

## Bygone Times with Mollie Pewsey

When I give one of my talks about Bygone Brading it is always amusing to note how "up tight" any resident of Bembridge becomes when they discover that many years ago, whilst the town of Brading was prosperous, Bembridge was but an isolated place with a handful of fishermen and farmers living there. How different today, thanks to the draining of Brading harbour and the advancement of the road networks that followed.

Bembridge folk had to go a very circular route to get through to Brading and Newport, the first improvement being the building of the medieval causeway from Yaverland to Yarbridge in 1338. Once the Embankment road opened in 1881 development could move apace.

I have always been fascinated to know how local folk used these drained marshlands to supplement their incomes in more recent days. For instance, George Pocock, a local man who used to roam these lands as a boy and until he died an old man, enjoyed picking blackberries on land owned by Mr. Thornycroft. Mr. Thornycroft gave George written permission to do so and George earned quite a tidy sum selling the berries in season. Of course the occasional pheasant went home with George too, the local policeman turning a blind eye, especially if he also went home with a pheasant.

During the war George went fishing down on the river Yar with the soldiers billeted in Brading.

In springtime St. Urian's wood was a mass of wild daffodils and Jessie Squibb's father had sole permission to gather basketsful for sale. Even in the 1980s I have seen itinerant folk carrying long poles laden with bunches of these small daffodils, quite a flashback in time. I believe there are very few of these daffs in the woods today.

Once when I was walking my Basset hounds on the old sea harbour wall, watching a stoat, I saw what can only be called an apparition. A man wearing an ancient pointed felt hat and holding a long net across a bush as if to trap birds - as my father used to do in his boyhood on the fenlands of Cambridgeshire - appeared briefly and

disappeared. Was he real or was this yet another flash back, for once the marshes were drained there was great rivalry amongst the Oglanders and others as to who had the rights for catching fish and birds to supplement their diet. Perhaps I have read too many history books!

## Bembridge Harbour Users Group Update

The Section 31 Appeals (for both 2006 & 2007) by the Bembridge and St Helens Harbour Association to the Secretary of State for Transport against the level of Harbour Dues remains ongoing.

In early July, the Harbour owner (Mr Blatch) who had earlier pleaded guilty to 6 charges of acting as a disqualified director, was sentenced to 8 months in prison, suspended for 18 months; an additional 5 years disqualification as a director; to pay DTI costs of £30,000; and further confiscations to be considered in early November.

No progress seems to have been made on two planning applications made last year, (the Angling Club Marina by the old St Helens Mill and for piles and a mains sewerage system for 34 Houseboats), nor for the promised refurbishment of Wades pontoon and Fishermans pontoon. However, work has started (albeit ahead of all the necessary consents) on the first tranche of the 106 fore and aft trot moorings to the east of Fishermans pontoon. A Section 106 Agreement requires them to be vacated for 4 months over the winter. Finally, the long awaited FEPA Licence to allow sand from "Attrill's Point" near the entrance of the harbour to be used to replenish the beach in front of St Helens Duver Wall is expected any day.

The Eastern Yar River and Coastal Strategy, which is looking into managing flooding and coastal erosion in the Eastern Yar and Bembridge Harbour continues, but is now not expected to be signed off until next summer. Significant research has been undertaken into the robustness of Embankment Road to protect the nature-rich Brading Marshes (RAMSAR, SAC & SPA); they have also been looking very carefully at the part that St Helens Duver plays in this.

# THE SENTINEL



Newsletter of the  
Bembridge and  
St Helens Harbour  
Association

No. 36 October 2007

## Chairman's Letter

*Dear Member,*

Recently the local scene has been dominated by concern about a Planning Application submitted by Maritime and Leisure Investments Ltd. (MLI) to build a 69 bed 4/5 storey hotel on the current Bembridge Marina car park site, Embankment Road. It is a major submission and includes an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) so the response period was extended until 28<sup>th</sup> September. Currently, over 300 objections have been lodged on a wide range of issues.

The proposed hotel, located in the flood plain, would be totally out of character with the area and highly visible from land and sea for miles around. It would have a seriously detrimental effect on the Harbour and its surroundings. BASHHA has strongly opposed the Application. Our letter of objection can be viewed online at [www.iwight.com/planning](http://www.iwight.com/planning) Click on All Applications Comments. 1.10.07

Our sub committee, the Bembridge Harbour Users Group (BHUG) have taken on the conduct and correspondence of the Harbour Dues Appeal, See report elsewhere.

Since the last Sentinel, we have held two events to improve our local environment. At our Spring Beach Clean in May we were delighted to welcome 30 volunteers at Bembridge Point and 8 at St Helens who made a massive clearance. Recently we joined the annual Marine Conservation Society (MCS) Beachwatch and Litter Survey. An amazing 29 volunteers, including 10 children, took part in collecting and recording every item of litter from 100m lengths on Point and Silver Beaches! All the information is sent to MCS who calculate the results from around the UK, then send us their Report next Spring. Afterwards, we enjoyed a welcome drink kindly donated by Trevor Nutt of the Toll Gate café. Our sincere thanks to all our helpers.

Sadly, for the first time in 20 years, the popular Bembridge Festival Street Fair had to be cancelled

owing to bad weather. Many charities missed out on fund raising. We also missed valuable contact with members and potential members and the chance to collect overdue subscriptions! Our new Treasurer Rod Bowman reported that in July there were 80 subs. outstanding! After a major Reminder initiative, I am pleased to report that our membership lists are now up to date. Our grateful thanks to all members for your continued support.

We are pleased to report that the Bembridge Harbour Trust has achieved Charitable Trust status and is now able to plan ahead. Trustees have been appointed and BASHHA, together with many organisations and individuals, has been invited to become a Founder Member for a subscription of £500. Your committee members voted unanimously to become a Founder Member. The Objects of the Trust reflect those of our own Association, founded in 1989.

Our Know Your Harbour Meeting no.16 will be held in St Helens on 8<sup>th</sup> November at 7 pm. We are delighted that Chairman of the Bembridge Harbour Trust, Donald Biddle, will update us on progress and enlighten us on the way ahead. We also welcome Arthur Robinson, one of the Trustees, who has been Vice Chairman of the St Helens and Bembridge Coastal and Harbour Working Group (SHBCHWG) since its formation in 2001. He is a member of the Steering group who meet with the Eastern Yar River and Coastal Strategy team. (EYRCS) He will also be able to inform us on progress.

Members have many concerns about Bembridge Harbour and its environs. We plan to have a Forum session during which there will be the opportunity to ask questions and contribute ideas. The subject matter is important, so please make every effort to attend. I look forward to seeing you there.

Yours sincerely,  
*Barbara Clough, Chairman*

## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Know Your Harbour 16

Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> November, St Helens Community Centre 7pm

The Bembridge Harbour Trust - Donald Biddle, Chairman of the Harbour Trust.

Arthur Robinson Vice Chairman St Helens and Bembridge Coastal and Harbour Working Group. To be followed by an Open Forum.

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# Annual General Meeting 2007

The 18<sup>th</sup> AGM took place on 17<sup>th</sup> March, in accordance with the motion passed at the October 2006 AGM to change the Constitution. Since the financial year now runs from 1<sup>st</sup> January to 31<sup>st</sup> December, all future AGMs will take place in March and our open Know Your Harbour meetings in the Autumn.

The Chairman welcomed all present and thanked the Officers and members for their continued help and support.

**Treasurer's Report.** Our new Treasurer Rod Bowman was welcomed and the Accounts for 2006, prepared by former Treasurer Jimmy Lyons were presented. Some extra expense had occurred in connection with the Association's published Notice of Objection to the Secretary of State for Transport to the level of Harbour Dues being imposed by the Bembridge Harbour Improvement Company (BHIC). The financial accounts remain sound.

**Chairman's Report.** Since the AGM on October 7<sup>th</sup> 2006, the public meeting held in Bembridge Village Hall on 17<sup>th</sup> October, at which Mr Blatch, owner of the Harbour, presented his future plans, was packed, giving evidence of strong public interest. Questions had to be submitted to the Parish Council beforehand and then posed at the meeting. However, there was little chance to follow up answers on the night. After publication of the Minutes of the meeting BHUG wrote to the Parish Council to correct some of the statements made. Mr Blatch presented his plans to replace swinging moorings with fixed trot moorings as a positive action and offered 30 trot moorings at half price for local boat owners. The negative impact on the environment and the reduced width of the channel available for the free passage of boats from BHYC, Bembridge Marina and the Angling Club mooring area were discounted.

There was no further progress with the Association's Objection to the DfT about the level of Harbour Dues. Pending determination of the case by the Secretary of State, Harbour Dues still have to be paid. It may prove necessary to submit another Objection to Dues 2007 -2008.

The striking photo taken by Mike Samuelson featured in Sentinel 35 showing the height of waves dashing against St Helen's Wall during a storm, was a salutary and dramatic reminder to accompany Heidi Robert's update on the EYRS of the importance of maintaining and protecting St Helen's Wall. The Environment Agency (EA) placed the photo on their website!

A CD of the Draft Report of Phase 1 of EYRCS had been received and comments requested. Project Leader Heidi Roberts would be attending a Steering group meeting involving members of the SHBCHWG to discuss the findings of Phase1 and the next stage.

There is little progress with outstanding Planning Applications. Consultation is frequently required with statutory authorities and sometimes compensatory "106" agreements have to be negotiated when loss of habitat is involved. BHIC have proposed moving the Palmer Memorial when its lease runs out in 2008. A formal proposal by Ken Hicks that the Memorial should not be moved was agreed unanimously. It is hoped that a website can be developed for the Association in the coming year. We were pleased to thank Ken Hicks in person for all his hard work in stripping and restoring the seat on Embankment Road erected in 1996 in memory of our Founder Chairman John Steane.

**Election of Officers and Committee members.** All had expressed willingness to stand for re-election. The following were elected unanimously - Chairman Barbara Clough, Vice Chairman John Askham, Secretary Mary Chappell, Minutes Secretary Helen Hunt, Treasurer Rod Bowman. Committee members - Robert Barnes, Barbara Blackburn, Jim Elliott, Felix Hetherington, Ken Hicks, Robin Humphrey, Perry Kuhns, Paul Traquair and BHUG representatives Robin Powell and Mike Samuelson.

After the tea break we were delighted to welcome Robin Powell, Chairman of BHUG to talk to us on Current Concerns. As a former Commodore of BHYC, Robin is particularly concerned about the effect that some of BHIC's planning applications may have on sailing activity in the harbour. Plans to extend Fisherman's pontoon and the Visitors' pontoon from the Duver Marina, together with the installation of piles and trot moorings are likely to impact detrimentally on the movement of craft navigating in the channel. He distributed plans illustrating the position of the new pontoons, piles and trot moorings. The relevant planning applications have still not been determined. The statutory authorities have to be consulted and raise any concerns they may have re. possible damage to the protected environment of Bembridge Harbour. The illustrations were most helpful and members gained a far greater understanding of the issues involved. Robin was warmly thanked for his illuminating talk.

## WOODEN BOATS OF BEMBRIDGE HARBOUR

John J. Askham

Where are they now? Where are what? The wooden boats from Bembridge Harbour, those that were built here, and those with a connection to the harbour. Boatbuilding as an industry has changed a great deal in recent years, from a cottage industry building mostly wooden boats, to now being dominated by large manufacturers that specialize in producing glass fibre products in complexity and styles not before considered possible.

This change was probably inevitable for economic reasons, but what has happened to those remaining traditional wooden craft? Woodnutts of St Helens were building many types of boat over a period from before the first world war up to the nineteen fifties, famous types such as the "X" One Design racing class and others of a similar style, as well as power boats, and cruising yachts such as the three "Wee Macs" built for one owner in the 1930s.

After the second world war a variety of traditional boats were built on the harbour by Keith Nelson in Bembridge, Attrills in St Helens, and AA Coombes in Bembridge who amongst other craft built quite a number of wooden Scows of clinker construction. The most well known group internationally, were the Keith Nelson built range of "Nelson" power boats.

Of those mentioned, most are no longer around locally. The exceptions are the wooden scows, some wooden Redwings, and the Bembridge Club Boats which all race in the summer season, in or adjacent to the harbour. One class that is having something of a revival is the clinker built "Swan" Class sailing boat originally built by AA Coombes in the nineteen fifties and sixties, some of which have been re-built and renovated and now race on an occasional basis.

So what of the others? It is inevitable that a large number would disperse as many were built for owners away from



*"Swan" One Design Cruising and Sailing Dinghy*



*26ft Clinker-built Nelson Power Boat  
Twin Volvo Penta Diesel Engines 1963*

the harbour, and others were later sold away, and there were those that fell into disrepair because of the lack of regular maintenance so necessary with a wooden boat.

Wooden boatbuilding and repair is a threatened occupation that requires skill and experience and can be expensive for the owner of a traditional boat. To keep the craft alive it needs not only skilled craftsmen but where renovation is concerned to be able to find those boats in need of repair. Who can recall the Brading Haven One Designs, a larger version of the Swan Class that used to race regularly with a strong class association, now gone? Also what about the 12ft clinker dinghies that Attrills built and used to hire off the beach on the Duver? It would be nice to think that some of these and others in need of renovation or rebuilding could be identified, and brought back into operation, and then the craft of building wooden boats will have a better chance of survival.