

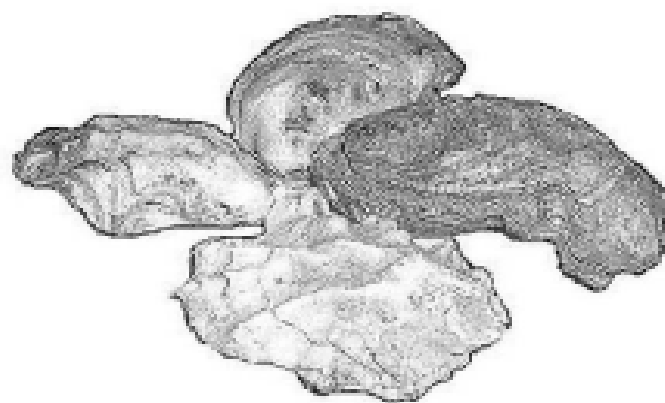
Journal of the  
Mersea Island Society

# Mersea Hall

2022

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# MISTRAL



**THE JOURNAL OF THE MERSEA ISLAND SOCIETY**

**Produced Annually**

**MMXXII**

**YEAR 2022**

The Society was formed to preserve, safeguard and promote the characteristics of Mersea Island for the benefit of all, to arrange open discussion whenever it appears necessary to obtain a consensus of public opinion and to provide opportunities to gain factual knowledge from lectures, visits and discussion of

**THIS GREAT ISLAND**

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## The Editor's Comments

Firstly, I must thank Claus for easing me into this task. His carefully constructed Mistral from last year has been the basis of my efforts this year. I wish him the best of health as he takes a well-earned rest.

I offered to become editor when approached by committee members and, at the time, did not realise quite what I was undertaking. It's a lot more than just lining up the pages!

I hope you enjoy our offerings for this year. If you have any good ideas for articles of interest to our members, please let me know. Even better if you could write one!

We are trying to update our website and Facebook page so keep an eye out for them.

<https://themerseaislandsociety.wordpress.com>



Mersea Island Society

During the past year both Heather Harrison and David Gibbons have retired from our committee. We would like to thank them for all their hard work over the many years that they devoted themselves to the society. We wish them well in their retirement.

### Mersea Island Society Privacy Policy and Data Protection

The membership secretary holds your information in strict confidence. We hold your name, address, telephone number (if given) and email (if given). We use your information for collection of annual membership subscriptions, and for the delivery of our annual journal, the Mistral. When we collect subscriptions and deliver the Mistral, we assume that your £5 subscription is your agreement that we may hold your information.

Electronic records: If you allow us to email you, it enables us to send out meeting notices before each open meeting. If members do not use email, they need to be proactive in watching out for signs and newspaper postings regarding events and talks as well as looking at our website.

<https://themerseaislandsociety.wordpress.com>

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If a member has any questions or doubts, please feel free to contact the membership secretary, Chris Kirkman

merseaislandsoc786@gmail.com or 01206 384113

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## **Chairperson's Report AGM 2021: - Mersea Island Society**

To begin, I must thank everyone of you for turning out to this meeting and I will keep this report short.

2021 has been a very odd year, starting in full covid lockdown and operating on-line for everything. Zoom meetings were interesting and we did our best. Unfortunately, a couple of committee members were not able to access the zoom meetings, however they have managed to join us once we moved back into the Community Hall in September. I sincerely thank those that could for sticking to the fortnightly zoom meetings.

Once the preparation of the Neighbourhood Plan was completed the pressure eased up for MIS for a while. Good news is that the Planning Inspector has made it clear that Mersea Island has only to take on the 200 new houses until 2033. Interestingly, pressure also eased up for the Bradwell B issue, and in the press it has been said that Bradwell on Sea has been removed from the list of potential sites for new nuclear fusion.

We can see the start of building in Brierley Paddock even though there are still ongoing discussions regarding vehicular access, and the proposed Dawes Lane development has not started yet.

I'd like to thank John Akker for keeping us on task regarding final dates for comments regarding the Neighbourhood Plan and various other planning issues during the year.

The Mistral: Sincere thanks to Lynn and Marica for pushing hard to get the Mistral together and to Claus for compiling it. We managed to produce the journal with a minimum of discussions at Claus's front door, through face masks etc. and, sadly, Claus has resigned from compiling the journal as his health is too unpredictable. We are thrilled to announce that Chris Kirkman has offered her IT skills to compile the next journal.

Membership has suffered over the last couple of years as we were not able to deliver journal and collect subs, again due to covid restrictions. Some members have overseen the request for subs while others have moved away, to care homes or passed on. However, we are very grateful for the support we do get and we started a serious membership drive at the Community Open Day on October 9<sup>th</sup>. I believe 9 new members were scooped up that day, thanks to Ian, Sarah and Heather.

To close I want to acknowledge that, during times when everyone has been challenged to manage their lives well, I have received strong support from committee members – thank you, all. You know who you are.

Faith Richardson, Chair

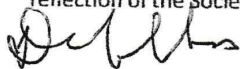
Mersea Island Society

**The Mersea Island Society**

Income and Expenditure Account for the Year Ended 30.9.2021

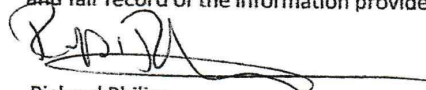
<u>INCOME</u>	<u>2021</u>		<u>2020</u>
Membership Fees	730		830
Stock Sales	174		74
Donations	30		50
Sundry	50		106
Mistral Sponsorship			188
Open Meetings			237
	<u>984</u>		<u>1485</u>
 <u>Expenditure</u>			
Public Liability Insurance	96		84
Donations ECC Freedom Adventure	400		
Stop 350	400		
Sundry			1100
Mistral Expenses Printing 644			
less Sponsorship 200	444		
Christmas Cards	85		
Stock Adjustment	<u>752</u>		
	2177		1184
Shortfall	1193	surplus	301
General Fund 2020	<u>6448</u>		<u>6147</u>
General Fund 2021	<u>5255</u>		<u>6448</u>
Presented by Balance at bank	5234	Bank	5669
Cash	21	Cash	27
	<u>5255</u>	Stock	<u>752</u>
			6448

I am satisfied these accounts are a true reflection of the Society's financial activities.



David Gibbons  
Treasurer

I have examined these accounts and believe them to be a true and fair record of the information provided.



Richard Philips  
Auditor

Greetings to all members.

First, I should acknowledge that this MISTRAL has been put together by a new team as Claus retired from the job last year. Claus did a sterling job for years and his most hated task was chasing up articles. This year, Chris Kirkman is compiling our journal, and she has had to chase me up a few times, so I need to both thank Chris and apologise to her for being tediously slow in producing notes.

Secondly, still on subject of the MISTRAL, I thank Lynn and Marica for being the driving force behind encouraging people to advertise and for shaking the money out of them – this money pays for the journal to be printed and is very much appreciated as then our subs money is free and available for projects etc. These ladies are a powerful pair and have been working hard behind the scenes since Barry Turner moved away from Mersea.

Speaking of which, 2022 is our Queen's Jubilee for managing to reign for 70 years. She deserves acknowledgement in every village, town and city and some of the committee have come up with a scheme that will be memorable for the children attending our local primary school. I'll say no more in this issue, and there'll be full coverage in 2023 Mistral. Watch this space.

This past year has been a bit heavy going for many people: we started the year by having booster jabs for the corona virus and saw good results till the end of the year; Brexit making itself known in the way wholesale procedures and shipping becoming more complex with red tape; the price of everything gradually sneaking up. We've seen people creeping out of their cocoons to go shopping, trying a little dining out, starting to socialise a bit more – and yet, as this is written, the infection rate amongst those of us aged 60 plus is increasing again as the 3<sup>rd</sup> boosters gradually wane in effectiveness.

In Mersea, on the planning front, Mersea Island Society has been involved in last minute tweaks to the Neighbourhood Plan and are very glad to see that the referendum saw the plan voted in by 88% for to 12% against. Now the plan can be referred to when debating any future planning applications.

We have been keeping an eye on, and submitting comments on, the access issues for Brierley Paddocks development – now called "Sanderlings". Also, the area put aside for a new medical centre was not taken up by our local medical group, so it has been put up for sale. There are now six houses completed.

As for Dawes Lane, apart from some obvious ground works on the site, nothing much has moved forward here. The only fly in the ointment will be the state of the large junctions on the north ends of Dawes Lane and Chapman's Lane which will spill an increased number of commuters onto East Mersea Road as the new sites become inhabited. It is anticipated that the three-way junction at the Strood will become harder to navigate as the volume of traffic builds and we suspect that something drastic might have to be done to this area. Sir Bernard Jenkin has offered to sit down with us to determine how he can help.



Just as we thought our 201 houses were accounted for, another planning application popped up which had been refused twice before. The owner of 102 East Road has tried to get permission to develop his property with 56 houses. Now, after two refusals he has taken the case to appeal with the Inspectorate. A few of us spent hours watching the hearing during this past February and March on Youtube and are still waiting for the Inspector's decision. This has been a trying time for residents, and we wait with bated breath.

Red Lines. My goodness there has been some extraordinary rhetoric exchanged about how to manage parking, particularly through the visitor months. There has been a volunteer working group initiated by the West Mersea Town Council who met several times, discussed, and eventually came up with a resolution, to scrap the red lines and to return to the yellow lines as they were before. Briefly, if the lines are red then Parking Partnership can scan parked cars with a camera and fine offenders electronically; however, if the lines are yellow the enforcement must be carried out in person. It was established that the red lines were laid "as an experiment" by Parking Partnership and were only laid for 18 months maximum. The working group decided that public opinion was seriously against the red lines and moved to resort back to the previous yellow lines. The issue now is enforcement – how can we get decent, appropriately timed visits from Parking officers? This is yet to be resolved.

A challenge going forward: Visitors now come whenever the sun comes out, regardless of season, and we need year-round parking facilities. How can we get the existing car parks enhanced to be useable year-round?

The Society has managed four open meetings since covid lockdown and, as Chair of Mersea Island Society I have been honoured to welcome Peter Inson who has published a new manual for better English, Richard Taylor who presented an update regarding our Red Squirrels, and to present Mark Dixon who informed us of the work by Harbour Protection Trust. The season closed with our Fish and Chip supper accompanied by a brief talk by Paul Button about his scheme called Freedom Boat Adventures. The three latter projects are ones the Society will continue to support as needs must.

In closing, I must mention that we need more members. The original members are thinning out and there are always going to be issues to resolve and projects to support. If you have received this journal through your door, you are on our membership list. Enclosed in this MISTRAL is a membership form which can be passed on to anyone who shows an interest in our Society so please do suggest to new residents that they join MIS. Also, please don't forget to pay your subscription as your £5's is all we get, and yet **we can make a difference.**

Best regards for the balance 2022

Faith Richardson, Chair

# YOUR 2022 COMMITTEE MEMBERS OF THE MERSEA ISLAND SOCIETY

Faith Richardson  
Chair



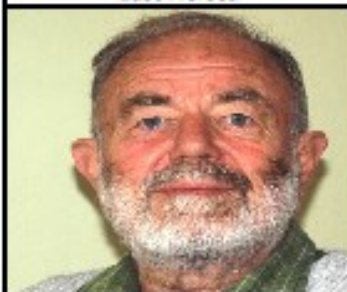
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## Council and Community to celebrate Queen's Platinum Jubilee

This year Her Majesty The Queen marks 70 years of service to the people of the United Kingdom, the Realms and the Commonwealth. This makes HM Queen Elizabeth the first British Monarch to celebrate a Platinum Jubilee. To celebrate this historic occasion, there will be events across the country and Commonwealth over a four day UK bank holiday weekend from Thursday 2nd to Sunday 5th June. The bank holiday provides an opportunity for communities across the UK to come together to celebrate this momentous occasion.

West Mersea loves to get together for a celebration. So, to enable our community to join in the Platinum Jubilee celebrations, West Mersea Town Council (WMTC) is working together with local organisations and members of the community to arrange various activities over the four day weekend.

**Platinum Jubilee Beacons:** The lighting of beacons, which has now become a tradition across the UK, will be continued to mark the Platinum Jubilee. Over 1,500 beacons will be lit throughout the United Kingdom, Channel Islands, Isle of Man and UK Overseas Territories. For the first time, beacons will also be lit in each of the capital cities of the Commonwealth countries to celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. The principal beacon will be lit in a special ceremony at Buckingham Palace. West Mersea will be one of the 1,500 beacons being lit and will take part by holding its own Beacon Lighting event on Thursday June 2nd at Victoria Esplanade car park from 7—10pm. WMTC has signed up for this official part of the celebrations and will be included on the official list of communities participating.

**Street Festival:** On Friday June 3rd from 10am—4pm there will be a street festival along the High Street with a mix of stalls, music and various entertainments. The MICA forecourt will be used as a central point for much of the entertainment, including music from each of the decades of the Queen's reign, Punch and Judy shows, balloon modelling and children's fairground rides.

**An evening of 'Queen' at the MICA:** On Saturday 4th June there will be a dinner/dance at the MICA from 7pm—midnight. Music will be provided by a Queen tribute band and there will be a traditional fish and chips supper. It will be a ticket only event but the ticket price will be kept low so it will be in reach of as many people as possible.

**The Big Jubilee Lunch:** Every year since the idea began in 2009, The Big Lunch has encouraged communities to celebrate their connections and get to know each other a little better, coming together in a spirit of fun and friendship. On Sunday June 5th, in liaison with the school, the West Mersea Big Lunch will be in West Mersea Park (behind the Legion) from 11am-2pm.

Mayor Carl Powling says "The Queen's Platinum Jubilee is an unprecedented and historic event. No other Monarch has reached a Platinum Jubilee, it is a unique royal event. WMTC is pleased to play its part in supporting our community in its celebrations"



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## Maintaining the Strood Causeway in Tudor Times by Sue Howlett



*Horse, cart and bicycle crossing the Strood, c1910 (Mersea Museum ID SS060002)*

In 2011 *The Guardian* newspaper published an article listing England's oldest charities. The earliest recorded, in AD 593, was King's School Canterbury, and other schools were also established before the Norman Conquest of 1066. One of the earliest charitable hospitals was St Bartholomew's in London, founded in 1123 by Rahere, possibly a former minstrel or jester to King Henry I. However, a far less familiar ancient charity is [Bridge House Estates Fund](#), now one of the UK's wealthiest charities. Its origins can be traced back to the levy in 1097 of a special tax to help repair the old wooden London Bridge, and its charitable status was confirmed by Royal Charter in 1282.<sup>i</sup>

A charity set up many centuries ago to repair and maintain London Bridge has much in common with Mersea Island's Strood causeway, which has been scientifically dated to around the year AD 700. During the 11th century the Strood became the responsibility of the small Mersea Priory, which held the church and three manors of West Mersea, Pete Hall and Fingringhoe. Labour to repair and maintain the causeway must have been carried out by manorial serfs and tenants. However, Henry VIII's Dissolution of the Monasteries meant that by 1540 all lands and property of more than 800 religious houses in England, including Mersea Priory, had been confiscated and granted or sold to the king's supporters.

This massive redistribution of monastic land meant that responsibility for the Strood now fell to West Mersea parish church and the new Lord of the Manor. By the 1550s, what later became known as the Strood and Churchlands Charity was funded by bequests or gifts of parcels of land. These included fields named as Churchfields or Church Lands, still held in 1839 by Trustees of the Church Lands.<sup>ii</sup> Landholdings granted to the Strood Charity before 1556 are named in its early records, and several of these names are still listed on the 1839 Tithe Award. Grazing saltmarsh and arable fields such as Strood Land, Carters, Saberds,

Mosses and Downs were farmed out to various islanders, at annual rents ranging from 3 shillings to £10 18s 8d, payable at Lady Day and Michaelmas.

These receipts were used to maintain the parish church and to pay for repairs to the Strood. Timber for the causeway piles came from Strood Wood near Waldegraves, which in 1839 was listed in the Tithe Award Map as 26 acres of woodland, also the property of the 'Trustees of Church Lands'. Although the Strood Wood no longer exists, memories remain alive among some older residents, who used the unofficial name 'Stroodland Grove' for a surviving strip of woodland between Cross Lane and Decoy Point.<sup>i</sup> 'Churchfields', a residential road close to West Mersea church, is a more permanent reminder of the charity's former holdings, while within the parish church a plaque records later feoffees (trustees) of the Strood Charity.

The charity's accounts of charges and receipts from 1554-1575<sup>ii</sup> have been transcribed by Trevor Hearn, a member of the Mersea Archive Research Group which meets regularly at Mersea Museum to research and transcribe early local documents. A wide range of transcribed documents, including those of the Strood, can now be found on Mersea Museum website.<sup>iii</sup> The Strood Charges accounts provide detailed descriptions of the materials, labour, costs and men involved in repairing the Strood, as shown in the example below.

*The charges for the yere of our lorde god 1559*

<i>... Item to John Stone for making of xvj score of pyls [320 piles]</i>	<i>... 6 shillings 8 pence</i>
<i>Item to Robert Platfut for caryeng of the same pyls at 2 times</i>	<i>... 12 pence</i>
<i>Item to John Stone &amp; John Goodin &amp; ye strowdkeeperis for dryvvyng ye same pyls</i>	<i>... 2 shillings 6 pence</i>
<i>Item to John Stone for making of v score &amp; xvj pyls</i>	<i>... 2 shillings 5 pence</i>
<i>Item to Robert Platfut for caryeng of the same pyls to the strowd</i>	<i>... 1 penny</i>
<i>Item to John Goodin &amp; the strowdkeepers for dryvvyng of them</i>	<i>... 16 pence</i>
<i>Item to John Goodin for making of a watterwaye on ye Este syde of the pyls &amp; for beating in of the cartrakes[ruts] at the furddest end of the strowd agenst the mell [mill] howsse</i>	<i>... [amount illegible]</i>
<i>Item for ij plankes &amp; ij slabbs to sett on ye Este syde of the pyls &amp; for ij bordes to sett agenst ye footte of ye worke that John Goodin made</i>	<i>[amount illegible]</i>
<i>Item to Robert Platfutt, for caryeng of xvj lodes of greate stone to the strowd</i>	<i>...15 shillings</i>
<i>Item to Rychard Tebbe &amp; John Prentis the younger for Eche of them ij dayes worke to sett all the planckes on the Este syde of the pyls wythe sayd greate stone</i>	<i>... 2 shillings 3 pence</i>
<i>Item to Robert Platfutt for caryeng of lxxiiij [74] lodes of small gravell to the furdeste ende of ye strowd agenst ye mell howsse the lode</i>	<i>... 7 pence</i>
<i>Item to John Prentis the younger for spreading of all the sayd gravell</i>	<i>... 12 pence</i>
<i>Item to Robert Nyckowle for makynge of xj lodes of woode</i>	<i>... 6 shillings 5 pence</i>

These documents listed as 'Charges' provide detailed information about how work on the Strood was actually carried out, and what the workers were paid. In 1559 John Stone and John Goodin cut down trees, shaped the piles and, with the help of the Stroodkeepers, manually drove them into the mud. Robert Platfort presumably owned a cart since he carried multiple bundles of a score (20) of piles to the Strood, as well as 16 loads of 'greate stone'. The photograph shown above illustrates how these rocks may have been used to reinforce the edges of the causeway, evidence that similar methods of maintaining the Strood seem to have continued for more than 400 years. Two Stroodkeepers, who organised repairs and kept the accounts, were elected each year at meetings held in the church. It is interesting to note that the accounts also refer to a mill house beside the Strood, which must have belonged to an early water mill. In 1551, a record of the manorial court held at Pete Hall referred to 'a trench by the Strode, where the old mill formerly stood'. That trench, water-filled at every high tide and enlarged by later activity, survives today as a forgotten relic of the medieval mill.

By the 1960s the local requirement to maintain the Strood causeway had ceased: the Strood and Churchlands Charity was dissolved, lands sold and the proceeds reinvested. In June, 1978, two new charities were established: the present Strood Charity and West Mersea Church Charity. Today, when islanders complain of delays caused by roadworks at the Strood, it is fascinating to imagine the scene that must have taken place centuries ago, when scores of oak piles had to be cut down and shaped by hand, taken by cart or boat to the Strood, driven into the mud, and the roadway reinforced with dozens of loads of large stones and gravel. Today, I am sure we all appreciate the work of Essex Highways in allowing us to travel freely on and off the island. Yet it is worth remembering that for around five centuries, maintenance of the Strood was funded by the charity which still today supports community projects on Mersea Island.

**Sue Howlett**

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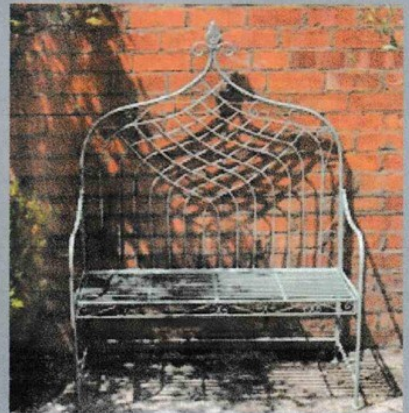
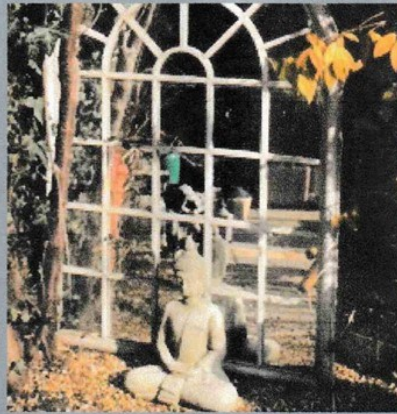
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## **Singing in the lockdown.**

Although the lockdown in 2020 was helpful in stopping the spread of Covid, it was not so good for the mental health of the population. Many people were confined to their homes, feeling lonely and forgotten. For many of us technology came to the rescue with the use of Zoom, a programme that allows us to see and speak to each other on our computers and tablets.



Lockdown meant that many people, particularly those who were self-employed, lost their income. They needed to find ways to keep going and, for two local musicians the following was the result of their brainstorming.

In March 2020, soon after the start of lockdown, Caroline and Ian, decided to try out using Zoom to sing together. They named the project 'Sing for Sanity' and charged a small amount for people to join. They advertised on Facebook and through emailing those that they thought might be interested then, having got a few followers, they chose a couple of songs and emailed them to their members, chose Thursday evening as a meeting time and so it began.

When using Zoom, there is a time delay meaning that we could not actually sing together, although we were all singing the same thing, we were not together in time. So everyone was muted except Caroline or Ian, whoever was leading the session. We quickly got used to this way of working as, singing by yourself along with the leader when no-one else could hear you was great, no-one could hear your mistakes!

After a while it was decided that, if we wanted to, we could record our efforts and send them to Ian (who is a whizz at the computer) and he would put them together to produce the sound of a 'real' choir. The results were shared with the members and with the wider community on Facebook.

As they became more expert at using Zoom, practice sessions were split into two virtual 'rooms', with Caroline leading the sopranos and tenors and Ian leading the tenors and basses. Then we all came back together at the end to compare notes and sing together. The members gradually got to know each

other and the beginning of each session was a time to chat, another bonus for those feeling isolated and alone.

Then, in May 2021, after a year of Zooming, we received the exciting news that we would be going 'live'. We still were rehearsing virtually each week in the privacy of our homes but at the end of four rehearsals we were to meet in a marquee at Mersea Outdoors on a Sunday afternoon. That first meeting was quite emotional, for the first time we could hear each other as we sang, we could laugh together and chat although we remained socially distanced, wearing masks to move around, but it was exhilarating. Caroline and Ian provided tea and coffee making facilities and we were advised to bring a snack for the interval.

Sing for Sanity continues to this day, meeting once a month, now at Mersea Vineyard. The results of our labours can now be seen on a You Tube channel and we still love it. Anyone can join what has truly been a life saver and kept us sane throughout a very difficult time.



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## The West Mersea Beach Hut Watch

The West Mersea Beach Hut Watch (WMBHW) is a voluntary organisation with its aims to promote and protect the interests of owners and users of beach huts in West Mersea.

The Watch organises routine patrols of members' beach huts in West Mersea, reporting damage to owners and, where appropriate, to the police. The Watch liaises with the local police on crime prevention matters and with the local councils and other parties to maintain and enhance amenities and the environment.

It additionally keeps members informed of relevant local issues and developments. Membership of the Beach Hut Watch is open to West Mersea beach hut owners and users on payment of an annual subscription.

The Watch was started nearly 25 years ago when a small group of like-minded volunteers decided that an organisation was needed to look after the interests of owners and users of Mersea beach huts. Among those early pioneers, who set up a small committee, was the late Colchester Councillor, Ray Cole, who chaired the committee for a number of years. Ray's term of office was then followed by Councillor Henry Spyvee, who guided the committee until he moved away in 2019. The current chairman is Bob Winnington.

Apart from the regular monitoring of the security of members' huts, members also benefit from a number of offers – such as concessionary car parking season tickets, discounts at local businesses and suppliers and reduced beach hut insurance premiums.

Information, regarding Beach Hut Watch membership and other related matters, can be obtained via email: [wmbhwmembership@btinternet.com](mailto:wmbhwmembership@btinternet.com)

Lynn Hartley



**Fen Farm Caravan and Camping Site is ideal for people looking for a quiet family retreat.**

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There have been schools for the sons of rich families throughout the centuries, but schooling for the children of the poor was a consequence of the Industrial Revolution.

At the end of the eighteenth century many people thought that educating the lower classes would be unwise, even dangerous, and would give them ideas above their station. In many places, the landowners refused to allow schools to be started on their land. Children were expected to work as soon as they were old enough in order to bring much-needed money into the family.

In 1780 Robert Raikes founded the first Sunday School in Gloucester. It was from these Sunday Schools that day schools began to develop, mostly founded by the churches. Schools founded by the Church of England became known as National Schools, while those founded by Non-Conformist churches were known as British Schools.

The present primary school has developed from Mersea's National School.

The earliest reference we have found so far for a school in Mersea is in the Tithe map of 1839, which shows a building at the top of what we now know as The Lane occupied by Mr Sadler and marked as a school. This is confirmed by the census taken two years later in 1841 where Mr William Sadler, aged 60, is recorded as schoolmaster. It is unlikely that he would have set up a school so late in life so it seems reasonable to assume that the school had been there for some time. Schooling was not compulsory, and the parents of his pupils would have had to pay Mr Sadler each week for their children to attend. We do not know whether Mr Sadler's school was set up by the church and we have found no further reference to Mr Sadler or his school.

However, in White's Directory of 1844 and 1848 a Miss Overall is shown as school mistress at the National School. The location of this early National School is as yet unknown, unless it was in Mr Sadler's cottage - but this is only conjecture. In following censuses reference is made to teachers at a National School, but its location is not known until 1861. In 1861 the Methodist church was built with its own school room and the National School moved into the barn which had been vacated by the Methodists. It was situated, 'to the best of their knowledge' near or next door to the site of the present school. A booklet, produced by Sybil Brand in 1961 to commemorate the centenary of the Methodist church, states: 'The barn stood in the garden of the house next to

the County Primary School on its west side and was used for seed storage until the early nineteen hundreds.'

Then came the Education Act of 1870, the first time the government had taken a real interest in education. The 1870 Education Act set up the beginnings of the system of education as we know it today. It established school boards elected by local people, and new schools were to be built, paid for out of the local rates, if adequate voluntary schools did not exist. Education was still not free however and children could be required to pay up to 9d per week, although the boards could offer free education to the poorest if they wished.

Although a school board was not set up in West Mersea at this time, it seems that this 1870 Act had the effect of focusing minds on the education of the local children as on 3rd June 1871 the Reverend Thomas Ralph Musselwhite of West Mersea, 'Clerk in Holy Orders', signed a document granting land to the Minster and churchwardens of West Mersea;

*"Upon trust to permit the said premises and all buildings thereon erected [or] to be erected to be forever hereafter appropriated and used as and for a school for the education of Children and adult (sic) or Children only of the labouring manufacturing and other poorer classes in the Parish of West Mersea aforesaid and for no other purposes And it is hereby declared that such school shall always be in union with and conducted according to the principles and in furtherance of the ends and designs of the National Society for promoting the education of the Poor in the principles of the established Church throughout England and Wales"*

The land was that on which the present school is built and the first building is that on the west side of the land, together with the school house for the accommodation of the master and his family. This was the beginning of the school in West Mersea that still exists today.



This is the same piece of land as discussed earlier that it seems the National School had moved to in about 1861.

Earlier in 1871, on 10th February, 'the Charity called the Church and Strood Land Charity in the Parish of West Mersea in the County of Essex' had made application to the Charity Commissioners for their sanction to appropriate 'the

*sum of one hundred pounds out of the unappropriated surplus income ... towards the cost of certain new schools which are about to be erected in the said Parish ... according to the provisions of the Elementary Education Act 1870 at an estimated outlay of six hundred and thirty six pounds or thereabouts...'* The request was granted.

Mr John Thorpe and his wife were employed to run the school and they were to be in charge for the next forty years, during which time the school was extended with the building on the west side of the school house and education became free and compulsory for children up to the age of 10. According to Mr Bill Clarry who was born in 1883 and was interviewed in his ninety-third



year about his memories; *"Mr Thorpe was a good man. He tried to teach you reading, writing and arithmetic. If you did wrong you got the stick!"*

Mr John Thorpe and family outside the original building Photo courtesy of Mersea Museum

In 1896, when the larger, second building was built, the control of the school passed from the church to a newly-founded school board consisting of five elected members from the local community.

The school continued to grow and until the 1950s took children from the age of 5 to 15. An interesting, wide-ranging curriculum was provided, using the school grounds for gardening, poultry, bee-keeping and vegetable growing. During the Second World War evacuees were received from West Ham, and the pupils kept pigs which were sold and slaughtered locally.

The Education Act of 1944 put into place free secondary schooling from the age of 11 and the school started to become what it is today.

Chris Kirkman

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# Blackwater Vets

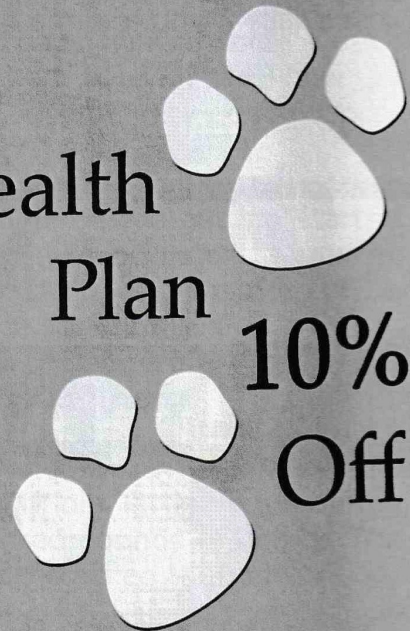


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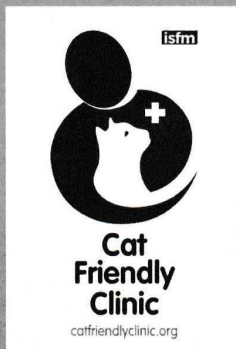
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## **Freedom Boat Adventures – Access for All**

The project to build a fully accessible boat for West Mersea and other towns along the River Blackwater came about after working several years at the Mersea Island Festival – a camp for disabled people.

One of the big restrictions for those with mobility limitations is the design of most buildings, vehicles and, of course, boats which, out of the three areas, have seen the least amount of change over the years.

Our aim was to not only build a boat that would take away all those barriers to participation but to also offer a product that would be educational and fun.

Working with a local boat builder and members of the disabled community, the project was launched in 2020 (Year of the Pandemic). Maybe not a great year for fundraising but a great year to have something positive to look forward to.

The boat has now had a design created to consider access across the whole deck space and into the wheelhouse, allowing access to the driving position. A unique aspect of the boat of this size is a fully accessible toilet area.

Fundraising to enable the build has been hard especially in a pandemic but with a determined attitude and being a little creative, the project passed the first target amount of £50,000 in August 2021. This will enable the build of the actual shell of the boat some time in January to April 2022.

There is still £100,000 to raise, and we have a plan of action to enable that with a further two targets of £50,000 by August 2022 and £50,000 by March 2023 which, if we hit those targets, will enable us to have sea trials in May 2023 and a launch dates of the summer holidays 2023.

The project will offer trips onto the River Blackwater where participants will get an opportunity to enjoy the big open space on the water with its wildlife and amazing coastal location and the thrill of driving such a great craft at high speed.

Another aspect of the project will be to open training opportunities to those who want to develop skills driving a boat who, at this moment, could not access any of the boats used for courses in this region.

Finally we are super proud of this project and know it will make a difference and have seen a real interest within the community who also seem excited.

Paul Button - Director

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## Coopers Beach

John Pittock was interviewed by Marica Frost and the following is a transcription of John's interesting reminiscences.

John Pittock's family came to Hall Farm at, what is now Park Resorts but known locally as Coopers Beach in late spring 1944. They came from Layham in Suffolk and John's father's boss was Owen Cooper who had bought the farm and the family came to see Henry Farthing who was the retiring manager. Henry lived further down in East Mersea in a house looking out across the Pyefleet channel and River Colne and John can remember, as an eight year old, looking from Henry's house across towards Brightlingsea and seeing the channel absolutely blocked with ships. That was the build up to D-day.

The army had been using the chalets at Coopers Beach but they had gone by then. There was a relic left in the marsh at the back of the sea wall (that has now fallen down) which was a car wheel that had been cemented in to run an aerial and to be a moving target for the army to practise on.



Before the war the area was known as Sunny Beach and John believes it was owned by Mr Austin and Mr Bishop. At the time that John's family took over, there was a full front row of chalets and the beginnings of a second row. There was less

than a hundred. Also, in the fifty acres of Sunny Beach, there were three old 1920s gypsy type caravans. There was no water and people had to walk up Church Lane to the village well and pump, the same as everyone in East Mersea at the time. There was no piped water or electricity in East Mersea. Everyone had oil lamps and visitors to the site often brought their own water with them because they didn't like Mersea water.

Toilets were Elsan, 'bucket and chuck it' and, on the farm, they had a tanker and one of the farm men went round with a horse and this tanker cart. About five acres every year was put to one side, fallow land, and the waste was tipped onto there. The farm kept forty gallon drums of paraffin for lamps and it was John's job to sell it to visitors when he was eight, nine, ten. It was ten pence a gallon and, because he was a little lad, the buyers would give him a shilling and tell him to keep the change. John also made a little profit on selling newspapers. His mother bought all the spare papers from Mr Cook the paper man who came on a trade bike. John would take them down and sell them to his favoured customers then give the cost of the papers to his mother and keep the change for himself. This money was saved up for John to buy himself a nice, new racing bike.

A club house was built from sections of army huts that were being demolished in the Colchester garrison. They had their own estate joiner, Hughie Cook, who had served his time at Clifford White's mainly making coffins. He was a first



THE BUNGALOWS, SUNNY BEACH, EAST MERSEA.

44.

rate carpenter and could turn his hand to anything and he built the original club. By then it was the 1950s and they had progressed to having inside toilets in the clubhouse. If you look west from East Mersea church you can see the water tower, rather tatty these days, built in 1946, and initially the tower supplied water for the dairy herd at the farm and the farm house and then they ran galvanised pipes to stand pipes along the back of the front row of chalets. However, the majority of people still brought their own drinking water because Mersea water was considered a bit salty.

The cost for a season at Coopers Beach rose to the 'astronomical sum' of £10! These days you're looking at four figures! None of the chalets were for hire, if problems were caused there was always the threat of having to sell or take your chalet away with you. There was very little drunken behaviour but the

biggest problem was young family members bringing their motor bikes down and riding through the site late at night making a noise and a racket.

The new clubhouse was built in the sixties and, prior to owning Coopers Beach, the Cooper family had been cinema owners. They built the foyer of the clubhouse in the grand style of an upmarket cinema. It had a sprung dance floor and the bar was put in by the brewers Ind Coope. At the time it was stated that it was the longest bar in East Anglia. It was used in the summer (March to October) by residents of Coopers Beach and then they hit on the idea of letting it out in the winter months. Eric Smith was the manager by then and they opened it up in the winter. The RNLI always had a dance there, the NSPCC, lots of sporting clubs and members of the local community. It was the only place like this in Mersea. Otherwise you had to go to Colchester. It was very well supported and a great asset to Mersea.

The Essex catchment river board looked after the wall between Coopers Beach and the Youth Camp and they churned up the lane to the farm and Mr Cooper wanted recompense for that so they put a small sea wall in front of the clubhouse which is still there. However the frontage was being worn away in the rest of the site so, round about 1960, John's father started to build a sea wall and John helped. They dug a footing, three foot deep, along the whole frontage. Sadly John's father died in 1963 so John continued with the work and completed the wall along the whole frontage. He maintained the wall until he left in about 1990. The new people didn't bother to look after it and it all fell down.

Gradually the chalets were replaced by caravans. The main reason for this was that caravans were more lucrative. Static caravans got bigger and grander with built in showers and facilities whereas the chalets never had taps or running water. The original owners of the chalets were relatively affluent, people who owned shops and small businesses; a lot of them retired to Mersea.

Marica Frost and John Pittock

## 100 years of Beach Club

A Beach Club for children of all ages has been running in Mersea for one hundred years. Having had two years (2020 and 2021) of absence due to Covid restrictions, plans are now in place for Beach Club to run in 2022 each morning from 25 to 29 July, when the Centenary Event will take place.

The origins of a Beach Club for children in Mersea may be traced back to around 1920 when the Children's Special Service Mission (CSSM), an organisation started in 1867 and which ran Beach Missions all over the UK, came to Mersea. It is understood that a similar organisation entitled Sunshine Corner had some involvement in the running of the Mersea Beach Club in the early years. In more recent decades, Mersea Beach Club has been run by members of local churches led by such figures as Colin Tucker, Peter French and currently by Peter's son, Andrew French.

CSSM's stated aim was to share the Bible to inspire children, young people and adults to know God. That aim is still current in today's Beach Club in Mersea. Typical activities at Beach Club now include singing, Bible stories, acting out those stories and craft activity relating to the day's subject. We are also planning a scavenger hunt, a games afternoon and a BBQ during the week

West Mersea Beach Club's Centenary Year looks forward to welcoming many children on the Beach opposite the end of Empress Avenue as Mersea churches join together for the week's programme of events.

(Steven Gaunt, Hon Treasurer, Beach Club Steering Group)



## 200 years of Her Majesty's Coastguard

Smuggling has been going on since medieval times when taxes were imposed on imports and exports. Smuggling was brutal, people lived in fear of violent reprisals on informers and the murder of revenue officers, while corruption enabled smugglers to evade harsh penalties.

In 1809 the Board of Customs formed the preventative water guard to fight smugglers and this small force used boats to patrol every bay and cove.

In 1821 a Committee of Inquiry examined every aspect of the Customs service. It recognized the Preventative Water Guard as a major force against smuggling and recommended that it be controlled by the Board of Customs. In a minute dated 15 January 1822, the Treasury accepted the proposal noting the new force would be called 'Coast Guard' which is, in effect, the birth certificate of HM Coastguard.

The censuses taken during the 1800s show that Mersea had coast guards stationed here. They were men who came with their families to live and work in Mersea and accommodation was provided. They did not stay long, as they were moved on to another post before they became too friendly with the locals.



This was in an effort to avoid the corruption that had been so rife before.

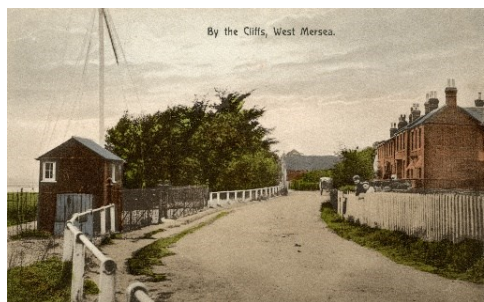
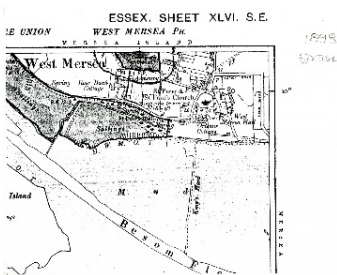
*Smugglers Way (Courtesy Mersea Museum In 1845 John Lufkin hired a house in Mersea Lane of Henry May, and at the same time married a Mersea girl. He stayed in Mersea until he died about 1875-80." "During his later years Jack worked on Mr May's oyster layings, and he told me tales of the smuggling which was carried on when he was a young boy and later. In those days a force of men were employed to counteract smuggling, and these men were called preventive men. For some time those stationed at Mersea, either all or part of them, lived on a big hulk moored in Mersea quarters, and for some time they were lodged ashore. They were succeeded by force of coastguards, who lived ashore, and who afterwards lived on a Government hulk, hauled up in the coast marsh near the "Ashen Tree" spring.*

*Later barracks were built for the coastguards."*



*"One of the Mersea preventive men lived in the Lane early one foggy morning was on the Strood, and became aware of some strange noise at the old lime kiln on the mainland side of the creek. He crept close and waited while several carts were loaded and then when the smugglers' land helpers came over the seawall through the only gateway leading to the roadway, he shot the leading horse, so that it fell, blocking the way; and the men were so alarmed, thinking that there was a posse of Government men after them, that they all ran off across the marshes. This courageous man's name was Cardy; some of his descendants still live in the district. (from Mersea Museum website)*

The barracks referred to above was probably the Coastguard cottages situated in what we now know as Churchfields. The cottages burnt down in 1949. From the cottages, the men could walk down to Coast Road where their lookout point was. A map from 1898 shows an armoury close to the cottages so we can be sure that our coastguards were armed when they were on duty. A look out point was on Coast Road with a semaphore signalling post.



(Pictures courtesy of Mersea Museum)



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## **Mad Mersea Mermaids.**

I usually swim in the sea at Mersea from April to September but in late October 2020, with another lockdown in sight, I became overwhelmed with the whole Covid situation.

I had a sudden urge to get in the cold sea and was instantly amazed at how good it made me feel, thus starting my love affair with cold water swimming!

Very quickly like-minded fellow nutters joined in and Mad Mersea Mermaids was formed. There are now over thirty five of us and, I hasten to add, only two men! The sheer exhilaration of swimming in the sea during the winter is second to none. I find that I burst out laughing with joy and almost pain. It is a natural high and a great stress buster. The sense of being at one with nature, the fun and wonderful community spirit has made this hugely popular.

The benefits of swimming in the sea during the cold winter months are endless and I feel incredibly lucky living on Mersea Island where we are surrounded by sea!

Jayne Eyers

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## A View of Mersea

Fifty years ago I took Jean Slack out on our first date from Fairhaven Avenue to Colchester Jazz club. Fourteen years ago we retired here and were reminded of what seems to be the first rule on the island – ***You will make friends here.***

We have lived longer on Mersea than anywhere else but sometimes we still feel like newcomers, welcome newcomers who chose to live here and appreciate our good fortune. How might someone born and bred here see things?

I found someone, approaching middle age, who has a home and family here and works on the island and who was prepared to reveal a local's view of things. Childhood is remembered as a permanent holiday, never short of friends. It was a cosy community but later in life there came the awareness that, without contact with outsiders, islanders' views could become narrow and inward-looking. Sometimes however when off-comers and islanders met someone would be quick to remark, "You're not from round here." People from Mersea were very aware that theirs was a distinctive community with all that can go with being different.

As my friend reached young adulthood, other people of much the same age would gather in The Victory, some of them from off the island; a friendly word or two and new and lasting friendships would be formed. This is rather different from the more recent arrival of jet-skiers, attracted here to a place where they are not charged to launch their craft and with little respect or consideration for other visitors or the natives.

A growing resident population comes about as holidaymakers return to the intimate community that they found as trippers but the new housing developments are seen as driven by greed rather than by a desire to provide homes. The lack of infrastructure is pointed out as evidence of a desire to make money rather than building for a community.

In the late nineties there were the first regular, independent journeys off the island. School in Colchester was tough, a real eye-opener. Finding oneself in the midst of a gigantic friendship group, horrified by the antics of some of them and yet able to find empathy for children from difficult backgrounds, who had not enjoyed starting life on a happy island like Mersea. Even in their

teens islanders appreciated their good fortune; at least one of the teachers was adored and school finished with a crop of respectable grades.

After school there was a local college where Mersea friends still counted for something, then work and travel. Brexit is seen as something ugly, a reluctance to engage with folk from elsewhere; so much it would seem for islanders' supposed narrowness of outlook.

My final questions concern off-comers; first, is there anything that troubles you about them?

"I try not to be cynical about anyone new coming to the Island. But as with anywhere in the world, when you move somewhere it's best to respect the place you have decided to call home. With the water as an integral part of Mersea life, when people show a lack of respect for the waterfront and its community, I do get angry about that."

What do you think newcomers have brought to the island?

"Diversity of thought springs straight to my mind. As with any close knit community it's easy to fall into a narrow mindset about community, and the wider world. People from other counties or countries bring their experience and stories, which I hope washes away a bit more of my ignorance! It's also nice just to meet new people."

Peter Inson



## Happy Dogs, Happy People!

Mersea Island Dog Agility is a club that was opened in 2019, by Jo Mole, as a community project with an aim to get dogs and their owners more active in a way to meet every dog and every owner's needs. There are currently fifty dogs attending agility classes and canine hoopers.



Dog agility is a fun sport which consists of a dog and handler negotiating a course of obstacles. Not only can you enjoy this together with your dog but the benefits are endless. Canine hoopers is a fun, fast, low impact sport.

The club ensures that dog agility and canine hoopers improve both physical and mental activity. We provide a way of socialising your dog as well as forming new friends with a common interest. The club helps build confidence, improve communication, strengthen balance and co-ordination and form and maintain a strong bond – all in a safe environment.

From pups to veterans, from those with disabilities to those fully abled, the club is a positive, reward-based environment and some members have even decided to unleash their competitive side, travelling to shows and entering competitions.



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## Mersea Island Rowing Club

As Mersea Island Rowing Club enters its 10th Anniversary year, whilst assessing future momentum, the club also looks back on its proud origins.

The Rowing Club was founded in 2012 as a result of founder member Karen Farrant and predominantly Chairman Reuben Frost's vision to provide a relatively easy means of accessibility to the water. The aim was to provide this safely, cheaply and as a different option to that of sailing.

Reuben had rowed since a young boy and was very aware of the pleasures to be had from the waters around Mersea. Following the initial concept in 2011, he had been rowing with Sudbury Rowing Club on their inland water and realised the scope that Mersea had to offer with regard to the sport - from the sea to the delights of the Creeks.

With the added support, help and enthusiasm from his wife Donna, Mersea Island Rowing Club was formed. They wanted to deliver their ethos well, so Reuben first completed a British Rowing coaching course. British Rowing status was also gained, which has afforded members the opportunity to represent the UK in events such as the Prince Albert 2 Challenge and the Coastal World Championships in Monaco.

The Club's first boats were 'begged and borrowed'. Since then, grants and fundraising has provided the wide range of boats which the club owns today. MIRC is unusual in the fact that it is affiliated to British Rowing and that alongside 'fixed seat' boats, it also owns a range of different types of sliding seat craft: thus enabling the Clubs' ethos of diversity and inclusivity for varying abilities and preferences. Our first launching trailer was kindly funded by Mersea Island Society. Other local organisations such as the Guardian Angels, Mersea Island Lions, the Strood Charity and Magnox have also kindly donated funds.

MIRC's 'pride and joy' is our beautiful Harker's Yard Gig "Mehalah". Built by the shipwright and apprentices of the Pioneer Sailing Trust, she is used for training, social rows and for competing in Gig racing, in particular the Harker's Yard Gig Associations' Winter race series. This is alongside, or often in front of, many other competitive crews from the ten rowing clubs around the Blackwater estuary.

Mehalah was purchased thanks to a donation to the Club by Colchester Community Initiative Funding. The name choice is an obvious one to Islanders, and members often choose a social row in the form of a 'picnic pilgrimage' to Ray Island at sunset.

Aspirations and goals are clearly determined by the members' shared passion for the sport and for the joys of Mersea in particular. Reuben has succeeded in his dream of inspiring other rowers and in providing opportunities. In races we have navigated Mersea, Osea, Northey and Canvey Islands with both very much existing founder members and new 'recruits'! ..Plus sunrise to night-time rows.

Last November saw the club hold the Mersea fixture of the Harker's Yard Winter race

series. Co-hosting with the generosity of Mersea Island Yacht Club; this is set to be a spectacular, established annual event. Its huge success and popularity is supported by many, including dedicated launching and recovery help from Colchester Sea Scouts. With junior rowers, many have since moved to university and have been well received by their Clubs.

Following the difficulties that Covid presented, MIRC is proud to retain enthusiastic membership. We plan to continue to publicise and promote expansion of the club, to train a number of further coaches with British Rowing and ultimately achieve funding to purchase a second Gig.

Events in the calendar for this year include participating in Ireland's Cork Ocean to City Race, the Hamble River Raid and the iconic Great River Race on the Thames. Also crews are competing in the British Coastal Championships to be held in Saundersfoot. This is a qualifier for the World Championships to be held in October, also, excitingly, in Saundersfoot.

Members will be celebrating the Clubs 10th Anniversary, indeed both the legacy and successes, with a dinner and dance at the Yacht Club.

Learn to Row courses are additionally planned for the year ahead. MIRC aims to provide the correct training and skills to enable people to go out on the water on their own or as part of a crew, enjoyably and safely.

We continue to strive to attract a genuine and diverse membership and welcome any kind donations to assist with maintenance expenses, plus those necessary for the growth of the club. Predominantly attracting local interest, this wonderful sport along with the attraction of Mersea also gains attention from far afield.

As we move forward, clubhouse premises and boat storage are facilities which MIRC hopes to establish future, long term security for. Another aspiration is for the Club to be able to purchase a Cornish Gig.

There is limited availability of Rowing Clubs in Essex. With enthusiasm for outdoor sports rapidly growing, Reuben's vision alongside the unwavering commitment from members continues to inspire and facilitate those who wish to join us.

Mersea Island Rowing Club thanks its sponsors and supporters as we look forward to another exciting year on the water.

Sue Steadman





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## S.R. Bikini Bottom

2022 marks the twenty fifth anniversary of the launching of S.R. Bikini Bottom, formerly swimming raft Oyster Island.

I make no apologies if you are unaware that Bikini Bottom is the underwater world of Spongebob Squarepants, his sidekick Patrick the starfish and friends. Though unknowingly you might have a replica of Spongebob's house in your lounge corner bar, a pineapple ice bucket.

You are probably more familiar with another nautical character, super strongman, pot smoking Popeye the sailorman and his zero sized girl Olive Oil and his love rival unshaven, bruiser Bluto. Sorry but they are no longer suitable role models so it couldn't be named 'That's my gal Olive'.

In the good old days of West Mersea Urban District Council, we had a grand fleet of twelve rafts in bold red and yellow livery lying off Beach Road and stretching to Seaview Avenue. However, with local government reorganisation, West Mersea lost its rafts, beach putting green and keys to the safe, the beach hut sites and Victoria Car Park rent and revenue but gained some bling in exchange: a chain of office. Duped! Just like the American Indians losing their ancestral lands for worthless trinkets. The borough were not initially interested in the grand fleet and they were scuttled by neglect, being left out in the perils of the autumn gales and finished off by winter seas.

In the absence of these swimming aids, I made my first raft with my niece in mind over thirty years ago. As a reward, the first words I heard her say were 'raft, raft' as she pointed out to sea like in the painting 'The Boyhood of Sir Walter Raleigh'. Although, like Raleigh, she could have been looking overseas as she now lives down under. The raft was eventually taken away by the borough, never to resurface.

To prevent piracy on various name plates grandchildren and the gunnels. On the and his friends who together with niece now lives, the house, Luna Park and local marsupials.



the low seas, Bikini Bottom has and the names of all my parents, great grandchildren carved on deck are portraits of Spongebob have had an Aussie make-over, pictures of Sydney, where my harbour bridge, the opera

The borough was made aware of their responsibility in the tradition of providing swimming rafts and, following the launching, I was commissioned to make three traditional rafts: S.R Saltmarsh City (mythical name for Ray Island), S.R. Borough Pirate (a reference to borough buccaneering) and S.R. Atlantis 9which, as the name suggests, has disappeared – or has it?)

Since then various boat builders have built rafts in the traditional style to bolster the fleet to three-quarter strength. The borough being landlubbers long ago.

Steve Vince

## **Mersea Island Rugby Club**

Sports' participation through 2020 and 2021 was naturally difficult to navigate with National and RFU restrictions in place. Mersea Island RFC was, however, determined to offer the community a chance to engage in sport safely whenever possible. This can-do attitude, whilst following all safeguarding guidance, saw the club's player pool grow. Some local talent started attending when possible as well as players completely new to the game. The player focused ethos on training fuelled a growth in numbers which has now paid dividends. The senior section regularly has over 40 players training each Thursday at The Glebe

Seven years ago the club started a youth section, which coincided with its move to The Glebe. It was this relocation, with the extra space, which was an important factor in facilitating its establishment. At this time, Tom and Cal Brennan took on the challenge of coaching our oldest junior group of under 11s with the simple aim of vanguarding Mersea rugby's fledgling junior section.

It soon became apparent that the club had a very special group of young players and the ambition crystallised as a drive to develop Mersea's first home grown senior side. Recruitment was fuelled by Tom Brennan and John Gradwell's RFU initiative to teach rugby at TLA and Thurstable Schools together with a number of Mersea youngsters, who had previously been playing rugby union at Colchester and rugby league at Eastern Rhinos, joining the club. A strong squad developed as a unit and the strict policy that every available player played a minimum of half a game had the effect of bringing on the less experienced players and raised the overall standard to a very high level.

The Colts have won over 80% of their matches over 7 years and enjoyed victories over the largest clubs in Essex and the Eastern Counties. However, this amazing success can be measured not just by results and performances on the pitch. The Colts have grown into superb young men with values and beliefs that are a credit to themselves and which also strengthen our community. The squad are universally respected and the work and commitment of the coaches were recognised by Eastern Counties in 2019 when Tom Brennan was chosen as Eastern Counties' Coach of the Year. Today's squad of 28 exceptional young players are predominantly from Mersea, Tiptree and South Colchester. A coaching team of Tom and Cal Brennan, Craig Sestak and Steve Ramsay have

been well supported by both the junior and senior sections of the club and transport has been donated by the Lions, for which the club is most appreciative.

An important factor in this growth in the number of players, both senior and junior, has also been the installation of match quality floodlights at The Glebe by an RFU accredited supplier. In addition to the club providing a significant sum towards the floodlights, grants were obtained from a number of charities who are positively disposed towards community and youth sport. These included Enover, the Essex Association of Local Councils (EALC) and the Locality Fund for whose support the club is very appreciative. Not only have the lights enabled players to train more regularly under better quality and more environmentally friendly LED lights but also they have saved players having to travel each week to Essex University to train.

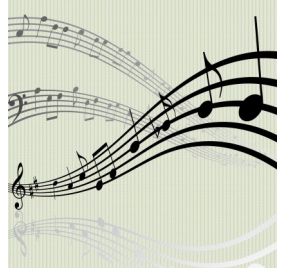
The club is still relatively small but with up to 150 young people registered and training every Sunday, and a clear organic pathway through to senior rugby being mapped out, it has a bright future. The club has already started planning for the 2022/23 season, with some exciting developments on and off the pitch. The club's vision for the future is being created with the community and members at its heart. As part of this process it is putting together a development plan for the next 3-5 years which reflects the club's desire to constantly move forward in order to provide a quality sporting and life experience for rugby players from the Mersea Island community as well as neighbouring villages.

Craig Sestak



## Mersea Island Folk Club.

First Monday of each month.  
Studio at the MICA Centre  
7.30 pm – 10.30 pm.



The first session of Mersea Island Folk Club was held in the small hall (Studio) of the MICA Centre in October 2018 offering an alternative to other music venues on the island. We envisaged a place where musicians could play, and audiences could listen and be entertained free of charge for all. We decided that there would be no amplification; all playing and singing would be acoustic. All performers, whatever the ability, would be made welcome. Very importantly, the MICA bar was to be open, and a beer break was to be held halfway through the evening.

And so, we began.

From the beginning we had a pleasing number of musicians and audience turn up. Each evening was compared by Liz or me and later by Rick. The term 'folk' was given a wide interpretation. Alongside sea shanties, ballads, jigs, reels, and other music traditionally thought of in this way, we have enjoyed jazz, blues, music hall and much more. A wide range of instruments has featured including, guitar, ukulele, flute, whistle, clarinet, fiddle, banjo, double bass, drum, accordion, melodion, nyckelharpa and hammer dulcimer. There have been solos, duos, trios, a cappella groups, ukulele groups and Mehalah Morris have danced.

By early 2020 we were attracting a regular and growing audience. Musicians from further afield than Mersea were coming along to play. Then we had to cancel our March gathering and covid prohibited any gatherings until October 2021 when we restarted. Since then, we have had a good turnout of musicians and audience. We ensure that everybody who wants to perform is given a spot during the evening. At our February session so many musicians wanted play it was hard to fit everybody in.

Throughout we owe thanks to Tim and all the staff at the MICA who have helped and supported us. The studio has been set up for us on each occasion, the bar is open, and every evening has been free of charge for audience members. However, since our restart, we feel it right to ask for a donation of £2 per session from audience and performers alike. This helps pay for the use of the studio and supports the MICA.

We now meet on the first Monday of each month with a 7.30 pm start and 10.30 pm finish. Whether you play or come just to listen, do join us. Everybody is welcome.

John Leyland

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## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Wednesday 27th July Members Garden Tea Party

Tuesday October 4th 2022: Talk by ENORI—Essex Native Oyster Restoration Initiative

Tuesday 1st November 2022: Trevor Hearn—A Mersea connection to the slave trade

Feb 2023 TBA

Mar 2023 TBA

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