around £38 billion. For the first time, the public will be co-owners of a British nuclear power station, with government the largest shareholder alongside EDF, Centrica, La Caisse and Amber Infrastructure.
- For an average of £1 per household per month during construction, the investment could deliver savings of £2 billion a year across the British electricity system.
- British businesses are set to benefit from 70% of construction spend.
- Tens of thousands of jobs, and 1,500 apprenticeships will also be created.

Later, an Academy is promised in Leiston. This will be essential

if the skills needs of the construction stage (peaking at 8,000 employees) are to be met. Many roles will be filled by contractors from outside the area. Permanent jobs after completion will be in the hundreds. Competition for skills is already affecting other projects. It is increasing the cost of building river defences for which AOA has campaigned and for which the Alde & Ore Estuary Trust and the Alde & Ore Community Partnership are working so hard. Roads, housing and local services are beginning to be strained. There will be an adverse impact on the Suffolk Heritage Coast, its important tourism and visitor economy and its value as a leisure destination.

More scepticism is in order when the Sizewell C management talk of timely completion and budget controls. Facing severe financial problems EDF has negotiated its way out of financial liability for overruns. You and I – the taxpayer and the billpayer – are on the hook for the extra costs caused by delays. The similar project at Hinkley Point C is running four to six years late and, allowing for like-for-like comparison, double the budget. In a recent *Financial Times* feature, Henri Proglio, a former head of EDF, has described the design as 'terrifying', 'phenomenally complex' and 'almost unbuildable'.<sup>1</sup>

EDF argues that Sizewell C will benefit from having the same design as Hinkley, but the similarities do not extend below the ground. The concrete foundations for Sizewell will be twice as thick because of its sandy and marshy ground. Down the coast at Thorpeness, residents are being warned that if sea levels continue to rise rapidly and cliffs continue to erode, then their properties must be compulsorily demolished at their expense. The proposal to build a jetty at Sizewell (to deliver materials) should reduce pressure on the roads, but nobody knows what the tidal consequences will be down the coast at Thorpeness, Aldeburgh or Orfordness itself and on the estuary behind it. Then because the local water company cannot supply drinking-quality water for making concrete, EDF has said it will build a desalination plant – something which could cause further coastal disruption.

Like HS2 this is a mega project, beset by complexity, uncertainty and ever-higher safety requirements. EDF is estimating ten years for construction: it is more likely to be between fifteen and twenty. Our part of the Suffolk coast is treasured for its landscape, open skies free from light pollution, and habitats earmarked for

protection by numerous environmental designations. It is time to weigh up the cumulative impact on such precious natural assets of Sizewell C together with various proposals for National Strategic Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) involving offshore wind and onshore substations.

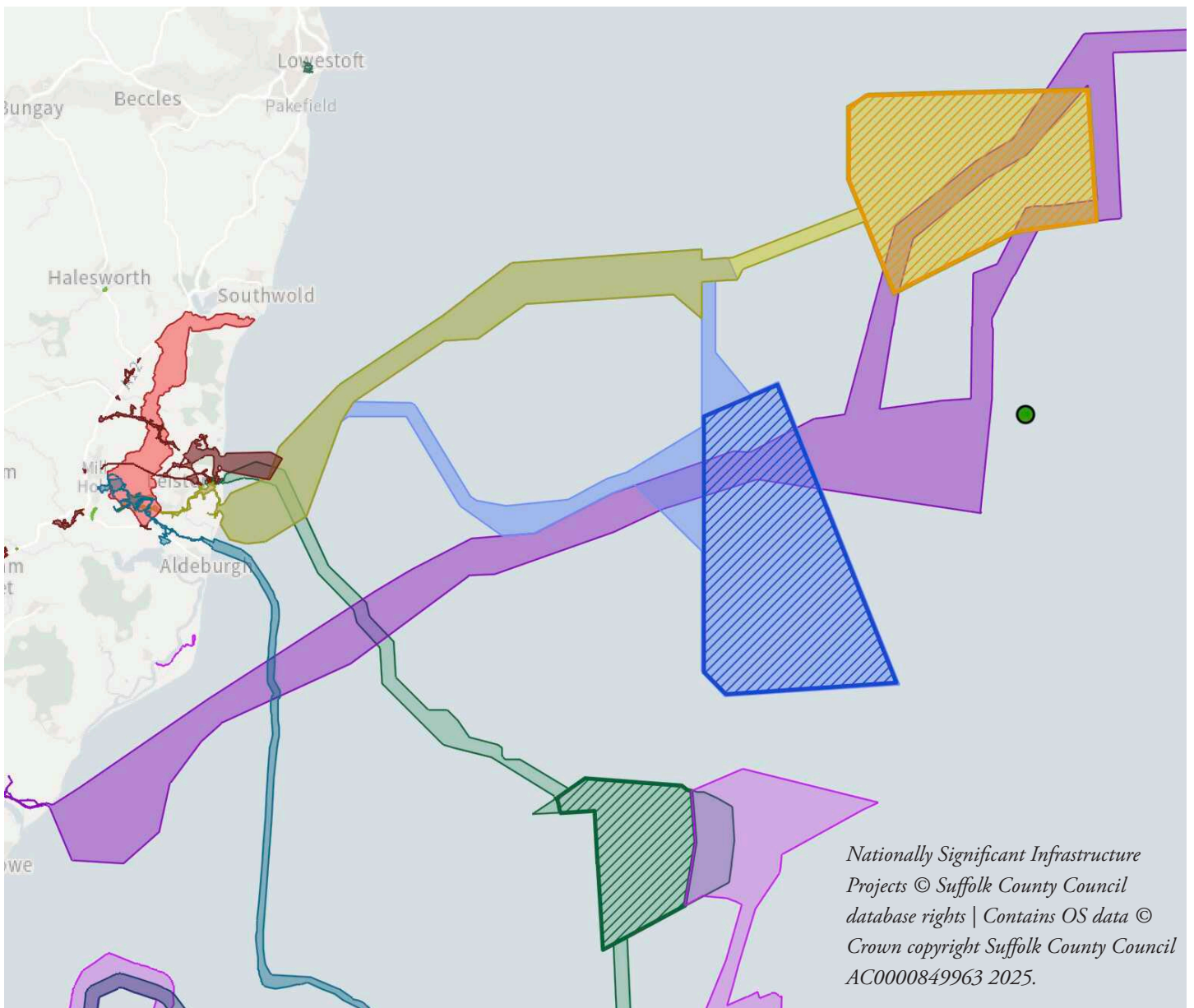
### ***Suffolk's renewable energy projects***

The onslaught from the North Sea windfarms is under way with construction of the substation at Friston for East Anglia 1 North and 2. This will involve cables coming in under the sea beneath the Thorpeness cliffs. Nobody knows what the knock-on effects might be further down the coast, including the Alde and Ore shoreline, should that hasten the gradual collapse of those cliffs.

The planning inquiry to consider the Development Consent Order (DCO) for Sea Link is scheduled for early November. Over 6,000 people have submitted their representations. The proposal is to run cables from landfall near the Scallop using horizontal

direct drilling under North Warren. The impact of such drilling on that precious wetland is unknown. From around the Old Railway Line footpath that connects Aldeburgh and Thorpeness trenches will be dug and run across North Warren bird sanctuary to cross the Leiston Road near Aldringham Court. The area affected will be the width of two motorways. North Warren RSPB Reserve is now part of the designated East Coast Flyway for birds en route from Humberside to the Thames, with the Alde and Ore estuary as their next stopping place. There will be a negative impact on nature. Only time will tell how serious this proves to be.

To appreciate the full mayhem that the area now faces, it is worth looking at the interactive map developed by Suffolk County Council.<sup>2</sup> A static version is reproduced here. The projects spread across the map like a stain on the carpet after the spilling of multiple paint pots. You can see an array of projects spreading diagonally south-west.



Furthest north-east (in purple) in the North Sea is EA3, now being constructed by Scottish Power. Its energy will be carried further south-west than the others to Bawdsey and then cabled 34 miles to Bramford Substation.

Next comes EA1North (yellow and olive green) coming ashore under the eroding cliffs just north-east of Thorpeness. Originally the idea was that cables for this project would be directed to Bramford, near Ipswich. Then complications arose. After Government changes to requirements for Offshore Wind and a change from DC to AC cabling, National Grid directed Scottish Power to a connection point in the Sizewell area (shown in brown). After investigating numerous sites around Leiston, Sizewell and further inland, Scottish Power finally opted for Friston and obtained consent for a National Grid 400kv substation along with their own two substations for EA1N and EA2.

Next (blue) comes EA2, which is at a pre-construction stage. Its cables will join those for EA1 North and also come to Friston. It is this development which is causing the present roadworks around Friston and Knodishall. They may be complicated but not prevented by archaeologists' discovery of a neolithic henge nearby.

Next (green) comes Galloper, run by German energy company RWE, already operating and connected to the shore at Sizewell. Next (light purple) is Five Estuaries, awaiting the go ahead from the Secretary of State in December. It will make landfall in Essex and connect with a substation planned for Lawford, near Manningtree. Plans have been made for protective enclosures for Lesser Black-backed Gulls on Orfordness in the hope they will breed there.

Not actually shown on the map is EA1, built in 2019 and now fully operational with landfall at Bawdsey cabling power to Bramford substation.

### ***Sea Link: the case for a rethink***

Next, there is a wavy teal-blue line coming up from the south. This is the proposed Sea Link, running cables from landfall near the Scallop on the coast at Aldeburgh, on its way to a substation at Saxmundham. This massive development will be visible in many places from the Alde and Ore Estuary by day (and possibly with lights against the clear dark sky at night). Sea Link is technically described as a 'bootstrap', offering 'on-shore reinforcement' to electricity supplies for Kent. As Suffolk Energy Alternative Solutions (SEAS) has demonstrated in its submission to the planning inquiry, no clear case has been made by the developer, National Grid, for this. In simple terms SEAS explains that 'the strategic justification was always vague, has shifted,

and, if there ever was, there is now no longer a strategic need/justification'.<sup>3</sup>

There is one more red blob on the map that does not, at present, link to anything out at sea and lies outside our immediate patch. Yet it has profound implications for Walberswick and Blythburgh. The cabling is for a multi-purpose interconnector called Lion Link, technically described as a hybrid interconnector between UK and the Netherlands. National Grid Ventures, the development subsidiary of National Grid, argues that this would facilitate cross-border trading and shared offshore wind integration (at least at the Dutch end). Interconnectors are a prudent way of allowing neighbouring areas to help each other handle peak loads, but wide trenches would be dug all the way from Saxmundham to Walberswick. In return for the cumulative impact of this further disruption to nature, tourism, the quality of life and the character of this precious area, the country will not gain anything in enhancement to our national supply of energy that could not be handled offshore.

With more co-ordinated planning, this major project affecting the Suffolk coast could have been developed with an offshore grid in the manner chosen by the Dutch and the Belgians. Logically this remains the optimal choice.

I observed in my article a year ago that the abolition in the 1980s of the Central Electricity Generating Board had robbed the UK of its capacity to think strategically about future development. Until a year ago National Grid was both judge and jury, on the one hand tasked with taking an objective view of the needs of our total electricity system, whilst on the other having a vested interest in getting permission for its own development proposals.

The tangled picture on this map reinforces one's impression that Suffolk is the innocent victim of a three-decade planning brain fade, exploited by developers whose interest is not in contributing to a rational energy plan, but rather to make the quickest, cheapest and nearest landfall regardless of impact on nature or ultimate value for money. The offshore grid solutions adopted by the Dutch and Belgians have been shown to be better. Unfortunately long-term value for money has not been given as much importance by the current government as its determination to hit its 2030 target for progress to Net Zero.

Sea Link is the vital domino. If it falls, others will follow. A precedent will have been set. So much damage will have been done to the Suffolk coast that decision-makers may judge that further destruction makes little difference. If Sea Link is allowed, Lion Link may well follow to the benefit of the profits of the developers' shareholders and the immense detriment of the heritage coast.

### ***Will the planning inquiry consider the cumulative impact here?***

Suffolk has faced a disproportionate number of nationally significant energy projects. One of them (the Nautilus interconnector) will now connect elsewhere – at the Isle of Grain. That, currently, leaves six. It is not possible to grant permission for all of these projects without irrevocably changing the Suffolk coast. Sizewell C is going ahead. EA1N and 2 and the National Grid Friston substation are going ahead. There remains a chance that the piling into East Suffolk of Sea Link and Lion Link, and further proposals, might be stopped.

When Scottish Power was asking for permission to build EA1N and 2, SEAS went to great trouble to point out that – even before mentioning the potential impact of Sizewell C – this was one of a possible seven projects coming to connect to the National Grid at Friston. In theory, any planning inquiry should look further than an individual application and consider the cumulative impacts on a community of all relevant projects. Yet, for what seemed to be technical reasons, the Planning Inspectorate was not able to take account of the cumulative impact of projects known to be on their way but not yet fully submitted.

### ***Has the energy regulator prejudged the outcome?***

Can we hope for an objective and comprehensive review of the impact on our precious area? It was depressing to learn in August that Ofgem, the energy regulator, was already assuming that permission would be granted. Under its Accelerated Strategic Transmission Investment (ASTI) programme, Ofgem launched a consultation proposing to release nearly half of Sea Link's funding before the Planning Inspectorate has even examined the project.

Ofgem wants consumers to underwrite Sea Link before the Planning Inspectorate has even decided whether it should be built. Once hundreds of million pounds of public money are committed, refusal could become politically and financially unthinkable. This represents a dangerous erosion of the planning safeguards on which communities rely.

SEAS is asking Ofgem to reconsider this 48% advance funding until after the planning process has been completed and decided. This seems reasonable. (Those who would like to know more – or engage more – should visit the SEAS website.<sup>4</sup>) When most of us make a planning application we are not allowed to start building before permission has been granted. Such interference by a statutory regulator does illustrate the intense pressure the planning inquiry will be put under by the government and the regulator, irrespective of the merits of the case. The inquiry, currently scheduled to start on 5 November (Guy Fawkes Day), will be interesting – and pivotal – for all of us who value the Alde and Ore Estuary and its precious surrounding landscape and seascape. Let us hope that those in charge show more respect for democratic processes than the man who made this date memorable!

#### *Notes*

<sup>1</sup> Is the UK's giant new nuclear power station 'unbuildable'? *Financial Times*, 27 August 2025. [www.ft.com/content/ee89bce2-a3e9-48ed-82eb-85916eb24777](https://www.ft.com/content/ee89bce2-a3e9-48ed-82eb-85916eb24777).

<sup>2</sup> <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/b8e2edd5fbc4c75b74aa38da7e710ed>.

<sup>3</sup> [https://nspip-documents.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/published-documents/EN020026-000631-A.%20SEAS%20Needs%20Case%20%20FINAL\\_Redacted.pdf](https://nspip-documents.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/published-documents/EN020026-000631-A.%20SEAS%20Needs%20Case%20%20FINAL_Redacted.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> [www.suffolkenergyactionsolutions.co.uk](http://www.suffolkenergyactionsolutions.co.uk)

## Talk given at the AGM in April 2025

Members were very fortunate to hear a masterly account of the wildlife of Shingle Street by Jeremy Mynott, an author on the classics and ancient and natural history. He is a leading light in ascertaining and recording the wildlife of Shingle Street, where he lives. He has also been much involved in the creation of a new wetland in the land behind the settlement there, which is already attracting a great variety of birdlife, resident and in passage. Jeremy wrote about this in the Autumn 24 issue of the newsletter.

The whole area is internationally recognised as having an immensely rich habitat with the designations of SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest), National Landscape (formerly Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty), SPA (Special Protection Area), SAC (Special Area of Conservation) and Ramsar Site, and having RSPB, Suffolk Wildlife Trust and National Trust reserves or

protected areas nearby. He showed a wonderful gallery of the physical landscape (how often Shingle Street changes!) and many of the wildlife inhabitants. A 2015 survey came up with 1,352 species of flora and fauna, including in this very small area 52 beetles, 249 birds, 26 butterflies, a surprising 349 moths (many seen during the day often with amazing camouflage markings), 238 flowering plants, 10 grasshoppers, 20 terrestrial mammals and much more.

Jeremy's most recent book, presented at the Aldeburgh Literary Festival 2025, is *The Story of Nature: A Human History*, exploring how human interests and attitudes have served to define what nature is and will increasingly determine what will become of it.

# THE ALDE & ORE ESTUARY TRUST



The Aldeburgh Bookshop has created two wonderful Christmas cards which are available to buy from the Bookshop in packs of 6 for £6.



## Emma Chichester Clark Town Steps

Emma Chichester Clark dedicates her time to writing and illustrating children's books, many of which are now classics including those about the much loved Blue Kangaroo and Plumdog. She has collaborated with acclaimed writers including Quentin Blake and Michael Morpurgo. Emma lives and works in London and in Aldeburgh. She has also kindly created the image of

a fleeing hare for use by the Alde & Ore Estuary Trust in their fundraising. [www.emmachichesterclark.co.uk](http://www.emmachichesterclark.co.uk).



## Mary and John James Three Wise Men on the Sailors' Path to Snape

Inspired by the decoupage of Mary Delany and Phyllida Stanley, Mary James composes bespoke collage designs from a variety of images including photographs, texts, catalogues and old masters. Some of the images were then cut as jigsaws by John James – there are boxes of these unique products in the back of many cupboards, including two at Sandringham. [www.aldeburghbookshop.co.uk](http://www.aldeburghbookshop.co.uk)

### THE ALDE & ORE ESTUARY TRUST

Proceeds from the sale of these cards will be donated to the Alde & Ore Estuary Trust (Registered Charity no. 1155115) who are responsible for raising and stewarding the funds required to maintain and upgrade the estuary walls.

The Alde & Ore Estuary Trust was established in 2013 and their Save Our Suffolk Estuary campaign is fundraising for essential flood defences. Fundraising support is needed to protect lives, homes, and businesses, as well as agriculture and wildlife habitats from being devastated by another tidal surge like those of 1953 and 2013.

'Together we can make the area as safe as possible for this generation and the next.'  
Find out more and donate at: [www.aoetrust.org](http://www.aoetrust.org)



## Welcome to Celia Bell, our new Hon. Sec.

Celia was Head of Department of Natural Sciences and subsequently Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Science and Technology at Middlesex University and has a strong background in research and teaching in biochemistry and biology as well as a deep interest in the environment.

Celia's connection to the Alde and Ore Estuary goes back over 30 years. She is now living in Iken and able to spend more time enjoying the beauty and tranquillity of the rivers and the surrounding landscape.

Please send your observations about the Association and its activities, suggestions for articles in the newsletter and your photographs to the editorial team at [newsletter@aldeandore.org](mailto:newsletter@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 on recycled paper by Leiston Press. Our thanks go to all the authors and to all the photographers and artists for the use of their photographs and illustrations. Please note that signed contributions may not reflect the views of the Association as a whole.