



Kaye Darby, Jean Mazzey
and Martin Treadway

55 years UP THE creek

The history of Eyott Sailing Club
and Fenn Creek 1950 - 2005



eyott
sailing
club



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foreword

55 Years up the Creek - a history of the Eyott Sailing Club in words and pictures - has been 'on the drawing board' for many years. It was earlier this year that, in conjunction with Jean Mazzey, I finally made a real commitment to try and turn the huge fund of photographs, anecdotes and ideas into a book to record Eyott's fascinating history for posterity. Not knowing even how to start, let alone make progress, I decided to contact Martin Treadway, an early member, who I knew had the skills (and I hoped the motivation) to be able to help get the project moving.

I am thrilled with the result and would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who combined to make the book so special.

I would also like to apologise for any inadvertant inaccuracies - and to all those members we have been unable to mention personally.

Kaye Darby, August 2005

Acknowledgments and thanks are due to:

The club founders, members past and present and all the contributors, over the years, to the club newsletter (Neaps) and the club log (Fenn Log) who have been liberally quoted throughout this book.

Reay McBride who had the original idea for a club history in the 1980s and Derek Dodd for his support and encouragement.

Photographers - too many to mention.

Martin Johnson who rescued the original file of articles from computer oblivion.

Martin Treadway whose professional graphic skills, written material and knowledge of the club were given at a critical time in the book's formulation, transforming what could have been an ugly duckling into this exciting publication.

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Martin Treadway
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Printed by

Halcyon
www.halcyonline.co.uk

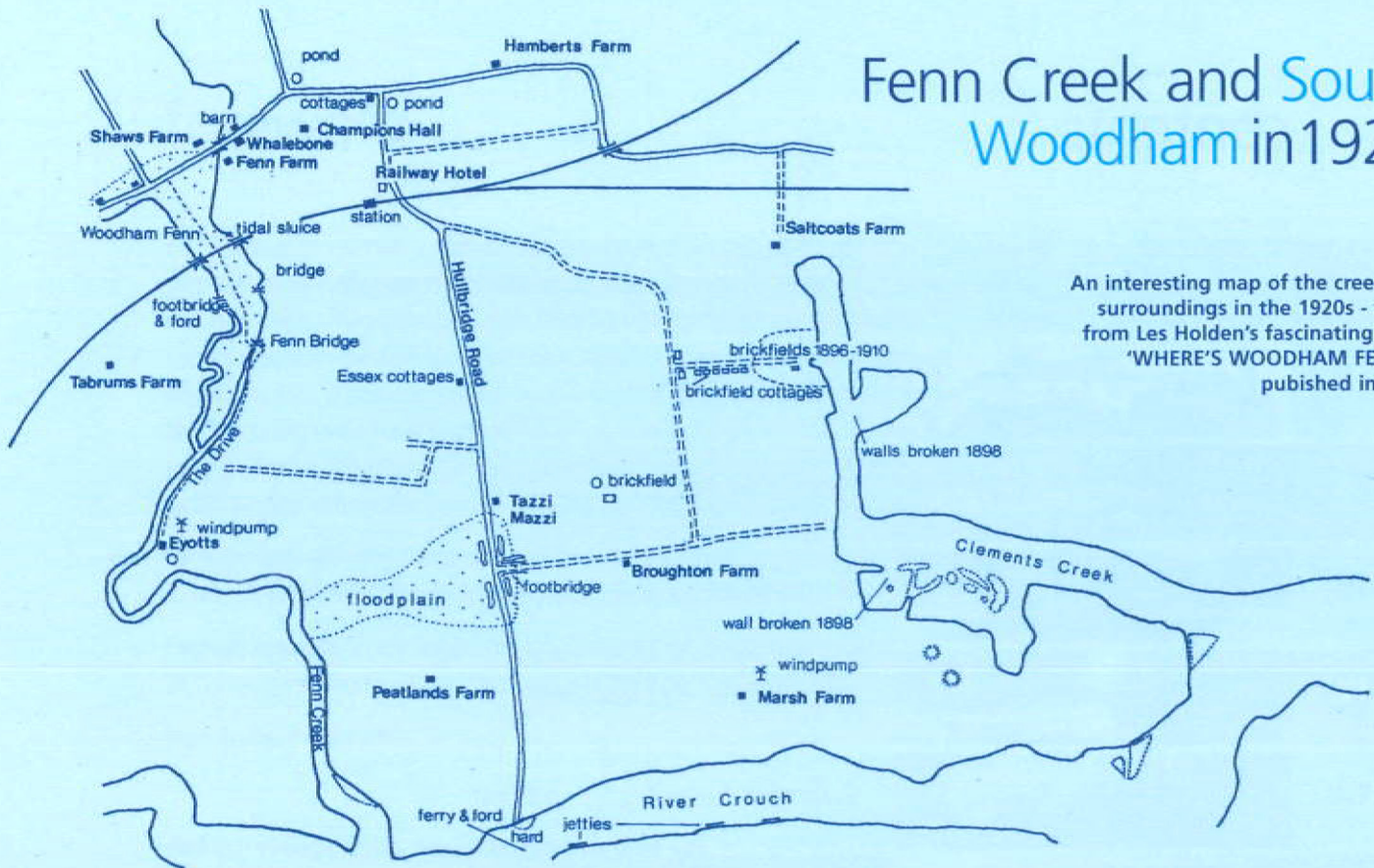
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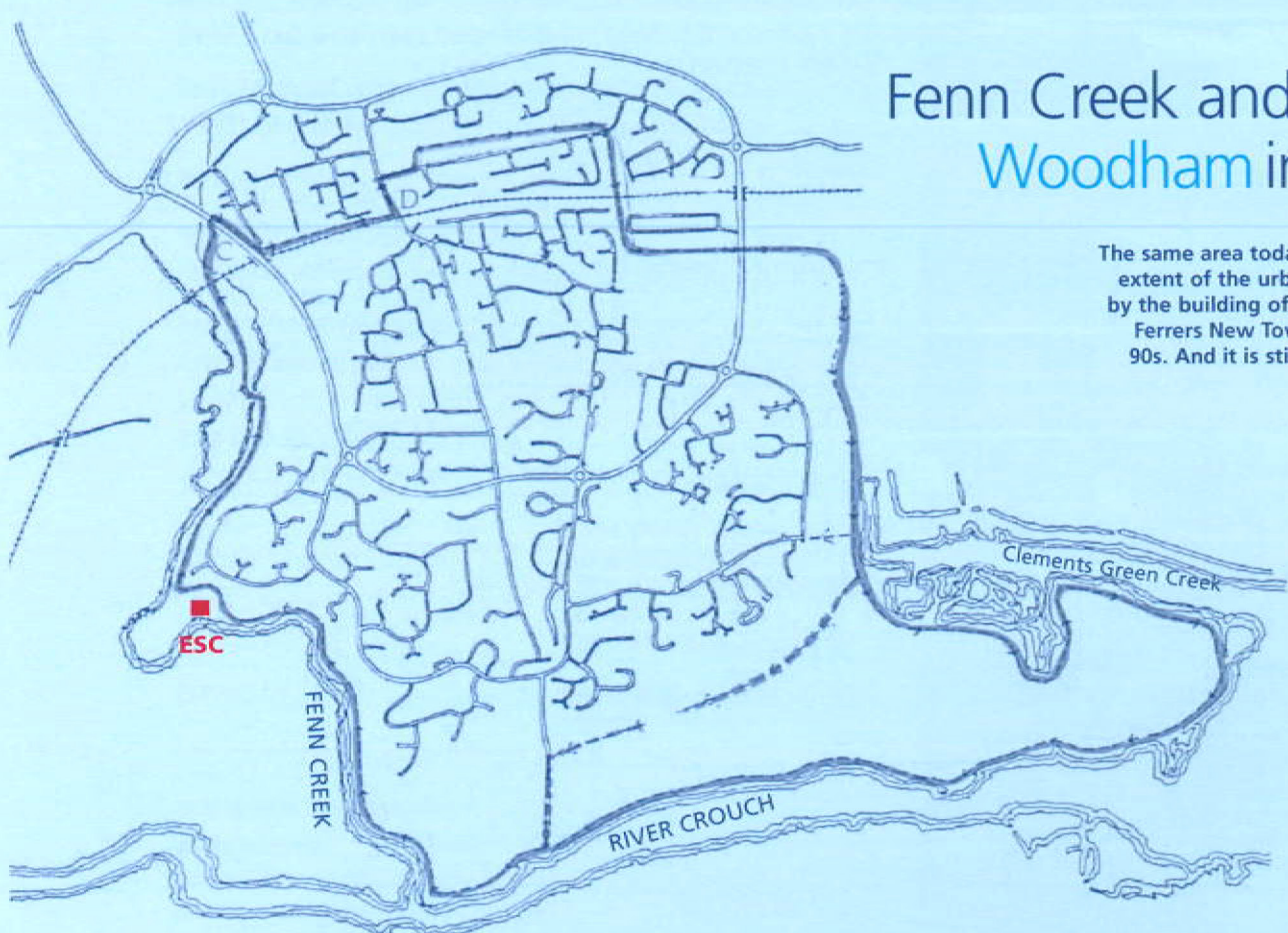
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Fenn Creek and South Woodham in 1925

An interesting map of the creek and surroundings in the 1920s - taken from Les Holden's fascinating book 'WHERE'S WOODHAM FERRIS?' published in 1988

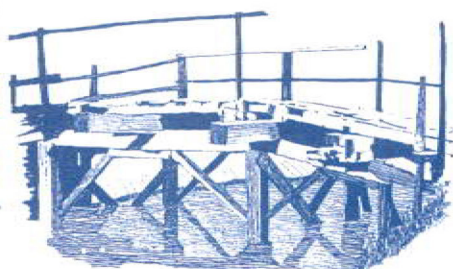


Fenn Creek and South Woodham in 2005

The same area today reveals the full extent of the urbanisation created by the building of South Woodham Ferrers New Town in the 80s and 90s. And it is still growing today!

very early days

Eyott Sailing Club is situated on the north bank of the Fenn Creek off the River Crouch at South Woodham Ferrers. Signs of earlier activity in the Crouch area are evident from finds of mammoth tusks, sharks' teeth, red deer antlers, stone age tools, Mesolithic flint axes and, apparently, the remains of a Neolithic footbridge between Eyott's Farm and the club. No buried boats as yet though.



The old wooden bridge which took 'The Drive' across the creek until it was replaced by a concrete structure in the 1930s or 1940s.

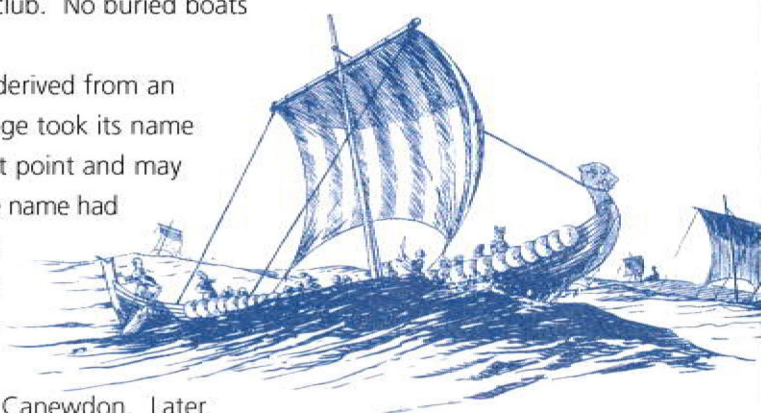
The Crouch was originally called the Holne, derived from an ancient word meaning arch. (The village at Hullbridge took its name from a Roman bridge which crossed the river at that point and may have been arched - it existed until 1645). By 1535 the name had changed to Burnham Waters, or the Burnham River.

The area has a haunting beauty and it is not difficult to imagine the Viking long boats using the river in their visits along the coast.

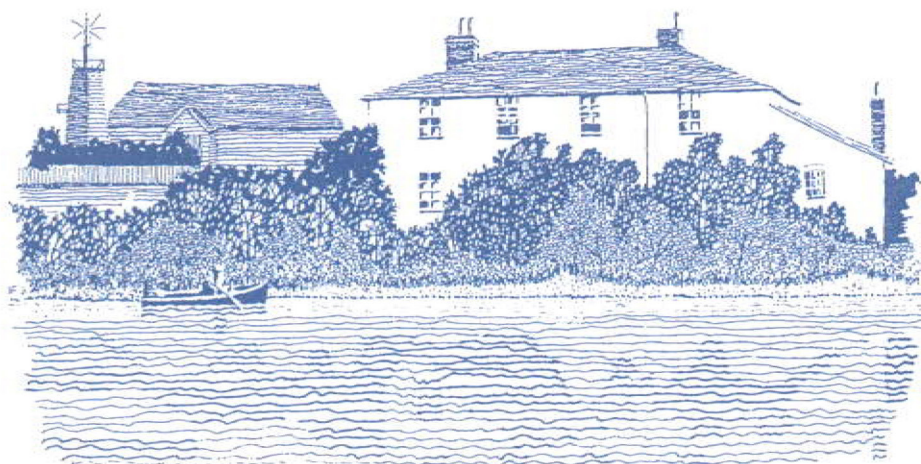
In 1016 King Canute defeated the Saxons at Canewdon. Later, smugglers found the lonely creeks and marshlands ideal for their activities while trading barges plied their more sober business delivering goods to the farms and villages along the river.

Closer to home, the junction of Fenn Creek and Woodham Creek used to be the 'winding ways' for barges and the road which once ran alongside the upper reaches of Fenn Creek was used as jetty. The records indicate that our particular corner of the creek has been occupied in some form for a very long time – a dwelling has existed at Eyott's Farm, for example, since the Norman Conquest.

This book has a more modest time scale and attempts to cover just the history of Eyott Sailing Club since its beginnings in 1950.



Viking longships visited the Crouch and in 1016 King Canute defeated the Anglo Saxons at the Battle of Canewdon.



Eyott's Farm as it appeared in the 1930s with its wind-driven pump. There has reputedly been a dwelling on this site since the Norman Conquest.



how it all began

“The idea was born during a cruise to Pin Mill on *Fidelis*. We had anchored under the Cliff at Althorne owing to strong east winds and it was there the idea of the club came to life.” These are the words of Maurice Redman, founder member and first Commodore of the Club, writing his ‘History of Eyott Sailing Club’ in 1950. Maurice occupied one of the several weekend huts dotted along the edge of Fenn creek at that time. His neighbours included Vernon and Joyce Walters and, naturally, several of them sailed. (Vernon and Maurice had met in 1940 and sailed the *Crouch* at the time when you kept an eye out for the navy patrol boat since the river was restricted to warships). Some among the initial group were thinking simply of an association among themselves, but “the Commodore thought otherwise”.

His notion was the formation of a club which could attract the then smaller classes of racing dinghies such as Cadets or Fireflies, together with a cruising interest. The first committee was formed at a meeting held on June 21st 1950 (at Forest Drive, in Leytonstone). In attendance were Maurice Redman, Peter Dear, Peter Maynard and Derek Timms. There was a long discussion over the name for the club – should it be Fenn or Eyott Sailing Club - and the design of the burgee. “It was decided to adopt a conventional design, of the loop in



A very early photograph of (left to right) Maurice Redman, Roger Clark and Peter Maynard sailing on Maurice’s 4-tonner *Fidelis* which he built himself at the creek in the ‘30s.



Above: The very first issue of *Eyott Neaps* published in 1952 and showing the tortuous route to the club across the fen.



Left: Early racing in 1952. Peter Maynard and Roger Clark getting Cadet 936 *Aphis* up to speed.



Left: Cadets and the first Heron racing at Eyott in 1953. The Cadets were soon to be over-run by a steady influx of new Herons.

This evening I feel to be an historic occasion for all of us

the creek as it winds around Eyott's Farm. This device split the burgee into dark blue sea and light blue sky".

Some words of the Commodore at that first meeting are also recorded "This evening I feel to be an historic occasion for all of us. From the nucleus of members present will probably arise something that in a few years may occupy some space in our Yachting Journals . . . we must encourage and help the junior members to become conscious of the satisfying pleasure afforded by sailing his own boat".

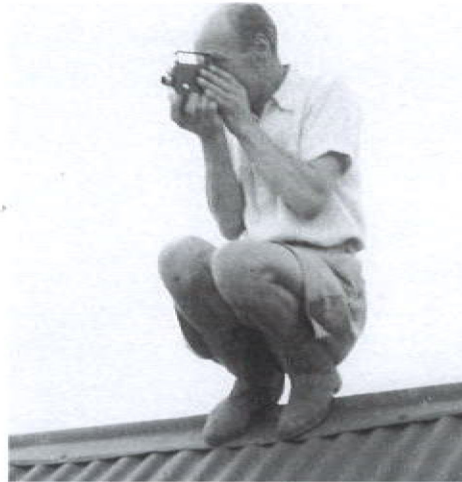
Subsequently, "Mr G R Levie and myself presented a guinea each to start the Club fund thus becoming the two founder members.

During the last six months of that year many people came forward with generous gifts of money and materials and it is due to them that the Club found its feet in the first year of its existence."

We may not have occupied quite as much space in the 'Yachting Journals' as those early enthusiasts envisaged, but in the main the aims of encouraging young sailors and small dinghy racing fleets has been amply fulfilled, within a thriving and self-sufficient club.

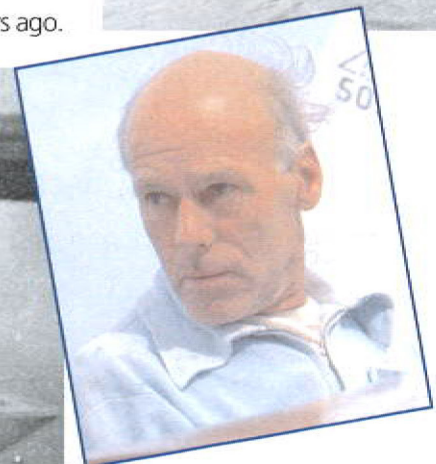
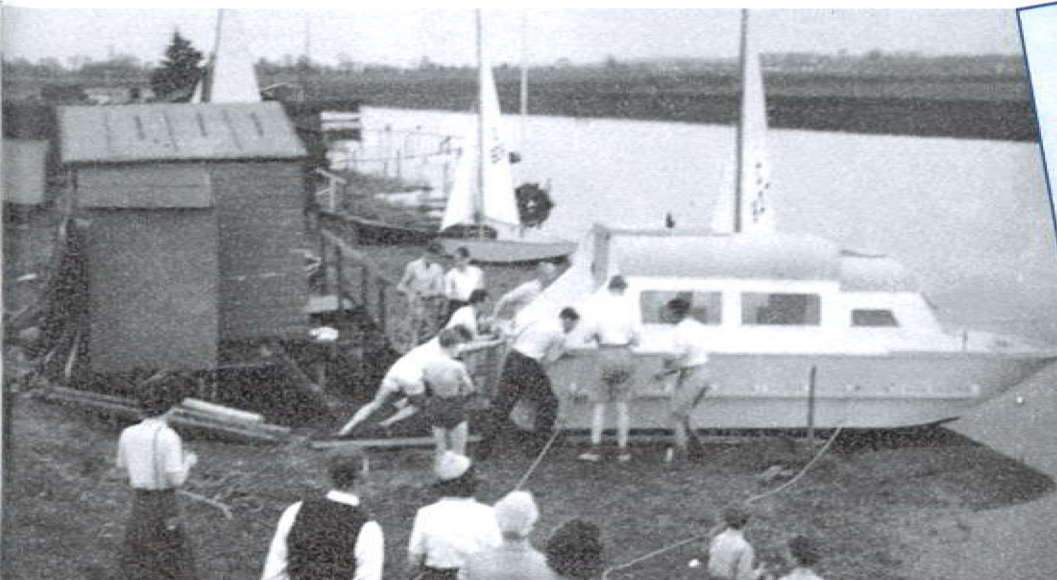
In 1950, we occupied a remote, almost inaccessible bank of a creek in Essex. Today, we are on the edge of a large thriving town and have services and facilities beyond the dreams of the founders. But face in the right direction, with the right outlook, and perhaps not much has changed.

The following pages outline some of the events and development of Eyott Sailing Club in the years since that first hopeful season over fifty years ago.



Left: Maurice Redman films the launching of the first clubhouse *Tamaris* - built by members on an ex-army pontoon widely available at the end of WW2 for £20 each. She can be seen in the foreground of the top picture and the actual launching is shown in the picture at the bottom of the page.

Below: The club's first Hon Secretary and 'Social' Secretary - Stan and Elsie Treadway sailing *Drizzle* at Hullbridge in 1955.



Above: Maurice Redman sailing his *Barbel* through the Burnham anchorage in 1966.

returning to eyott

a personal recollection by Martin Treadway

From the age of 6 in 1950 until I left to go off to art college ten years later, I spent virtually every weekend and school holiday down at 'the creek'. And while my parents were building their new bungalow at Sandon the three of us lived permanently in our 12ft by 12ft creekside hut from June 1955 until July 1956.

This period included my whole first year at grammar school in Chelmsford where I became a first former in September 1955.

The daily journey involved a mile and a quarter hike across the fen to South Woodham station where I caught the old No.19 Eastern National bus to Chelmsford – one and a half hours, with another 10 minute walk at the end. The winter of 1955/56 was bitter and I regularly had to battle through blizzards and snowdrifts (at the age of 11). It was so cold that I remember one day the creek froze solid at high tide and when the tide went out it left an ice 'roof' in place which caved in during the night with an enormous crash.

These episodes contrasted with happy memories of endless summers messing about in anything that would float, of swimming, mud baths and generally having an idyllic and privileged childhood which I shall never forget.

So what were my impressions when I returned to Eyott a few years ago? On one level I felt everything had changed. But then there were signs that



Above: Aged 6, taken on the day we discovered Fenn Creek. The photo bottom left of Captain Coward's smack yacht *Cornishman* was taken with the Ross Ensign Fullvue camera I am clutching.

Below: Practising hard in my Cadet C927 *Sheldrake* - originally built by Maurice Redman with 'dodgy' plywood. My father bought it for £10 and re-skinned it. The new suit of sky blue cotton sails (including spinnaker cost £7 2s 6d. Jimmy Allison and I finished 18th out of 148 at Cadet Week, Burnham, 1959.



very little was different. On the plus side it's certainly a lot easier to get to – once the brain had adjusted to the total transformation of the landscape by the new town. But when I first stood by the clubhouse and looked south, and put what was behind me out of my mind, the view across to the Rayleigh skyline had hardly changed. The contours of the creek at low tide, the willow trees, the row of pylons – even the sound of the mud 'pop-ping' – were entirely familiar. And when I actually went racing in my



Left: The first ESC Laying Up Supper at St Andrew's Church Hall in Wickford. The junior members seated at the front are me (left) and Michael Dexter.

Vernon and Joyce Walters (extreme right) are still Eyott members today in 2005.

Below: Our converted chicken hut on the edge of the backwater which was home for 12 months - and a base for weekends and holidays for over 10 years.



Heron, I was transported 50 years back in an instant. Nothing whatever had changed, except perhaps that I could not sail quite as well as I used to!

It was a wonderful experience to return after so long and I am especially grateful to the members who made me so welcome. It is a wonder and a blessing that the club still attracts such decidedly nice people.

But to be completely honest, I found it strangely unsettling too. There were so many ghosts for me, so many faces of men and women who shaped my life, who are no longer with us, that in the end I needed to move on.

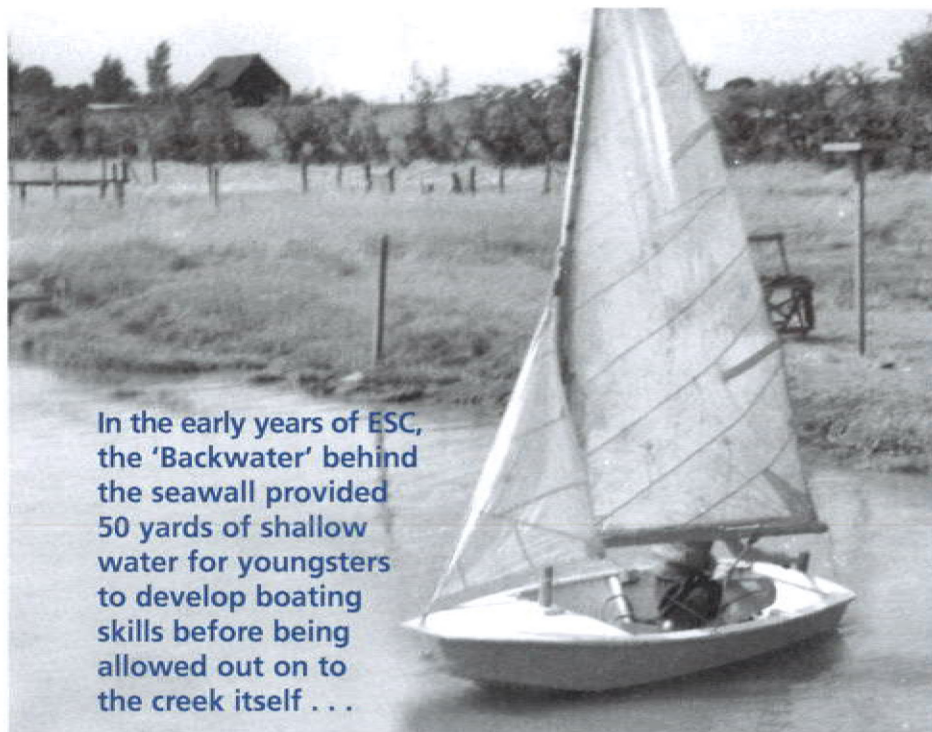
It is a truly unique place with an illustrious history which I know – like me – will make a lasting impression on generations of new sailors to come. As it says prophetically on the banner at the first Laying Up Supper: 'Eyott for Ever.'

Back at Eyott in 1999, after a 40 year gap, with Drizzle 2 - a very old Heron I bought for £200 and re-furbished. This was a very windy day at the creek with racing cancelled - so I put on the small jib and went out to try out the new centre mainsheet system. Derek Dodd was lurking with his camera to get the evidence that Herons do plane!



Above: A proud day! Keith Musto and me collect our spoils after winning the first Heron Nationals at Ruislip Lido in 1955 in the Club boat *Aries*. Her mainsail was so flat that Keith used to whack it with a big oar to try and develop some shape in it before we went out to each race.

little boats and backwaters



In the early years of ESC, the 'Backwater' behind the seawall provided 50 yards of shallow water for youngsters to develop boating skills before being allowed out on to the creek itself . . .

Left: Gerry Ledger coaxes *Junior Yachtsman* to windward against the fickle, westerly breeze.

Below: A model ketch was one of a fleet of models regularly racing on the Backwater - which also included a very fine Thames Barge model built by the Ledger family.

Centre below: *Earlybird* was a nimble performer under oars.



It all started with the arrival at the creek of a very small 6ft long boat called *The Junior Yachtsman*. This had been a woodwork project in Stan Treadway's handicraft room at Benfleet Secondary Modern School where he taught woodwork and metalwork. It was actually another Yachting World sponsored design (like the *Heron*) designed for children to learn to sail with alternative use as a yacht tender.

The problem with the 'Backwater' was its depth: 15 inches (max) with a bottom of grey, glutinous mud. *Junior Yachtsman* had a conventional daggerboard - like the *Cadet* - which needed 2ft 3ins of water to sail to windward. Stan came up with a solution. He designed and made a long keel of about 12 ins depth which provided the little boat with some sort of windward ability. Enough - at any rate - to provide the likes of Gerry Ledger, Donald Dear, Chris Storton, Martin Treadway, Michael Dexter etc with years of fun learning to sail, row and paddle in complete safety.

The other main player in the Backwater fleet was *Earlybird* - a very pretty, clinker built 'ship's boat' whose origins were always uncertain belonging to Donald Dear. She had no keel or centreboard so had very limited sailing ability - although she would scamper downwind very briskly under a variety of square rigs. But as a rowing boat she had no equal.

Model yachts also played an important part of Backwater activity and getting them to run downwind the 50 yards between bridges without touching the sides was a constant challenge. Tacking them back upwind necessitated a huge amount of racing from side to side to put them about on to a new tack; lots of small boys would slide down the seawall straight into the 'oggin' in their haste to get to their model.



Above: *Junior Yachtsman* was also very good at attracting pretty blondes out on to the water.



Above left: Chris Storton at the oars while (above) Kay Risby prefers the double-ended paddle.



Left: Donald Dear sailing *Earlybird* before a fresh easterly breeze. The ramshackle hut belonged to the mysterious Mr Groves from Birmingham who also kept a pretty, white 7-tonner called *Faith* in a mud berth opposite this hut. No one ever saw it sailing.

Below: Les Stanley, the rear commodore of the day, test sails *Junior Yachtsman* on the creek. He was clearly dressed for any eventuality!

The 'pot' at the end of the rainbow for aspiring Backwater sailors was getting permission to sail *Junior Yachtsman* on the creek itself. But as well as achieving a high standard of sailing (in the opinion of ESC elders) the young lad or lass had to be able to swim. And swim well.

The requirements of the International Cadet Class - also adopted by ESC for its juniors - were to swim 50 yards fully clothed with lifejacket and 10 yards underwater (no lifejacket.) As everyone seemed to live in the creek during the summer, swimming across and back at high water was accepted as the equivalent of 50 yards. (See 'Safety' chapter page 8).



Left: Sailing standard achieved . . . swimming test passed . . . and finally allowed out on to the wide, wide creek. Only problem . . . no wind. The moored cabin boat is *Fen Gull*, a 20-foot plywood centreboard cruiser built by Maurice Redman for Reg Dexter, the club's first treasurer. The *Heron* in the foreground is Stan Treadway's *Drizzle*, the first at the club. Notice the boom crutch for cruising comfort.



Left: A proverbial 'drifter' on the Creek. The fleet battles against the incoming tide with a fickle southerly breeze barely providing steerage way. (1990).

Below: Stan Treadway gets some tuition from the commodore, Maurice Redman, in his scratch built Heron 'Drizzle' - the first one launched at Eyott in 1952.

sailing . . . sailing . . . sailing . . .

In any book about a sailing club the chapter on sailing must surely be full of facts, anecdotes and memories and be the longest in the book. Sailing at Eyott Sailing Club is no exception. Back in 1950 the few founder members of the club chose the Jack Holt designed Cadet to sail deeming it very suitable for the restricted water in Fenn Creek.

Early in the 1950s, Jack Holt designed a new small sailing dinghy to bridge the gap between his Cadet and GP14. In later years Bob Ledger said: "As it was supposed to obviate the necessity for a trailer, it was called the "Cartop" dinghy. Yachting World magazine, which introduced it, announced that it was not intended for racing and so no association would be formed. However, several clubs, including Eyott, decided it was just the boat for their waters and adopted it for racing. Ruislip Lido and Bletchley clubs set the wheels in motion to form an association and at the same time a change of name was mooted. Although it was possible to carry the boat on the roof of a car, it was not practical as you need four people to lift it on and off, so a "Cartop" was deemed misleading. 'Heron' was among the names suggested, though several of us objected to that on the grounds that there was something rather incongruous in naming one of the smallest dinghy classes in the country after one of our largest birds. However Yachting World suddenly announced that it had been decided to change the boat's name to 'Heron.'"

The Heron proved popular with Eyott members, for both racing and pottering. Since its introduction to the present day, Eyott has had one of the largest Heron fleets in the country and has produced several class National Champions, Area Champions and winning teams.

For nearly 20 years the Heron was the adopted class, until the smaller Mirror 10 was designed in conjunction with a National newspaper and well known Television 'Do-It-Yourself' personality, Barry Bucknell. It was decided to adopt the Mirror dinghy to supplement the Heron fleet



Above: Yachting World's original name for their new dinghy design was the 'Cartop.' This was soon changed to 'Heron' as the boat proved a bit of a struggle to get on to a car roof - in spite of this publicity photo in the Bell Wood-working brochure.



Left: The singlehanded Solo was adopted in the 1980s to ease problems when crews were in short supply.

Below: Andy Dale and Amanda Shillitoe in Andy's very smart new Mirror 10.

It was decided to adopt the Mirror dinghy to supplement the Heron fleet and, hopefully increase membership

and, hopefully, increase membership. It was originally intended to race two separate fleets and extra trophies were needed. Some were bought by the club, while others were presented to the club.

After a while, however, lack of interest in racing by the Mirror sailors meant two racing fleets were impractical and it is recorded in Neaps that "it was reluctantly decided to combine the two fleets and race them on handicap". As a result the two sets of trophies were combined and gave ESC its current plethora of trophies.

The 12ft Mirror Miracle dinghy was also accepted into the club having been designed after its smaller sibling, but only three, to date, have ever been at Eyott at the same time.

A singlehanded dinghy, the Jack Holt designed Solo, was accepted at the club when crews were in short supply and a singlehander was thought to be appropriate.

Since then a few other classes have sailed regularly at the club, including the Comet, Streaker and Topper. At present the Heron fleet is still the largest, but over all the classes, plastic now outnumber wooden boats.

In the early days of the Heron class, self-build was a popular choice but with the increased availability of secondhand boats and professional builders, this has declined. A major exception was the pioneering by Derek Dodd of the first 'stitch and glue' form of Heron, the construction method now generally favoured for all new wooden Herons.



Left: In the late 'nineties the designer Selway Fisher 're-invented' the method of construction for wooden Herons, replacing the 'plank-on-frame' technique with an easier, quicker 'stitch-and-glue' process. Derek Dodd successfully built the first boat 'Ez Pz' to the new plans - seen here in build and racing in the Nationals at Priory S C, Bedford.

Above: In Northern Ireland, Tyrone Boats built a 'demonstrator' to the new Selway Fisher design and lent it to Eyott for 'evaluation.' Andy Dale immediately won the Nationals and Southernns in 1999 with this very fast and light boat, 'Nice 'n Easy.' It was subsequently bought by Nigel Darby (above) who has continued to enjoy much success with it. Sadly, Tyrone Boats have not continued building Herons and construction of kits and completed wooden boats has now passed to Chippendale Craft.



Left: An intense tacking duel against the tide to the finish in the mid-'sixties, long before the arrival of South Woodham Ferrers new town.

Below: The 'big fellow' as a wee lad. Nigel Darby in pensive mood, circa 1964.

Keen racers have always out-numbered the potterers with varying degrees of success. Most notable was Keith Musto who, as a boy, was winning races in 1952. An early Neaps commented on Keith and Terry Pearce "Judging by their performance last Sunday they should do very well."

Keith went on to win a Silver Medal in the 1964 Tokyo Olympics!

It has often been said that if you can sail in Fenn Creek with its twists and turns and short water time, you will be able to sail anywhere. In addition to Keith who was the first Heron Nationals winner in 1955, sailing 'Aries' (and crewed by Martin Treadway), other National winners were Vernon Walters in 1972, also in 'Aries', Greg Thorpe in 1974 and 1975 (in 'Topper'), Andrew Woodfield in 1976 (in 'Suza'), Andy Dale in 1999 (in 'Nice'n Easy'), and Nigel Darby singlehanded champion in 'Sooty'.

Eyott has always encouraged its junior sailors and the narrow creek has proved a safe place on which to learn to sail.

Ten year-old Thomas Beecham wrote in 1983 about his first capsized while crewing for Nigel Darby (whom he described as a very nice man, but a bit heavy!). "When we were just round Heartbreak and heading for the bank ready to tack we went to one side a little too far . . . in! I was standing on the side of the side-deck with my bottom half in the water. It was cold. I waited for Nigel to go round and on to the bank to pull me out. I was terrified. He pulled me out and I sat on the bank."

Later in the clubhouse Nigel said: "The first time is always the worst!"

Twenty one years later, twelve year old James Polston, also crewing for Nigel, had a happier experience at the 2003 Heron Southern Championships. After three slow races: "We got changed and went to the prize giving. We were called up a couple of times. I got first crew and Nigel got first helm. We also got two big trophies. We won the Heron Southern Championships for the first time ever. Even Nigel had never won it before. So the first time he brings me we win".

Alexander Johnson crewing for his father in their Mirror in the 2003 Hullbridge Regatta wrote in Neaps later "On the way back, we occasionally stuck our nose in front, only to be dragged back again by Andy, so we had



In the 'seventies the Topper took the world of dinghy sailing by storm and Catherine Mazzezy became the proud owner of the first one at Eyott. Many more of these little boats were to follow and proved very popular - especially with the younger members.



Left: Hullbridge Regatta in 1957. To make the early start time, all the Eyott boats were taken round to Hullbridge hard by road and rigged there.

Below left: Cadet Week at Burnham on Crouch in 1958. Eyott S C usually sent a fleet of three Cadets to take part in the 150-boat International regatta - which was the highlight of the sailing year for the young sailors.

Below: 'Bilbo' gets a helping hand.



to make do with second. The trophy is a rather nice mug and a plaque so it's a shame I couldn't collect mine on the day."

Chris Harvey had a slightly different slant on the very stormy 2003 "Widdy-Wid" race: "In the river boats were capsizing with the rescue boat and Gareth frantically trying to keep track of them all. Then I saw the RNLI lifeboat come towards us . . . We then went aboard one of the Brandy Hole boats back to our club which I was very glad to see. I would like to do the race again next year but would not wear as much hair gel!"

There is a splendid Trophy for the Caton junior championship race - a highly valued trophy in the club. Juniors are encouraged to sail together but when juniors are scarce an adult crew is allowed.

During the 1960s and 70s Junior Heron Championships were held (two juniors in the boats were compulsory). In May 1967, it was recorded that 22 entrants had competed on 1st April in the Southern Junior Championship at Ruislip. David Walters (son of Vernon) in 5th place won a burgee while his crew, Nigel Darby, won a thermos flask. David was 12 and Nigel 10 years old at the time.

From time to time a series of Junior Races has been included in Eyott's calendar, the success (or otherwise) depending on the number of juniors available and the willingness of parents to be involved in the organisation. A Saturday Series was introduced in 1997, supported by the enthusiasm of the Ettershank family, and gives further sailing and practice opportunities for all levels of helms and crew.

The fickle weather means that no two day's sailing are the same. Commodore Brian Darby writing in 1980 about the Widdy-Wid Cruise Race to Burnham and back said: "For the benefit of those who have never sailed this far before, it is generally a good day out and the sailing can be extremely exhilarating." Perhaps 'exhilarating' was not the adjective used by those who took part in the 2003 race when the coastguard came to the rescue after a mini tornado decimated the fleet.

However, a young Michelle Burles wrote about the 1984 Mirror Nationals held at Thorpe Bay: "the last four days were boring so we took a picnic and when we were 'doing' the sausage, Dad's mainsheet got stuck!"



Above top: Peter and a very young Andy Dale in their Mirror 10.

Above. The slippery new Toppers chase a pair of Herons to the Farm buoy.

Racing Series always depend on members' help. A duty roster delegates an Officer of the Day (OOD) to organise the race, two members to take out the support dory (one of whom must be experienced and another member (often the wife or crew of the OOD) to serve in the galley. However, members, spouses and friends have always been flexible and willing to help. Derek Dodd commented on the day he bought his first boat (a Mirror 10) down to the club: "Bill Short was nominated as being the best person to demonstrate assembly of it as, although he now sailed a Miracle, he was a Mirror sailor before. Halfway through the exercise he excused himself as 'I have to start the race.' He went off to the clubhouse, blew the horn several times, broke out and pulled flags down, and the boats in the creek sailed away. He returned saying 'now we have plenty of time to ourselves.'"

The club continued to develop. John Rutherford, a Solo sailor at the Marconi Sailing Club and local chandler had given lectures at the club on sailing techniques, and talks on the racing rules were given by Andy Dale and Nigel Darby. Novice training days were also introduced with experienced helms acting as crews.

The Australian Connection

In 1985, Derek Urban, a Heron sailor from Australia and his wife Jean, visited the club and subsequently wrote an article in the Australian Heron Newsletter entitled 'Back to the Home of the Heron', which was later included in Neaps.

Locating the club was their first difficulty, with all the new house building in process and sails in the distance 'apparently sailing across the open fields.' Having arrived in England in April to find it snowing he felt we must be a hardy lot when told that our season extended from March through October.

He found 'the pre-start manoeuvring on the very short startline was 'something to behold' and soon discovered what 'gone gardening' meant, and what to him seemed the 'endless series of hairpin bends before reaching the main river.' The Heron in Australia at that time was virtually unchanged from the original design, so Derek found our variations interesting - 'some with standard rigs, but with genoa foresails, others had one piece aluminium masts with non-standard rudder blade shapes.' Some ESC sailors expressed regret over this trend and urged Australian Heroners to keep the class 'PURE.'

The difference in sailing conditions were vividly brought home when Derek described the vast distances travelled in Australia to attend National and State events - one involving a trailer load of eleven Herons travelling over 4000 miles from Sydney to Perth and back! During their visit, Commodore Reay McBride presented Derek and Jean with an Eyott burgee and several mementoes of their stay, and we subsequently received the Narrabeem club pennant which is in the clubhouse.

Derek and Jean have remained in touch and we have since been visited by other Australian sailors.

Nigel Darby and Andy Dale accepted an invitation to sail in the Australian National Championships in 2002 and enjoyed Aussie hospitality and exciting sailing in rough seas off Brisbane. At the end of 2004 Nigel returned, this time to Melbourne (and stayed on and on. . .!).



Joyce Walters, frequent OOD and poet in her spare time, described the non-sailors at Eyott like this:

We sit and we chat and we make tea,
Blow, hoot and raise flags for the sailors to see.
We sew and we knit and some days we go
To dig and to plant or to cut, strim and mow.
We sunbathe and read, walk, watch or recline.
We wake up to check who's first to the line.
We serve the hot drinks and cake freshly made,
The choc bars and crisps and cold lemonade.
We cheer, laugh, discuss, commiserate too.
Launch boats, wash hulls, Oh, we've plenty to do!



Bob Ledger and Reay McBride with the Eyott and Narrabeem pennants.



Derek and Jean Urban - Eyott's welcome visitors from 'down under.'



cruising . . . cruising . . .



Elsie
Treadway

'Cruises' were once regularly included in our season's calendar and were especially enjoyed by the non-racing members and their families who joined the sailors for the picnic lunch and were very involved with all activities. Cruises used to be arranged on suitable tides - out on the ebb and back on the flood. The sailing programme today is mainly committed to racing but in 1954, in a Fen Log article, Elsie Treadway commented that: "Cruising and racing were two separate forms of enjoyment and hot arguments were heard as to the rival merits of both."

In recent years interest in cruises has dropped. Even the annual 'Widdy Wid' race to Burnham and back is now under review for a possible change of format. Individual sailors, however, have continued to set off on their own on longer trips. Probably the best known was Wilf Caffell who had some amazing adventures.

We quote from one of his reports:

"I wondered if it was possible to get through the Ray Sand channel at this state of the tide . . . this paddling lark is not much fun!"

Later in the report he admits to being towed by Silver Queen out of Harwich, all the way up to Fenn Creek. "Damned decent of him" writes Wilf, "He knows I could not possibly make it against this foul tide." The log ends with: "Total distance travelled - approximately 40 miles. Total time taken - approximately 13 hours. Speed out - approximately 4 knots. Speed back - approximately 2.5 knots. Bet I'll feel shattered tomorrow!"

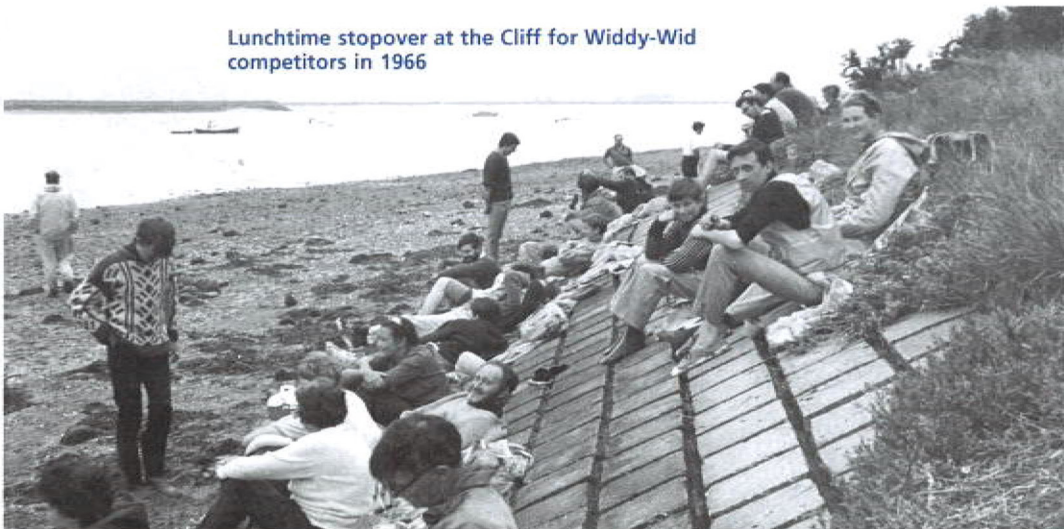
Albert Jones who sailed his Heron, The Whale, at Eyott for 43 years remembers attending regattas at other clubs on the Upper Crouch and further afield to Ruislip, Croydon, Chipstead and interclub team racing. Brandy Hole Y C and the Up River Y C are on the Hullbridge side of the river and still run regattas and open meetings. In the 1960s there were also on the south bank, the Newham and Harlow Clubs. The SWF Yacht Club opened in 1975.

Eyott teams still take part in regattas and organise an interclub team race for the Eyott Plate. This is a silver dish, mounted on a wooden plinth and is competed for enthusiastically every year.

The highlight for many of Eyott's members is probably Eyott Week held in August each year, since 1992. This was the brainchild of Peter Shillitoe and is popular with all age groups. As well as sailing each day, social events such as barbecues, rounders matches, quizzes and crabbing competitions are organised.

In 2004 the Mayor and Mayoress of Chelmsford attended the prizegiving.

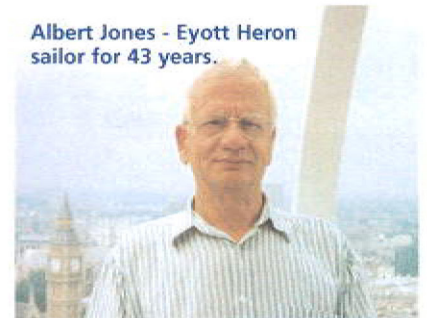
Lunchtime stopover at the Cliff for Widdy-Wid competitors in 1966



Top: Day cruising
1950s style. Treadways and Dawes
stop for 'elevenses' at Fambridge.

Above: Lone sailor extraordinary, Wilf
Caffell, travelled far and wide in his
Heron Bees Knees.

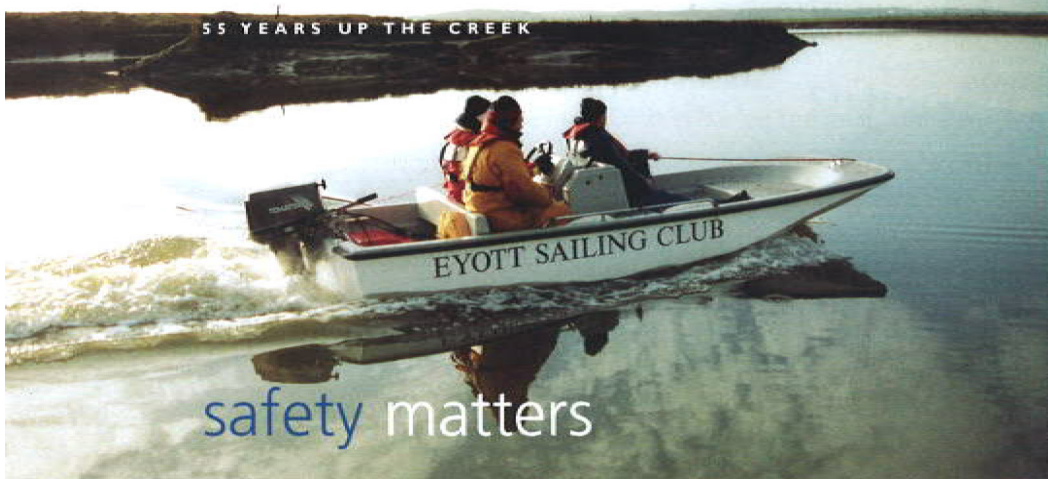
Albert Jones - Eyott Heron
sailor for 43 years.



Below: 1950s Rear Commodore Peter
Smith slips his creek mooring in his
pretty little 17ft gaffer *Dormouse*.

Bottom: Commodore Maurice Redman
designed and built some very small
boats! Here is his diminutive 12ft
'Barbel' pocket cruiser at anchor off
Black Point opposite Bridgemarkh Is.





safety matters



Left: Today's safety boat at Eyott is reliable and well equipped with VHF radio, first aid kit, lifebuoy etc – and a crew trained to RYA standards.

The past fifty years have brought about many developments in equipment and changes in attitudes, particularly with regard to the use of a 'safety/support' boat for racing and cruising and 'risk assessments.' Commenting in 1952 Bob Ledger noted in passing that: "a few boats had buoyancy equipment on board", an indication that it was by no means common practice. Early Fen Log articles are very descriptive of bad weather conditions – so no change there – but there is little mention of a 'safety' or support boat.

In 1954, Elsie Treadway wrote of a 'Cruise to Creeksea' in Fen Log:

"The five boats then kept in their position all the way to the Cliff through rapidly deteriorating weather, crews hanging on to their booms with all their strength like human kicking straps. Drizzle's crew recalled the overnight promise to turn back if things got too lively, but the thought of doing anything to alter the course of that hurtling boat was so terrifying that conscience was abandoned in the need to hang on in spite of hail stones and the rising wind . . . this time, instead of just the froth coming inboard the whole solid wave leapt up joyfully and flung itself into the boat with a juicy smack which bounced right over my head down my neck and out of my shorts at the bottom . . . two more green ones came over and reduced my protests to a gurgling splutter."

To the crew's relief the helm eventually decided "to cut out the racing and just get this boat home tonight."

Safety? To quote Albert Jones on earlier cruises to Burnham:

"Two or three of us would take outboard motors in case the wind dropped, which it sometimes did, to tow the fleet back to the club . . . In those days no one used 'life preservers', unless it was very windy. I have a sailing book printed in 1962 and in all the pictures no one is wearing a life preserver."

Things were much the same in 1977. By then the club had acquired a wooden 'launch' called Wotsit, with a temperamental inboard engine and a speed capability over the water somewhat less than a Heron. The minutes of a Committee meeting in that year noted: "Wotsit has served her purpose over the years but with so few members sailing it was better to have enough boats in the race and leave Wotsit. She was not used very much and it was felt that a replacement would also remain on the bank." Following the demise of Wotsit was Flexi, imaginatively named because of its flexible plastic construction.

Today's requirements and expectations are somewhat higher! Our present support boat (the third dory owned by the club) has to be reliable, well equipped – radio, first aid kit, lifebuoy etc – with a trained crew. RYA training courses run by Doug McEwan of South Woodham Ferrers YC, to obtain competence certification were first instigated by Idris Lewis in winter 2002/03 and have since been successfully completed by a further batch of

Below: Suitable clothing was not a consideration in 1952. Here the Treadway family enjoy a Spring breeze on the creek attired in sports jackets!



Above: Michael Dexter and Martin Treadway at International Cadet Week, Burnham on Crouch, 1957. Compare the huge, cumbersome, kapok life-jackets with the modern kit opposite. And young sailors had to swim 50 yards in this get-up. The shorts and plimsolls offered very little protection against the elements either.

trainees, bringing the total to more than twenty. Such safety measures are now considered essential. Races do not take place without the support boat in attendance and manned by a competent crew.

But weather is still the dominating factor and, as we know, it can be very fickle. The 2003 Widdy Wid race to Burnham and back started in a flat calm with increasing doubts about getting there and back without tows. On the return leg, however, conditions changed dramatically, to a force 8 which eventually needed a Mayday call to the coastguard for extra help for Andy Dale and Alan Copson in the club dory and Idris Lewis, Gareth Lewis and Andrew Goodman in the three hard pressed support boats.

The cost of insurance for both the club and individuals has increased considerably over the years and helms now have to provide evidence of sufficient cover, as recommended by the RYA. All afloat are also required to wear buoyancy aids, carry whistles and – most important – prove their boat can float adequately!

The safety of our junior members, however, has always been a major priority. Before being allowed to helm a boat on the creek, Juniors were required to prove that they could swim, and for this the club followed the Cadet Class model of the time – 50 yards in sailing gear (canvas smocks and kapok life jackets!) and 10 yards under water without gear.

What to wear for sailing has also undergone change. Today, there is a wide choice of special clothing - waterproof smocks, wet suits, dry suits, dinghy boots, sailing gloves etc – all in the highest of hi-tech materials.

In earlier years the Eyott sailor was less catered for and perhaps a bit more informal. Elsie Treadway recalled a particularly wet day in 1954 when “even the dye in our sailing suits gave up trying and gently oozed away down our legs; Stan’s bright yellow and mine a sickly pink.”

Kaye Darby (Commodore 1987-89) remembers wearing kitchen gloves over woollen ones to try to keep warm in winter. (Kaye also modelled wetsuits for a well known company – without kitchen gloves!).

Maurice Redman may have had the right solution to the clothing question: He was an ardent naturalist and sometimes only wore a beret – albeit only on the bank on solitary days!

The importance the club now attaches to health and safety, both on and off the water, and to the present day focus on ‘risk’ issues, is reflected in the appointment of separate Health and Safety, and Child Protection Officers.

Derek Timms, one of the club’s founder members, in a Neaps of 1952, perhaps best summed up the necessary cautions of taking to the water when recalling the old saying . . . “A man who is not afraid of the sea will soon be drowned!”



“In those days no one used ‘life preservers’, unless it was very windy. I have a sailing book printed in 1962 and in all the pictures no one is wearing a life preserver”

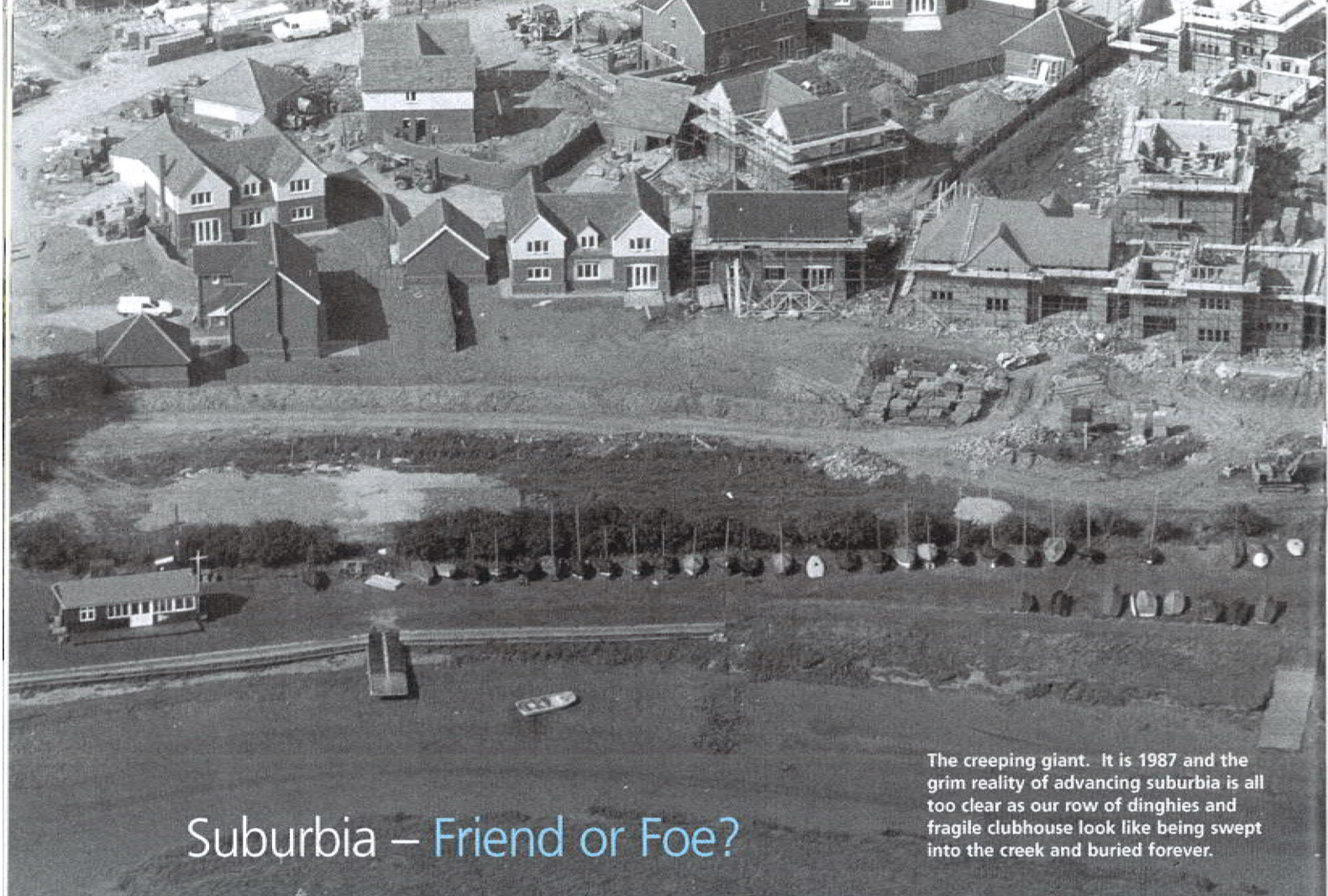
Albert Jones

Below: Today’s Heron sailors on the creek wear modern buoyancy aids in case of mishaps.



Above: Maurice Redman’s year round tan was the result of sailing with very little in the way of protective clothing and - allegedly - swimming in the creek 365 days of the year. Except when it was frozen solid.

Left: Today’s Eyott juniors take their sailing gear very seriously. Left to right: James Polston, Christopher Harvey and Alexander Johnson are all competent crews and very keen helmsmen.



Suburbia – Friend or Foe?

The creeping giant. It is 1987 and the grim reality of advancing suburbia is all too clear as our row of dinghies and fragile clubhouse look like being swept into the creek and buried forever.

Announcement of plans for a new town in South Woodham Ferrers (in the 1970s) was the beginning of changes that had major implications for Eyott Sailing Club and its members. Would the club be allowed to continue? What would happen to the weekend and permanent residences along the creek, some of which were occupied by club members?

Maurice Redman, the club founder, lived on the edge of the creek next to the then clubhouse. (He earned his living producing plans for home extensions and general carpentry jobs – in the early '70s he designed the new South Woodham Village Hall in Hullbridge Road). Having lived on the creek since the 1930s he was obviously keenly interested in the plans for the new town and undertook the job of attending the meetings set up for objectors who had properties along the creek. He attended the first two days of the hearings and was due to give evidence on the third day but failed to turn up. Sadly he had suffered a heart attack and was found dead at the gap in the club hedge.

Today we know the outcome of these events. The hut dwellers lost the day, but Eyott Sailing Club survived and is thriving. South Woodham Ferrers is now advertised by Essex County Council as a 'Riverside Country Town' with the availability of sailing as one of its assets.

The development of the town has, of course, affected the club in a number of ways. Our idyllic, secluded spot with its abundance of wildlife has largely gone but now we have easy access to the club throughout the



A summer's day in the 'seventies. The old clubhouse and summer huts are deserted, as they await the inevitable carnage to come.

year and the modernised clubhouse is more extensively used for social activities.

In the early days, only one member actually lived in South Woodham Ferrers and membership was widespread, coming from as far afield as Enfield and Southend, Harlow, Grays and North London.

Today the majority of members live locally, although a good number still come from further away and this is obviously encouraged. The change in the local mix of members also means that the creek and club facilities are used more regularly, especially in the school holidays.

The most notable change to sailors is the effect by nearby houses on the wind, a vital element for sailing, particularly when it blows from a northerly direction. Sudden wind shifts and 'dead patches' on the water can make conditions on the startline less favourable and so a second line, further east, has been set up and is used at the discretion of the Officer of the Day.

More recently, houses have been built southwards alongside the creek ('long reach') adding further changeable conditions. An extra buoy has been laid in the upper reaches of the creek that enables the latter part of races to be kept closer to the clubhouse if necessary. The OOD and the crew of the support boat keep in touch by radio so that adjustments to the course can be made during a race, if changes in conditions dictate. Eyott's Race Officers can occasionally be seen dashing along the riverbank, with all their paraphernalia, to finish the race at a more appropriate part of the creek. The aim, of course, is to give competitors a good race while ensuring that they can return safely on the tide.



Below and bottom: The late 1980s and new houses are beginning to soften into the landscape. The wooden supports are all that remain of Molly & Reg Dexter's hut - while the 'backwater' - once the scene of frenzied junior sailing activity looks dank and forlorn.



Left: Now you don't see it . . . now you do. Top: Sooty enjoys a peaceful sail on an idyllic creek in the heart of the Essex countryside, well away from the madding crowd. Below: Same place, different decade. Everything's changed, but there are compensations: better access, more members, local shops. And the tide still comes in twice a day . . . the wind still blows and the air smells the same. It could be a lot worse.

The boathouse (sometimes called 'the cathedral') served as clubhouse No 2 - after 'Tamaris' - proved unsuitable. All of the weekend huts are clearly seen in this 1960s photo. The two little bilge-keelers are Maurice Redman designed 14ft loa 'Barbel' pocket cruisers.

Clubhouse and dinghy park developments

When the Eyott Sailing Club was formed in 1950, a member's weekend hut on the bank of Fenn Creek was used as the first clubhouse. This hut was one of several along the water's edge, including one belonging to the current President, Vernon Walters. It was in the vicinity of the present easterly boundary of the dinghy park. During the winter after the first sailing season, a World War II pontoon was bought and converted for use as a clubhouse. It was named Tamaris and was moored in the creek near to the hut. (see page 3)

Quoting from Jim Pickett's memoirs (club secretary from 1965 to 1972) circa 1967, "Due to the growing size of the club, it was decided to sell Tamaris and turn the boathouse into the clubhouse. This meant renting some land from the owner of Eyott's Farm, a surgeon by the name of Sir John Nicholson. It took a lot of negotiation by Horace Harvey, club treasurer, and Bob Ledger, Commodore, before, with some reluctance, he allowed us to rent a small strip of land for boat parking. It had to be fenced and we had to promise not to have music or parties on the land in case we disturbed his quiet weekend retreat. At this time, Stan and Elsie Treadway took it in turns to be club secretary. "We fitted the boatshed with stairs to the roof space, lined the inside and installed a sink made from zinc - and a zinc sheet protected space for a Primus (paraffin) stove."

Jim wrote later that: "The club was still growing fast and every year, after the Boat Show, we would get six or seven enquiries about membership as we were the only Heron club in the east. The dinghy park was small for the club, so it was decided to approach Sir John Nicholson again for a further piece of land and a long lease to erect a larger clubhouse. Negotiations took eighteen months and were concluded mainly due to Horace Harvey being polite but blunt with Sir John. The new piece of land was fenced and an order placed for a wooden building to be erected on concrete pillars so that the floor was level with the sea wall. (This building forms the front of the present clubhouse).

Bob Ledger (subsequently club President, several times Commodore and also chairman of the Heron Association) was foreman for the fitting



Top: Clubhouse No 1 *Tamaris*, ready for launching, Easter 1952.

Centre: Bob Ledger (left) and Jim Pickett outside the new (third) clubhouse.

Bottom: A very early shot showing the end of Maurice's hut, his 4-tonner *Fidelis* and the site of our current clubhouse and dinghy park.



By 1982, our landlords Essex County Council were persuaded, as part of the development of their new "Riverside Town", to raise and strengthen the sea wall along the frontage of our land – at a cost of £10,000. Plastic nets filled with rocks were set into the mud, with the expectations that the silt brought up by the tides would eventually fill all the gaps. These were then topped with a smart concrete wall, which after more than twenty years is leaning uncomfortably forwards. How many years before some of it topples into the river? We often wonder.

The sailing season came to an early halt so that work on the wall could begin. Members who visited the club that winter to monitor progress were dismayed to find a tractor abandoned, stuck up to its axles in the quagmire that had once been our dinghy park. However the tractor was recovered and the land was raised, levelled and grass seeded. Almost on time we were sailing.



out of the clubhouse, supplying material and designing the Officer of the Day's (OOD's) box and counter. Jim Fuller fitted all the wiring and a clock for the OOD's box (still in the clubhouse) at his own expense.

The clubhouse and toilet hut were put into use at the beginning of the new season and later there was an official opening performed by Sir John. The toilet was an Elsan (chemical) type and digging the hole and disposing of the contents was a task not enjoyed by those on the rota. Kitchen waste ran into a very small bucket under the clubhouse. There is no record of this proving a health hazard, neither did it flood the dinghy park as has happened with the town's modern drainage system. "Water was fetched in containers from the top of the hill, halfway between the Clubhouse and Heartbreak corner, a good walk with full containers."

Electricity was available from overhead wires and two small changing rooms were incorporated in the western end of the clubhouse. The supplier had included two steps for the two end doors, but not for the front facing the creek. To quote again, Jim Pickett remembered that "The platform from the front of the clubhouse to the sea wall was largely built by Vernon Walters (several times Commodore and club President from 2002) with some help from other members."

Soon afterwards, member Roy Sears who sailed a Miracle dinghy, designed and built (with some willing helpers) a slipway into the creek opposite to the present gate into the dinghy park. This made launching more civilised and less of a messy business than pushing boats up and over the muddy sea wall, as in the previous years. The second more easterly ramp was built many years later, as membership and boat numbers increased and as launching trolleys became popular. Both of these ramps have been rebuilt since the year 2000.



Top: Members pose outside the smart new clubhouse. Top row left to right: Joan Lea, Jim Pickett, Bob Blackstaff, George James, unknown. Bottom Row: Vernon and Joyce Walters, Horace Harvey and Bob Ledger.

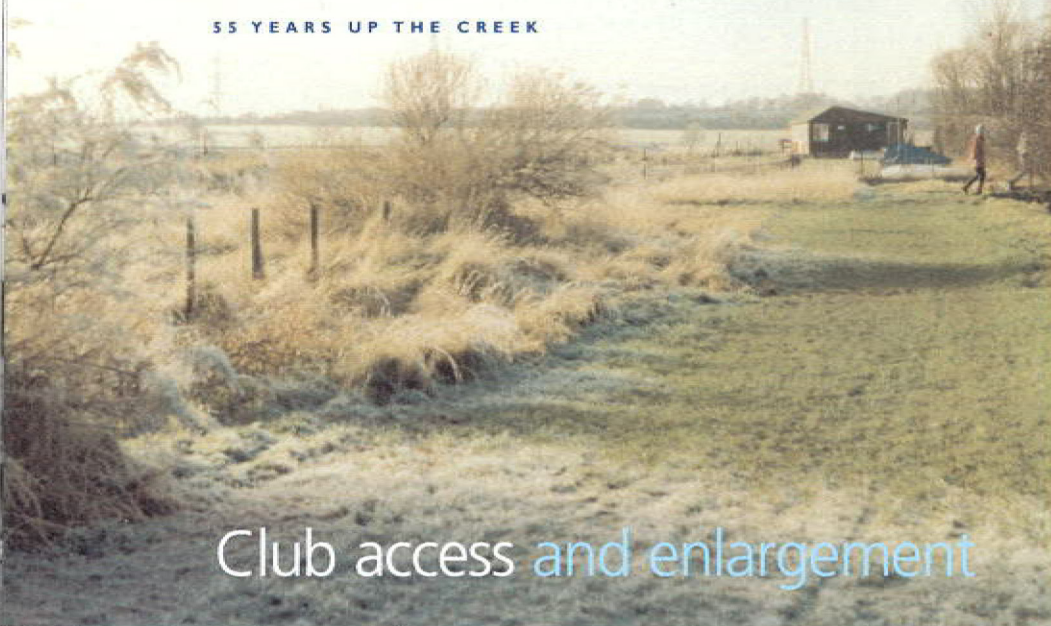
Above: Stan and Elsie Treadway return from a tough climb to the top of the hill for water.

Below: Members working on one of the launching ramps.



Reflections on a good day's racing





Club access and enlargement



Left: A frosty morning and a good view of the newly extended clubhouse.

Below: Derek Dodd drew the plans for the clubhouse extension and also took a major part in the work itself.

The early members of Eyott Sailing Club were stalwart souls, as access to the club proved. Originally access was from the Old Wickford Road, across some fields, over a level crossing, across Fenn Creek by a small bridge and along by the river bank. Here the track turned left, then right thus skirting the farmyard and some private gardens.

By 1962 entry was from the Hullbridge Road, along Albert Road, which was partly concrete, and then along a lengthy unmade track. The latter made it impossible to drive to the club at the beginning and end of each season so cars were left on the concrete area – much to the annoyance of one lady in particular, who regularly admonished us for getting mud on the concrete! Boats were manhandled on their trailers and all our gear, sails, spare clothing, food, drinks etc, had to be carried the rest of the way, which soon taught us to remember everything we needed first time and not to leave essentials in the car.

The unmade track passed several cottages with large gardens (a relic of the plotlands) where fruit and vegetables could be purchased very cheaply. The fruit and vegetables for sale were left on little tables by the gates and passers-by were trusted to leave their money in a container.

Then, one day came the plans - for a NEW TOWN and the compulsory purchase of our dinghy park and all the surrounding land. Elderly folk had to leave their little homes, fences were erected and a locked gate became the only means of entry to the area. In the Neaps issue of December 1977, members were notified that "Essex County Council have given notice that the access to the club will be closed in 1978 and an alternative route will be made up from the Wickford Road."

The alternative route turned out to be the original route but now there was the sewage works to pass and we were allowed to take a short cut through the farmyard. We also could get our water from an outside tap of the farmhouse, running the gauntlet of the flock of aggressive geese as we did so, as our water tap on the hill was no more.

An item in Neaps of February 1981 told members how to find the club, after roads were built and altered for the development of the new town.

"The new route to the club is now open. Proceed to the new roundabout south east of the new bridge over the railway, either from Hullbridge Road or from the roundabout on the Wickford Road, where Fenn Road over the crossing took off. Leave the roundabout by the road through gateway



Builder and member Bill Stannard was foreman on the build programme over the winter of 1987/8.





to the southwest. The gate is likely to be chained up with two padlocks, one an ordinary type and one a combination lock. It will be observed that the two are interlocked, so that either one can be used to open the gate, or to put it another way, there is a padlock on each end of the chain and these must be interlocked to complete closure of gate; continue along the main spine road passing a junction on the right. Shortly after, turn right onto an unmade track, which is the old Victoria Road. Follow the track round to the left (the old Fairview Road till you reach the site of the old standpipe. Turn right down Connaught Road to the Farm entrance."

How good is YOUR navigating?! There is no record of how many members got lost and were never seen again. Those who did decipher the instructions were continually finding the locks stuck closed with super glue or the combinations changed. Some times the gate was manned to let us in after a mishap, but not often. This continued for about two years while the land stood empty – in the name of development, yet enthusiasm for sailing did not diminish and Eyott Sailing club continued to grow.

An extension

By 1987, the club had an address (Whitefield Court) and water and mains drainage had reached the car park area. The members decided that the club should avail itself of these refinements and at the same time, the clubhouse should be enlarged. Plans were drawn up by Derek Dodd, (later to become Commodore of Eyott and Chairman of the Heron Association), planning permission was granted and work began. At this time the club was fortunate to have Bill Stannard as a member. Bill was not a racing man but enjoyed pottering in his boat for relaxation and he volunteered to be foreman for the new building project. He had a band of very willing helpers, both skilled and unskilled and over the winter the clubhouse as we know it today took shape. The following season a "Clubhouse warming" was held and the Commodore, Kaye Darby, expressed her gratitude to Bill and all the members who had helped and worked so hard. The club now had a new galley, (with sink, water heater, hob and fridge supplied and fitted by Peter Dale), larger changing rooms, running water and flushing toilets. Not all changes are bad! We were really into the 20th century. A little later, Bob and Anita Ettershank gave us a microwave oven and Idris Lewis gave us a freezer. All mod cons had arrived.

Left: A happy band of workers start taking the old clubhouse apart.


Above: Peter Shillitoe and Alan Copson helping out.

Below: Brian Darby prepares to test the new toilet - much to Kaye's amusement.



Below: On the night of 11th February 1996 a winter storm removed the clubhouse roof - leaving it open to the elements (including three inches of snow) for many days. As usual, local members joined forces to get the rebuilding complete in time for the new sailing season.





The cake-cutting ceremony about to take place at the well attended celebrations of Eyott Sailing Club's 40th birthday.

Social Matters

Eyott Sailing Club has always prided itself on being a friendly club with members helping each other and helping the club in general. This can be giving advice on boats and sailing, taking positions of responsibility or helping with ongoing chores such as painting the clubhouse, grass cutting in the dinghy park, high pressure hosing the ramps or cooking for social occasions and the Ships Cooks' prizes.

In August 1951 Maurice Redman (the first commodore) wrote that at the recent AGM "The new secretary's wife, Elsie Treadway, took over the catering side of the club and with the co-operation of the lady members gave us a successful Laying-up Supper." The Social Secretary (presently Jennifer Brunning) is still helped considerably by willing members – of both genders nowadays – and the job has expanded enormously over recent years. The extended clubhouse is used for more social occasions as fundraising has become more important due to the Club's expansion and the rising costs of maintaining it. Extra to the Fitting-out and Laying-up Suppers, additions to the social calendar include Open House (when friends and members of other sailing clubs are invited to join us), Open day (when any interested members of the public are welcome to come and try sailing), barbecues, quizzes and raffles.

During the winter months a 'February Evening' get-together is held each year at a member's home – usually the Commodore's. These very friendly occasions were introduced by Monte and Fay Levy in March 1977, and resurrected during the 1980s, to ensure that members do not feel out of touch with the club during the non-sailing months.

Bill and Margaret Short were instrumental in setting up many social activities, particularly the midsummer barbecue.



Above: Barbecues are always popular - here served up by David Banfield, Alan Copson and (an older) Michael Ettershank.



Above: Fenn Creek has always enjoyed a healthy crab population and our children often organise contests to catch them.



Far left: Jennifer Brunning is a non sailor but works tirelessly organising the club's many social events.

Centre: Peter and Sue Shillitoe instigated the very first Eyott Week - now an eagerly anticipated annual event.

Left: Des Mazzezy and a very young Michael Ettershank - the youngest member of the winning team at the 40th Anniversary team racing.



Half a century ago the club was in an isolated rural area. Now we are bordered by suburbia that has brought with it many modern facilities. Yesteryears' cold buffets have mainly been replaced by hot meals. For Open House in the early 1960s, Kaye Darby remembers, all members attending were asked to bring enough food for themselves and one other person, thus ensuring that there would be sufficient for our invited guests. She also remembers the Fitting-out Supper being held in the little Ingatestone village hall and the Laying-up Supper being held in the restaurant of Norrish's, a popular baker's shop in Brentwood. The dessert was always a selection of their delicious gateaux and was looked forward to with anticipation.

Other venues used for social occasions during the lifetime of the club have been in Fambridge, Maldon, Chelmsford, Kelvedon Hatch, Roxwell and of course South Woodham Ferrers since it came into being. At the present time the Chichester Hotel in Rawreth is popular with our members.

The format of the Laying-up Supper and Prize-giving, probably the highlight of our social calendar, has fluctuated between dinner/dances and just a meal according to the wishes of the members. Today, we have so many trophies to present that very little time would be left for dancing. An honoured guest (including Eyott's Olympic silver medallist Keith Musto) was always invited to present the prizes. Recently, our Commodores and Sailing Secretaries have done the honours, with much good humour and repartee as they recall memorable incidents of the past season.

Health and safety factors put a much greater burden on the club and its members now. The days when the clubhouse was used for camping holidays have long gone, but an article in a middle 1980s edition of our Neaps magazine, records memories of such an event (next page).

Above left and right: Visitors to Eyott arrive in many different craft and we always try to provide a warm welcome.

Below: Vernon and Joyce Walters (left and right) with Mary Pickett.



Below: Founder member Peter Maynard and Martin Treadway visited the creek in Peter's Marieholm Folkboat in July 2005 and came ashore for tea and cake.



Camping by the Creek

Kaye Darby recalls some happy summer holidays



Left: Brian and Kaye Darby set a trend for summer holidaying by the creek.

Below: Happy holidaymaker!



In the early 1960s members could stay in the clubhouse for 2s 6d (12.5p) per group, per night. During a rare moment of inspiration, Brian and I decided to have a few days by Fenn Creek, during August, to try and improve our sailing. We packed our sailing gear, some extra old clothes, plus a selection of convenience foods, three sleeping bags (Nigel came too!) and three camp beds.

The clubhouse in those days was surrounded on 3 sides by agricultural land. Main roads, mains drainage and civilisation were some distance away, yet the momentous news that Brian was taking a holiday reached the Eyott juniors in seconds and the Up River Y.C. juniors in minutes - or so it seemed. During our week's sojourn at South Woodham Ferrers we were joined by up to fifteen others at various times plus visits from assorted parents. The latter were particularly welcome as they always came bringing donations of puddings and pies. These were especially appreciated by myself, who was trying to satisfy the appetite of this large group of youngsters using just a Baby Belling hot plate and a mini oven. Incidentally, this was still in use in the club until the 1990s.

Names that spring instantly to mind are Mike Pickett and his brother Andrew, Ken Northfield, Carolyn Hopson and her friend Anne (who later married Mike and Ken respectively), David Walters, Andrew and Stephen Hopson, Vernon Rolston, Robbie Robertson (later tragically killed in a road accident) and Paul Bayley. Paul was greatly welcomed by all for two reasons. Firstly his grandmother lived in a delightful, isolated little cottage nearby where we could always go in an emergency because the cottage was opposite "the tap" from whence came all our water. (It was a fair step with a gallon of H₂O in each hand). Secondly, and more importantly, Paul had a part-time job at Marks & Spencers in Chelmsford. He regularly brought us cakes and pies etc which had reached their sell-by date. So Paul's arrival back from work was akin to the arrival of Santa Claus.

The sleeping arrangements were sparse, of necessity. Cast your minds back to the clubhouse before the recent extension, please. Two females



Above: Boats, warm water and a clubhouse to rest your head at night. The recipe for some memorable summers.

Below: Boys will be boys!



slept in the gents' and two in the ladies' changing rooms. The younger males, who retired slightly earlier than the others, but rose considerably later, slept in the loft. The rest slept in the main part of the clubhouse, giving the appearance of a Dickensian dormitory.

After sailing and eating, many activities were devised for amusement. There was swimming, both voluntary and involuntary, driving lessons in our car, and how many juniors could fit into Mike Pickett's car at one time, with him still able to drive it? Not forgetting the various card games where the object seemed to be to find who could cheat with the most success. After dark, levitation was a favourite especially when one of us appeared to rise into the air balanced on a few fingers. Brian must take responsibility for the special effects, as he must for the uncanny results of the Eyott S.C. version of the now infamous Ouija board game.

The week at Eyott was voted a success by all concerned and by special request it was repeated in subsequent years, thus giving us all particular memories of camping by the Creek a quarter of a century ago.

Growing up at Eyott

We must not forget the children. We value our juniors, for they will be the future of the club. Many of them have had much enjoyment, both on the water and on land, while growing up at Eyott. Those, now grown up, recall happy years when, in its isolation, Eyott was a very safe place for children to play. Who of the long-standing members of the club, as Pam Jones reminded us, will forget the "dens" built by their children in the hedgerows. Here they felt secluded and private and were able to share childish secrets and gossip with each other.

Quoting from Chrissie Burles in an issue of Neaps: "There used to be lots more trees lining the outskirts of the club, here myself and friends would set up 'camp' near to the club. This was our hiding place for getting out of cleaning boats. At Open House and other social occasions all of the youngsters would gather in the camps to tell ghost stories."

Maintenance

Eyott S C is a self-supporting club. It is run by members, for the members and maintenance work is an important part. Strictly speaking, this is probably not part of the social side of the club – yet it often seems like it. Numerous cups of tea, homemade cakes or bread pudding and the picnic lunches help to make working days very convivial occasions. Working days are arranged throughout the season when tides are not suitable for sailing. Many willing members have devoted much time and energy to keeping the clubhouse, dinghy park and car park in good order and without their help the club could not continue.

One of the assets that came with the encroachment of suburbia is the fact that we no longer have to maintain the access to the club. For decades members toiled hard every season moving piles of hardcore and filling in the deep ruts that regularly appeared in the long track down to the dinghy park. Oh happy days!

High tides combined with easterly winds have regularly flooded the dinghy park and its approaches. In the past, the non-sailors left behind at the clubhouse have saved the day by moving cars and equipment to higher ground as the water level rose during races.



Above: A happy group of 1960s campers at Oyster Ledge near Brandy Hole - nicely dated by their yellow oilies.

Below: Digging holes has always been part of the ESC maintenance programme! This was Mike Burles' turn.

Centre: Constructing the present car park.

Bottom: Extra-high tides happen from time to time - the main reason we built the clubhouse up on stilts.



Going . . . going . . . gone?

Testing times for the club and its members

David Pyatt and his daughter Clare were among many new members who joined following the Eyott's successful visits as an exhibitor to the Dinghy Exhibition at Pickett's Lock. Oh, yes - they did capsize!

Eyott Sailing Club nearly folded in 1978. There had been a fall in the turnout on sailing days (often only two boats) and membership numbers were falling. This was partly due to some waning in the 'dinghy boom' which affected many clubs at the time, and also to some disagreement over the direction the club should take. Another factor was the rapid growth in gravel pit sailing opportunities around London - all seeking new members - and Eyott membership had been largely from North and East London.

A 'Special Meeting' was convened for 23 July 1978 for all members to discuss what to do, and several circulated their views in advance. Bob Ledger wrote that: "the family man who was always the mainstay of our membership no longer needed to trek to the coast and the jams on the way home . . . The coming of the new town development has not helped . . . the access road has deteriorated and is enough to put off any prospective new members before he has even got to the clubs premises."

Closure and amalgamation with South Woodham Yacht Club was considered. Faye Levy, however, was determined the club should not lose its identity and worked hard to convince other committee members that Eyott had something very special to offer with its friendly atmosphere, idiosyncratic sailing conditions and very special location (no new town then). "My own opinion (Faye) is that this would be like killing something that is still alive." She recognised that revival was necessary but stated forcibly: "If all of you who have had good times at the club on sunny days with a good breeze for sailing, not forgetting our social events, would help in the reviving, then the club will survive. If you just keep away because of a bit of mud on the road, and a wettish summer, then the club will die."

At the Special Meeting there was great enthusiasm for keeping the club going and Bob Ledger agreed to become Commodore again (for the fourth time) and helped steer the club through this difficult period. In addition to Faye Levy, the Committee (December 1978) under Bob's leadership included such club stalwarts as Tony Writer, John Michael,



Above: In 1978 the turnout on sailing days had often fallen to just two boats.

Below: Julie Jones helming *The Whale*.



Bob Ledger



Bob Ledger was an enthusiastic and much respected member of Eyott Sailing Club for 50 years. He joined the club in 1950, soon after its inception, when he was living in the then small village of South Woodham Ferrers. Bob was already a keen sailor. He had been a rower at Cambridge University but took up sailing with a cousin after leaving. Together they sailed regularly along the swatchways of the East Coast, at a time when sailing equipment and clothing were still very basic.

Bob brought a fount of nautical and legal knowledge and expertise to the club that was appreciated by a great many of our members over the years. He was Commodore four times, President of the club and Chairman of the Heron Association – an indication of how much his ability and views were widely respected.

Although usually a man of few words, Bob expected sailors, young and old, to abide by the 'rules of the sea'. His help and advice were always worth heeding and many became better sailors and enjoyed sailing more because of him.

Albert Jones, Denis Turner and Brian and Kaye Darby. Both Brian and Kaye continued to serve the club and committee in various roles for what must be a record number of years and Kaye became our first lady Commodore. Also probably a record is that they have sailed together very successfully for many years!

At the AGM later in 1978 it was decided to widen the search for members by mounting an Eyott SC stand at the Dinghy Exhibition. So Faye Levy, with husband Monte's help, set out on a membership drive at the 1979 Exhibition, held in those days at Pickett's Lock in the Lea Valley.

Monte wrote about it in a later article: "Out of virtually nothing our display arose miraculously, consisting of Albert Jones' Heron mainsail, some club photographs, Mirror posters, a peculiar folding paddle contributed by Denis and Gemma Turner, the Club's name cut out of polystyrene and stuck to a cardboard panel; and after a paper hanger's table and some garden chairs were added, the floor was tastefully covered in bright green plastic. When the exhibition opened we were approached by a would be member who wished to purchase a Heron. This was Wilf Cafell who bought Bees Knees and became well known for his sailing adventures (as noted earlier). Several very useful members and their families – providing much needed crews — were recruited, including a couple of future Commodores." After this first foray into the outside world the experiment was repeated for several years.

Nowadays, the Heron Association has its own stand at the annual Alexandra Palace dinghy show and we are well represented as Derek Dodd is the present Chairman.

Subsequent Commodores, committees and members have all helped to maintain the reputation of the club as a safe and friendly sailing environment. To assure continuing success, this active membership will need to be maintained and new members attracted.

Emma Lewis wrote these words (right) when she was 16:

Bob sailing 'Andromeda.'



Faye and Monte Levy put on a massive membership drive at the Dinghy Exhibition which contributed greatly to turning round the club's fortunes.

“When ESC was founded all those years ago, Mr Maurice Redman planned to establish an intimate and friendly club in which every member really meant something to each other; when old members come back to visit they always comment that 'It's great to see the old Eyott spirit is still there'”

Racing Successes

Eyott Successes in National and Area Championships

NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS

Silver Heron (Awarded to the National Champion)

1955	K Musto	104	Aries
1972	V D Walters	104	Aries
1974	G Thorpe	239	Topper
1975	G Thorpe	239	Topper
1976	A Woodfield	3450	Suza
1999	A Dale	9894	Nice 'n Ez

'Yachting World' Bowl (Awarded to the winner of the first race)

1975	G Thorpe	239	Topper
1976	A Woodfield	3450	Suza
1977	A Woodfield	3450	Suza
1998	A Dale	9891	Ez Pz
1999	A Dale	9894	Nice 'n Ez
2000	N Darby	10010	

Findlay Cup (Awarded to the winner of the second race)

1972	V D Walters	440	Fulmar
1974	G Thorpe	239	Topper
1975	G Thorpe	239	Topper
1976	A Woodfield	3450	Suza
1988	A Jones	2765	The Whale
1999	A Dale	9894	Nice 'n Ez
2000	A Dale	9894	Nice 'n Ez

Bletchley Bowl (Awarded to the winner of the third race)

1967	V D Walters	440	Fulmar
1969	V D Walters	440	Fulmar
1972	V D Walters	104	Aries
1974	G Thorpe	239	Topper
1999	A Dale	9894	Nice 'n Ez

Singlehanded Trophy

1969	V D Walters	440	Fulmar
1988	A Jones	2765	The Whale
1999	N Darby	2393	Sooty

SOUTHERN CHAMPIONSHIPS

Bell Trophy (Awarded to the Southern Area Champion)

1960	M Treadway	2150	Surge
1965	V D Walters	440	Fulmar
1974	A Woodfield	3450	Suza
1975	G Thorpe	239	Topper
1976	A Woodfield	3450	Suza
1998	A Dale	9891	Ez Pz
1999	A Dale	9894	Nice 'n Ez
2002	M Treadway	9866	Piranha
2003	N Darby	9894	Nice 'n Ez
2004	N Darby	9894	Nice 'n Ez

NORTHERN CHAMPIONSHIPS

2002	A Dale	9336	Bilbo
2003	A Dale	9891	Ez Pz
2005	N Darby	9894	Nice 'n Ez



Ruislip Lido S C was the venue for the first ever Heron National Championship in 1955 - won by Keith Musto in the Eyott club boat No 104 'Aries.' Keith won every race by a considerable margin and demonstrated the talent that would lead him to a silver medal at the Tokyo Olympics in 1964.



Priory S C in Bedford is the current venue for Heron National Championships and produced the best turnout for many years of 28 boats in 2004.



In 2001 Eyott S C managed to stage the Southern Championship by teaming up with West Wick YC at Farnbridge and holding the event on tidal waters. It was voted a great success.



Eyott's Nigel Darby makes a perfectly executed port tack start in 9894 'Nice 'n Ez' at the Priory S C open meeting in September 2001.



ESC Commodores 1950 - 2005

1950 - 54	M S Redman
1955 - 57	R C Ledger
1958	H F W Harvey
1959 - 61	R C Ledger
1962 - 64	V D Walters
1965 - 67	R C Ledger
1968 - 70	V D Walters
1971 - 72	H W Shearman
1973 - 75	M L Levy
1976 - 77	A Jones
1978 - 80	R C Ledger
1981 - 83	B Darby
1984	D Turner
1985 - 86	R McBride
1987 - 89	Mrs K Darby
1990 - 92	D Mazzey
1993 - 95	N Darby
1996 - 98	D Dodd
1999 - 2001	N Darby
2002 - 03	I Lewis
2004 -	A Brunning



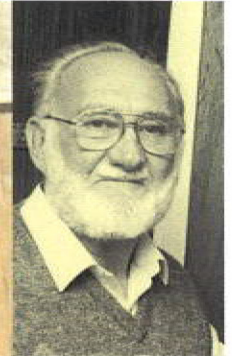
Maurice Redman



Bob Ledger



Horace Harvey



Vernon Walters



Hal Shearman



Monte Levy



Albert Jones



Brian Darby

the future looks bright . . .



A group of enthusiastic youngsters pose with Joyce and Vernon Walters - Eyott members for nearly all 55 years of the 'up the creek' story (see picture on page 11). Our current Commodore, Alan Brunning, perhaps wonders how many future commodores there are in this group?



Dennis Turner



Reay McBride



Kaye Darby



Des Mazzey



Nigel Darby



Derek Dodd



Idris Lewis



Alan Brunning



The 55 year history of Eyott Sailing Club and its unique location on a tidal Essex creek is both remarkable and colourful. It was the brainchild of Maurice Redman and a handful of young friends who ignited the imagination of many others looking for a satisfying outlet to the frustrations and austerity of the immediate post-war years.

That Eyott has survived its 'impossible' location - together with the unexpected advance of suburbia - is a testament to the character of its members and the timeless fascination of messing about in small boats on tidal waters.

There seems little doubt that these simple pleasures will ensure the future of 'carrying on up the creek' for many years to come.



eyott
sailing
club