

Suffolk's natural treasures

In the second of his visits to Suffolk, **Graham Sherwood** explores some of the area's natural and historic attractions

Woodbridge

Woodbridge lies along the River Deben at the end of long estuary, about seven miles from Ipswich. With 1400 years of recorded history, the town has retained a wide variety of historical architecture, and there are facilities for boating and riverside walks on the River Deben.

Although the area was under Roman occupation for 300 years, very little evidence remains, as by the time the legions were recalled to Rome in AD 410 there was already a substantial Anglo-Saxon (Germanic) settlement there.

The town has been a centre for boatbuilding, rope-making and sail-making since the Middle Ages. Edward III and Sir Francis Drake had

fighting ships built in Woodbridge. The town suffered badly in the plague of 1349, but recovered enough to have a new church (St Mary's, situated behind the buildings on the south side of Market Hill) constructed with limestone from the Wash and decorated with Thetford flint. After significant and persistent religious upheaval, the religious settlement under Elizabeth I helped Woodbridge industries such as weaving, sailcloth manufacture, rope making and salt making to prosper, alongside the wool trade. The port was enlarged, and shipbuilding and the timber trade became so lucrative that a customs house was established in 1589.

Around the town today there are various buildings from the Tudor, Georgian, Regency and Victorian eras. Woodbridge also has a tide mill in working order, one of only two in the UK and among the earliest. Two windmills also survive, Buttrum's Mill and Tricker's Mill, the former being open to the public.

Sutton Hoo

Just across the River Deben from Woodbridge lie the

burial mounds of Sutton Hoo. Excavations in the months leading up to the outbreak of the Second World War revealed an amazing hoard of treasure held within a wooden Anglo-Saxon burial ship undisturbed for 1300 years.

Instantly becoming the most important Anglo-Saxon site in the UK, Sutton Hoo is thought to be the final resting place of the early seventh century King Raedwald of East Anglia. Raedwald was 'Bretwalda', the most powerful king in England, who died around AD 624. The 89ft burial ship

and its many treasures, the iconic warrior helmet being one of the most important, were the richest ever found in British soil. They are now kept in the British Museum. Impressive replicas of some of the items, and the story of the finds, are to be found in the Woodbridge Museum. The National Trust has built an equally impressive new visitor centre on the site at Sutton Hoo including re-creations of the historical significance of the find.

■ **Tranmer House, Sutton Hoo, Woodbridge** IP12 3DJ, tel: 01394 389700, website:

(www.nationaltrust.org.uk/sutton-hoo). Opening times vary but generally are 10am to 5pm daily during the summer, and 11am to 4pm Saturday and Sunday in winter. Admission £7.15, children £3.70, families £18.05, NT members free.

Suffolk Punch Heavy Horse Museum

Housed in the fine Grade 1 listed Shire Hall at Woodbridge, this museum contains a fascinating collection of historic photographs, harnesses, mementos, paintings and silverware associated with this noble animal. There's

a harness maker's shop, a large collection of horse brasses and the faithfully restored office of Herman Biddell, the society's first secretary, containing a studbook tracing the pedigree of the breed.

■ **The Market Hill, Woodbridge, Suffolk** IP12 4LU, tel: 01394 380643, website: (www.suffolkhorsesociety.org.uk). Open 2pm to 5pm Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday from Easter Monday to the end of September. Admission £2, children and concessions £1.50. Due to its location, the museum is unsuitable for wheelchair access.

Waiting for the tide, fishing boats on the Suffolk coast



Clouds gather over the quayside at Woodbridge

Thorpeness

Originally a small fishing hamlet in the late 19th century, Thorpeness has a folklore that includes stories of it being a smuggling route into East Anglia. In 1910, Glencairn Stuart Ogilvie, a Scottish barrister famed for railway design, bought the entire area from north of Aldeburgh to past Sizewell, up the coast and inland to Aldringham and Leiston.

While most of this land was used for farming, Ogilvie developed Thorpeness into a private fantasy holiday village, to which he invited his friends' and colleagues' families during the summer.

To hide the eyesore of having a water tower in the village, the tank was clad in wood to make it look like a small house on top of a five-storey tower, with a separate water-pumping windmill next to it. It has since become known as the 'House in the Clouds', and is a tourist attraction.

Thorpeness remained mostly in the private ownership of the Ogilvie family, with houses only being sold from the estate to friends as holiday homes until 1972, when Alexander Stuart Ogilvie, Glencairn Stuart Ogilvie's grandson, died and many of the houses, the golf course and country club were sold to pay death duties.

An artificial boating lake, or 'meare', was created, with many of its inspirations coming from Peter Pan, which was written by family friend J M Barrie. Besides a large main pond, there are several channels with landings marked with names on the Peter Pan theme. Tiny islands on the Meare contain locations found in Barrie's novel such as the Pirates' Lair and Wendy's home. The Meare has a shallow depth for increased safety. Boats



The old harbour at Woodbridge

can be rented and in August the Meare is the location for the Thorpeness Regatta, which usually takes place around the same time as the carnival in neighbouring Aldeburgh.

Dunwich

In the Anglo-Saxon period Dunwich was the capital of the Kingdom of the East Angles. The Domesday Book of 1086 describes it as having three churches. At this time it had an estimated population of 3000 but the harbour and most of the town have since disappeared due to coastal erosion.

Its decline began in 1286 when a storm surge hit the East Anglian coast. Much of the town was swept into the sea, and the River Dunwich was partly silted up. This catastrophe was followed by

two further surges in the following year, and although residents fought valiantly to save the harbour, this too was destroyed by an equally fierce storm in 1328, which also swept away the entire village of Newton, a few miles up the coast.

Another large storm in 1347 swept some 400 houses into the sea and eventually Dunwich was reduced in size to the village it is today.

While most of the 13th century buildings have disappeared, including all eight churches, the remains of a 13th century Franciscan priory (Greyfriars) and the leper hospital of St James can still be seen. A popular local legend says that, at certain tides, church bells can still be heard from beneath the waves.

Orford Ness

Orford is an attractive, tranquil Suffolk village on the bank of the River Ore, some five miles from the estuary mouth, relatively untouched by the fast pace of

the modern world and surrounded by farmland and many acres of Forestry Commission property.

The quay is now used for access to the National Trust site on Orford Ness, the RSPB sanctuary on Havergate Island and the BBC World Service Site on the Ness.



The house in the clouds a cleverly disguised water tower at Thorpeness

Orford Castle

One of England's most complete and unusual castle keeps can be seen at this fascinating visitor attraction in the unspoilt village of Orford. The unique polygonal tower keep stands beside the pretty town and former port, which dates from the time of Henry II.

■ Orford Castle, Orford, Woodbridge IP12 2ND, tel: 01394 450472, website: (www.english-heritage.org.uk/orford-castle). Open March 29 to November 3, all week 10am to 5pm. Admission £6, children (five to 15) £3.60, concessions £5.40, families (two adults and three children) £15.60, English Heritage members free.

Orford Ness National Nature Reserve

Few National Trust visitor attractions equal the Orford Ness National Nature Reserve for sheer drama, remoteness and austere beauty. The shingle spit has a relatively short history, a mere few thousand years, and as a landscape feature its evolution hardly shows in geological timescales. However, it has been responsible for diverting a river, forming an estuary and for creating more than ten miles of coastline and over 2000 acres of land. The frank warnings on the NT website give stark account of the Ness's unspoilt features: "It is remote and can be bleak and unforgiving. It remains littered with debris and is uncompromising about its past and in protecting its future. For most of the 20th century the military used the island for top-secret experiments on a vast range of weapons. Intensively used as a bombing and rocket range, dangerous debris, including bombs, still remains."



A view across the frost covered burial mounds at Sutton Hoo on a frosty dawn morning

■ The Ness is only accessible via NT ferries which run between 10am and 4pm at various times of the year, with the last leaving the Ness at 5pm. It's vital to see the NT website for current information before planning a trip: (www.nationaltrust.org.uk/orford-ness). Admission £8, children £4, families £20, NT members half-price.

East Anglia Transport Museum

In perfect keeping with the nostalgia of peaceful Suffolk, a trip to the EATM will immediately immerse the visitor into bygone days of trams, trolleybuses and steam railways.

■ Chapel Rd, Carlton Colville, Lowestoft NR33 8BL, tel: 01502 518459, website: (www.eatm.org.uk). Open from the end of March to the end of September but there are also many special open days, such as Christmas events. See the website or request information for the time of your visit. Admission £7.50, children £5.50, concessions £6.50.

Bawdsey Radar

The transmitter block at Bawdsey was the world's first operational radar station and is now open to the public to explain the crucial work that helped us to win the Battle of Britain.

■ Bawdsey Radar Trust, 1 Whitehouse Cottage, Gulpher Road, Felixstowe IP11 9RJ, tel: 07821 162 879, (www.bawdseyradar.org.uk). The trust is staffed by volunteers so check opening days on the website. Opening generally 12.30pm to 4.30pm. Admission £4, children free.



A costumed recreation of the 1930s archaeological dig by Basil Brown at Sutton Hoo, Suffolk