

RIVER ORWELL CRUISE

On Friday 30th June, over forty of our members set forth, by coach, to travel to foreign parts (Ipswich) for a lunch trip on the River Orwell, aboard the good ship 'Orwell Lady'. Her captain gave us a great running commentary, He was saddened by the port's decline in container shipping, a graveyard for old, rusting containers. The main imports at Ipswich are now grain and timber.

The River Orwell is about 20 km long and flows from the River Gipping, at the tidal limit at the west of Ipswich waterfront, to the River Stour estuary at Harwich and the UK's largest container port of Felixstowe, into the North Sea. Thousands of birds nest on the Orwell's mud flats during the winter and Peregrine Falcons, once wiped out by D.D.T. etc., have returned to healthy numbers and build their nests under the bridge.

Once we had passed through the lock system at the east end of Ipswich quay we headed eastwards towards The North Sea and Felixstowe and Harwich. The first major landmark was the magnificent Orwell Bridge opened to road traffic in 1982 and carries the A14 (formerly the A45) over the river. This road is the main artery for heavy container traffic from the Midlands through to the docks at Felixstowe. The main span is 190 metres which, at the time of its construction, was the longest pre-stressed concrete span in use in the UK. The total length is 1,287 metres, the width is 24 metres with an air draft of 43 metres; the bridge had to be at least 41 metres high.



There were various marinas en-route which were stuffed with expensive boats. The riverside between the towns is beautiful, tree lined and with lots of fields. We passed a folly, built in 1578, which also has been a smallpox hospital and is now a holiday home of six stories. Sailing is popular on the river, and there are several sailing clubs as well as marinas. Pin Mill is a hamlet set in a sheltered anchorage about halfway up the river, and along with The Royal Harwich Yacht Club, are the sailing centres on this stretch of water.

Our guide pointed out a building that was known locally as 'The Cat House.' One owner was involved in the smuggling along the river. He had a beloved white cat stuffed after it died. He would place the cat in the window as a signal that all was safe from the 'Revenue Men.' We passed the Ipswich Observatory and an area that was used by the Desert Rats during their training for D. Day.

For most of the outward journey the Port of Felixstowe can clearly be seen on the north side of the river. It is the United Kingdom's largest container port, dealing with 48% of Britain's containerised trade. The port has two main container terminals as well as a roll-on/roll-off terminal. There is a continuous quay of over 2.3 kilometres (1.4 mi), equipped with 29 ship-to shore gantry cranes. The main navigation channel is dredged to accommodate the world's latest generation of deep-draughted vessels that are capable of carrying 18,000 containers.



On the opposite bank towards Harwich is the site of HMS Ganges. HMS Ganges was a training ship and later stone frigate of the Royal Navy. She was established as a boys' training establishment in 1865 and was based aboard a number of hulks before moving ashore ending up at at Shotley (from 1905) and remained in service at RNTE Shotley until October 1976. HMS Ganges was also known as Shotley Training Establishment.

As the boat turned for its return journey we approached Harwich with its Lighthouses and Lifeboat Station. Harwich High and Low Lighthouses are a pair of early 19th-century towers in Harwich, Essex, which were built as leading lights to help guide vessels into the harbour. Although they no longer function as lighthouses they both house small museums.

The Lifeboat station is positioned on the southern side at the mouth of the estuary. The station serves a particularly busy section of coastline covering Harwich ferry terminal and the Port of Felixstowe.

We then returned to Ipswich Quay travelling along the north bank of the Orwell before rejoining our coach at the quayside.

As well as lovely sunny weather, we enjoyed a delicious buffet lunch and a well-stocked bar. So, in conclusion - we all had a really GREAT day out. Thanks again to John and Vivienne for organising this memorable day.

