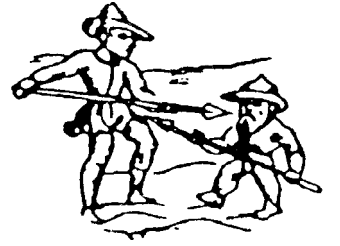




# The Mudlark



For all the news that's too hot for other newspapers to handle

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## Floodwalls

Anyone who has read *The Skeptical Environmentalist* by **Bjorn Lomborg** knows that global warming is being used as a stepping-stone to other political projects. So it is rather alarming to find the flood defence and insurance lobbies swallowing everything they read in the newspapers. The nonsense of a flood risk index based on the first half of the postcode was the subject of a short piece in a recent issue of the *Rye Harbour Boat Owners' magazine*. But now **Sheila Bowler** tells us that the insurance companies are using the fact that TN31 is shown on the *Environment Agency's* website as being subject to a high flood risk to justify a surcharge of £100 a year on the house insurance of residents in *Fair Meadow* at the top of *Rye Hill*. Meanwhile down at *Rye Harbour* the men in suits are refusing architects planning permission on the grounds that properties the wrong side of a recently moved flood wall line would be unable to find insurance. The fact that every house in *Tram Road* has found insurance seems to be neither here nor there. It is also of no consequence that no floodwalls have yet been moved. A couple of strokes with an HB pencil on a drawing board on the far side of the county is the latest way of imposing new laws on the people of Rye. In fact the whole subject of global warming is highly contentious with political decisions under review at many levels of government. Of course it does not take a degree in rocket science to figure out that if global warming takes place and *Romney Marsh* disappears under a few fathoms of water it may make sense to abandon the existing coastal defences. They'll be six feet under anyway. But there are an awful lot of ifs and buts between here and there. The irony is that if ice caps melt and sea levels rise then all that will happen in this part of the country is that *Romney Marsh* will return to its former 14th century glory. If this happens, moving a floodwall back fifty yards is hardly an adequate response. If higher water levels imply anything it is that towns like *Tenterden* and *New Romney* will become thriving ports again just as they were when **Geoffrey Chaucer** was going about his royal business on the far side of the county at *Eltham Palace*. The only walls Rye should be building are the old 14th century city walls. Build a new *Baddings Gate*, rebuild the *Strand Gate* knocked down in an act of vandalism 150 years ago, put up a proper wall just like the French have in *Old Boulogne* and then shut the town gates to non-residents. Think of the benefits that would flow from that. Instead of a few shopkeepers getting a few pence from the occasional coach tourist fit enough to struggle up to the high street, the town could sell itself as a 21st century heritage theme park and charge *Eurostar* visitors a few hundred euros a day for the privilege of spending a day within the walls of *Ye Antient Towne of Rye*. ■

## Admiralty Jetty

In January this year the news of a debacle of monumental proportions at *Admiralty Jetty* was all over the front page of the *Rye Observer*. Meanwhile the *Environment Agency* was doing its level best to keep its head below the jetty's newly raised parapet. Millions of pounds were mentioned and with disturbing visions of mooring fees shooting through the cabin roof most

boat owners were anxious to find out just what was going on. The civil servant responsible for the project, **John Morgan**, assured the *Rye Observer's* **Andy Hemsley** that everything was under control and he shouldn't believe everything he heard from the *Rye Rumour Mill*. Fair enough but here is a little corroborating evidence from the *Rye Fact Factory*. **Bullens**, the consulting engineers for both the *Admiralty Jetty* and the *New Fishmarket* have been 'relieved of their contracts'. No doubt litigation will follow. Marshes and reclaimed land do not always have bedrock at riverbed level. With hindsight a local engineering firm with knowledge of *Romney Marsh* and of tidal rivers might have known that. Then there seems there was cost cutting on design. The idea was for new timbers to be bolted onto the existing timbers below the waterline after cutting away the rotten wood. However when **Nuttalls**, the contracting engineers, came to do the work they found rotten timber all the way down. Bolting to rotten timber is not a good idea so new timber piles were needed. Unfortunately no piling equipment had been brought to the site. Sound judgements might have been made, risk and reward always need to be balanced, but the bets turned out to be bad ones. It now looks as if discarding the existing 1940s timber jetty and sinking two parallel lines of piles to support the newly raised jetty would have been a better bet and cheap at the price. ■

## Fishmarket

**Ronnie Simmons** was scurrying around for a couple of weeks after **Nuttalls** walked off the job. And no wonder. The raising of *Admiralty Jetty* by three feet was the first phase of a project to provide his fishermen with the best fishing quay in Europe. Some of us have lost count of the number of times the representative for *Sussex Sea Fisheries* has travelled to *Whitehall* over the past few years to read the riot act to the ministers and civil servants of the relevant ministry - the names change every year. Had this all been in vain? Well by the time of **Stan Pepper's** retirement party in mid-January, which just happened to coincide with his trawler *Royela* being craned out at **Derek Phillips'** boatyard to be chain-sawed apart by order of the *Common Mark-Up*, the jury was still out. But at least the prognosis was not as bad as feared. The project would go ahead but completion would be delayed by one year. What a pity the same could not be said for *Royela*. Common sense dictates that she be put 'in the ordinary' as they say in the *Royal Navy*. Sending a perfectly good seaworthy vessel to the knackers yard is about as criminal as it comes. ■

## Double Trouble

Duncan Grant sold the fishing boat *Lesley G* to a local gentleman, John Bligh. Whether money changed hands is unclear. But it certainly did a few weeks later when the *Lesley G* was sold for a second time to Mick Sharp of Dungeness. Now no love is lost between the *Nessmen* of Dungeness, the *Mudlarks* of Rye and the *Chopbacks* of Hastings, so there was no doubt about the outcome once three witnesses had reported to Mick Sharp that John Bligh was busy removing equipment from the *Lesley G*. Within the hour a gang of *Nessmen* were battering down the door of John Bligh's house. They turned the place over allegedly, although no doubt without prejudice, but to date no charges have been brought in connection with the incident. ■

## Rock Channel

After years with little going on, two meetings came up on the same night last week in two different locations several miles apart. Following the *Rye Town Hall* meeting it became quite clear to one of the *South Undercliff* allotment holders **Peter Etherden** that the game being played by *Rother District Council* and the *Rye Town Council* is to divide and rule allotment holders in Rye by throwing together the *Love Lane* and *South Undercliff* groups into one association. *Rye Partnership*, *East Sussex County Council* and other groups may also be in the know. From a development planning point of view the two groups have little if anything in common. Once such an association is formed the two groups will be played off against each other by such tricks as threatening to build houses on the *Love Lane* allotments and then withdrawing the threat after some horse-trading at the expense of *South Undercliff*. In such a combined association the interests of the *South Undercliff* allotment holders will be marginalized in favour of *Love Lane*. Furthermore any moves against the *Love Lane Allotments* would be feints because the real development prize is to clear the allotments from *Rock Channel* as an essential prelude to opening up the whole area for extensive development. As there will be many powerful and skilful local players backing these plans the *South Undercliff Gardeners* will need their wits about them. What they should do is form a *Rock Channel Gardens Club*. The club's principal purpose should be social, starting off by organising an event on the allotments, open to all the residents of *South Undercliff* and *Rock Channel Quay*, to celebrate **Her Majesty's** Jubilee. But the society should also make sure it has the power to organize politically whenever the allotment gardens are under any outside threat, be it from supermarkets, fishing quays, marinas, housing development, bypasses or plain old fashioned piracy and enclosure. Membership of the society should embrace the whole of the surrounding neighbourhood. As far as everybody's interests as allotment holders are concerned the way ahead should be to make common cause at this end of the county in defence of allotment rights by joining together as independent societies in a *Romney Marsh Allotment Association* that would include allotment groups in the adjacent parishes. One thing's for sure. Allotment holders should be wary of regarding *Rye Town Council*, *Rother District Council* or the *East Sussex County Council* as their friends. As corporate bodies their interests are not those of the allotment holders and they will unashamedly use these friendly local diggers as pawns in their own power games. ■

## Pilotage Accounts

In the winter of 1999 **Peter Davison** the Chairman of the *Rye Harbour Boat Owners* and one of three *Royal Yachting Association* representatives on *HORAC*, the *Harbour of Rye Advisory Committee* finally succeeded in calling the harbour's managing body, the *Environment Agency* to account. The resulting report into the management of *Rye Harbour* prepared by the *RYA* made a number of recommendations. One of them was the regular dredging of *Strand Quay*. Soon it will cease to function as a drain and it's only a matter of time before some visiting Dutch yachtsman sues the harbour management for the damage to his £100 000 yacht. Levelling the mud would cost very little and would solve much of the problem. **Mike Roud**

could have the job done in *Duty* in next to no time. But on another of the *RYA* recommendations the *Agency* can be pleased with their record. There was a time when we had to read *Hansard* or persuade the local Conservative MP, **Jacqui Lait** to submit a written question to the minister before anybody found out what the *Agency* had been doing with our money here in Rye. This has changed. Now we are being inundated with figures. But are they right? The *Pilotage Account* is a case in point. The *Agency's* figures suggest a thumping great loss both in real terms and against budget. But the Chairman of *HORAC*, **Ken Steele** had the good sense to run a few numbers on the back of his tide tables and was able to prove to his own satisfaction that Pilotage fees multiplied by the number of ship movements in the harbour showed that the *Port of Rye's* piloting business, far from running at a loss, was what *Dell Boy* might call a nice little earner. Indeed there is probably enough money there to buy **Steve Kemp** a bucket and spade for the odd occasion when he finds himself unexpectedly marooned overnight on *Camber Beach*. ■

## No New Lease of Life

A familiar sight at the *Salts* end of *Rock Channel* used to be the arrival of a large articulated lorry with French number plates. The local residents have always assumed that these highway wreckers were in Rye to collect all the fish the English refuse to eat and ferry it across the Channel for the more robust French stomach. If you can eat snails and frogs legs you can eat anything. For some years Duncan Grant had been in the business of buying and selling fish. But as his business expanded he found himself owning fishing boats and employing fishermen to catch the fish in *Rye Bay* and offload them upon their return into his processing sheds on *Rock Channel*. Over the years he would also buy up the fish brought in by the other fishermen. Things started to go wrong last winter. There were gales in the *English Channel* for weeks on end and fishing boats tied up in port make very little money. But **Ricky Goodsell's** business has gone from strength to strength while Duncan Grant has been floundering. Same fish, same fishing boats and same fishermen so why the difference in their fortunes? So when spring came half a dozen fishing boats were put up for sale - sometimes twice. But nothing worked, so that by late summer **Lesley Grant** was to be seen burning the midnight oil several nights a week down at her *Rock Channel* office. The final straw came in the unlikely guise of **Philip Alliston**, the *Estates Manager* for the *Environment Agency*. In a desperate last throw of the dice attempts were made to sell off a rather complicated mess of leases pertaining to the *Rock Channel* warehousing and fish processing operations. Alliston would have none of it and for reasons best known to his bosses at the *Environment Agency* was strangely reluctant to close any of the deals proposed. Whatever the intent the effect of the *Agency* dragging its heels was to drive a long-established small businessman into bankruptcy. ■

## NEXT ISSUE

*The Mudlark's* policy is to publish whenever there are a dozen or so items of local interest or a matter of some urgency.

## Channel Link

Early last year a large articulated lorry parked itself down by the *Rye Harbour Wharf*. No sooner had it stopped than a stream of humanity poured out of the back. You can imagine the amazement among the crowd of onlookers when after rounding them all up, instead of frog-marching them over to Dover and putting them on a slow boat to China, the police took their names, gave each of them a train ticket to London and as something of an afterthought, the address of the *Immigration Office* in Croydon. Rye is vulnerable with the huddled masses swarming into the *Red Cross* refugee camp just 40 miles away in Calais and a ring of steel thrown around *Dover Docks* to keep them at bay. There have been other incidents. Here is one reported to *The Mudlark*. One afternoon in broad daylight a small 22-foot cabin cruiser pulled up on *River Brede Moorings* alongside *Noah's Ark* and proceeded to offload some half a dozen smartly dressed passengers much to the surprise of **Fred Robertson**, the owner of *Noah's Ark*. Apparently this was the third occasion on which this particular boat had been seen coming into Rye with its assortment of well-dressed blond and blue-eyed economic migrants from the *Baltic States*. Once disembarkation was complete all hell broke loose as officialdom came galloping in - harbour masters, excise agents, policemen and probably the US cavalry as well. **Malcolm Wallace**, the skipper of the *Marjory Gaw* was having afternoon tea on board the good ship *Vemara* at the time. According to one unreliable eyewitness the conversation went something like this as two men and two women disappeared down the Winchelsea Road. "Wow, wot a pair of crackers! We'll let those two in!" And shortly afterwards from the ladies present: "Malcolm, be a sport, go and see if those two gentlemen would care to stay over on the boat tonight." Do we have here the criteria for dispensing green cards? What could be more democratic? We could make it a game show with **Anne Robinson** hosting it. "You are the weakest Channel Link. Goodbye!" ■

## Euroscam

Shortly after the collapse of the fisheries empire on *Rock Channel* a French company made an offer for Duncan Grant's assets in Rye. Such requests are a delight to accounting firms who feed off commercial bankruptcies and step in as official receivers. **Arthur Daly Anderson** has landed some surprisingly large fish while trading bankrupt goods at knock down prices and selling off received assets on behalf of creditors. **Mick O'Grady** the local *Customs & Excise Intelligence Officer* was not born yesterday however. Together with the *Rye Harbour Master* he has been keeping a watchful eye on the cross-Channel movement of fishy goods. Knowing that Duncan Grant owned a third share in the French company that bought and marketed his fish in France they smelled something fishy. Not being renowned for their gullibility the VATmen's first assumption is that if one company goes under with a pile of debts there is a sister company piled high with assets wait-

ing in the wings. No doubt the application remains at the bottom of the in-tray. ■

## Fishing for Laptops

The bankruptcy of Duncan Grant might not turn out to be quite as straightforward as you might think. Nothing ever is in Rye. Indeed some of the rumours are so exotic the sorry tale might be billed as *Rye-Enron* meets the Rye branch of the *Allied Irish Bank*. Are you sitting comfortably? Then I'll begin. We are told that some time last year when cash started to run out, Duncan Grant began paying fishermen in kind instead of cash. But not the kind you might have thought. It seems it was a barter deal of fish for computers. Clearly there is no truth in these rumours because fishermen have what economists call a time preference for money, especially the type that comes as wedges and is good for anything money can buy. Besides **Duncan Grant** didn't have any computers. Still laptops can be turned into money and allegedly last year's exchange rate was one £ 1200 laptop for £ 300 of fishing wages. Be that as it may, it came to pass that a man at the *Post Office* inadvertently redirected a consignment of laptop computers destined for the *Friends Provident* to the offices of a Mr Duncan Grant of *Rock Channel* in Rye. It was even suggested that the person concerned was related in some way to Mr Grant which might provide the explanation for his mistake. Anyway it seems the consignment failed to arrive which obviously left the police at a loss. But then laptops started popping up all over Rye, at which point following a tip-off that there was a warehouse in Birmingham piled high with laptops for the *Friends Provident* the local constabulary paid it a visit. Finding nothing, they returned to Rye and raided the houses of all Duncan Grant's fishermen expecting to find half a million pounds worth of computers but to date have recovered only a dozen or so. That at least is the story we've been told. As the whole matter is *sub judice* there is little more we can say on the matter. But nonetheless what started off as a two-year ban on being a company director has now developed into the threat of a rather longer period spent at Her Majesty's pleasure. ■

## Millwood Homes

**Peter Elwell** one of Rye's more colourful entrepreneurs and briefly a part-owner of *Lydd Airport* has sold an option to some land opposite *Lochins* on *Rock Channel Corner* to a company called *Millwood Homes* who have to date spent three quarters of a million pounds on architects and designers. *Millwood Homes* are the latest in a long line of marina developers to notice that *Eurostar* stops at *Ashford International* just a 20 minute train ride away from Rye and that Rye is far and away the best harbour of refuge between Folkestone and Newhaven. So a few months ago the *Harbour of Rye Advisory Committee* was treated to a full bells and whistles power-point presentation complete with scale model of the future *Millwood Marina*. Choosing a location a few hundred yards downwind of a chemical works was not too intelligent but the airport satellite design was a big hit. Next in line for the soft-sell are the *Boat Owners* and the *Sailing Club*. How this all stacks up politically is hard to tell but we have it on our usual dodgy authority that the *Environment Agency*, *Rother District Council* and *Rye Partnership* also like the cut of the *Millwood* jib but that the *Rye Town*

*Council* are more sceptical. *Millwood Homes* really should have done their homework better. Comparing a list of local dignitaries with the land registry is always the first step in such matters. There have also been some excellent engineering reports prepared over the years identifying potential sites for floating moorings on the lower *Rother* and *Rock Channel Corner* did not feature prominently. But architects can dream up anything and engineers can always find ways to build it. If the *Rye Town Council* becomes too disillusioned with their inability to influence events it might change tack. Everyone knows that marinas are merely financial devices for turning a quick buck on the redesignation of previously worthless land for development so why not impose a *Parish Windfall Tax* on the winning bidder. **Henry George** would smile in his grave at the thought. Just think what the money could be used for: a swimming pool, a medieval festival, floating moorings, which are always the first casualty of the first cash flow crisis to hit marina schemes. Now the truth is that Rye has no use for a marina. It needs floating moorings. These it can provide itself from its own local resources, were there the political will to do so, at a fraction of the cost of a marina. This is the way these things are done in Holland. Why not in Rye? ■

## Maritime Trading

Anyone who has travelled along the Dutch, Belgian or French canals knows that their heart invariably skips a beat whenever a Dutch steel cruiser passes by. These come in all sizes from 18 foot to 80 foot but are always immaculate on the outside and elegantly appointed inside. They are the perfect vessels for cruising the waterways of Europe. They are also everything that the Irish tourist needs to enjoy the extensive network of canals and waterways of the Emerald Isle. And herein lies a commercial opportunity. The price the Irish are willing to pay while awash with low-priced euros is considerably more than the Dutch are wanting to sell for, though the same euros wash over their shores. There is only one problem. How to make it commercially viable to move steel boats from Holland to Ireland. Over the past two years **Patsy Richey** at *Rye Bay Brokers* has solved the problem and is now managing one of the more surprising Rye enterprises. It is one thing for **Mick Hodgson** to import chairs from Czechoslovakia or Poland and sell them on into the UK market from *Rye Harbour*. But trading as an intermediary, importing and exporting across the *European Union* between Amsterdam and the River Shannon from an office on Rye's *Rock Channel* shows that enterprise, initiative and commercial flair are alive and well and flourishing here in Rye. So far Patsy has moved a dozen or so Dutch steel cruisers out of Holland to satisfied customers in the UK and Ireland with **John Pierce** looking after the logistics. It has not all been plain sailing. Nothing ever is in business. The trick is knowing which boats are best for which waterways network. But with the learning years behind her, this is one maritime business that could well grow over the years bringing jobs and money to Rye in its wake. ■

## Stand and Deliver

Did you know that the *Rye Harbour Master* is one of *Her Majesty's Official Receivers of Wrecks*? Did you also know that one of the perks that comes with the job is the right to

own and discharge a firearm without a licence? Another is to command the local constabulary, which may explain why **Gilbert White** is no longer hailed in his traditional manner: 'Mr. White. Your Harbour Dues Please!' when passing the *Harbour Master's Office* in *Kim II*. One theory for the loss of this hallowed local tradition centres on **John Thomson** and his computer. Last year's alleged success rate of 97% in the registration of boats and the collection of their harbour dues is taking away all the fun. Our forefathers must be turning in their graves after centuries of successful tax avoidance. The other theory is that Master Mariner White has acquired a healthy respect for **Carl Bagwell** ever since finding out that he has the authority to shout 'Stand and Deliver' from behind the barrel of a gun and can follow that up with a posse when he misses. ■

## Rye Maritime Gazette

Rye's landed interests have done a first-rate job over the years to ensure that the land is well-drained and the shopkeepers have their *Rye Chamber of Commerce*. But who looks out for the seaman's point of view? The paid-up membership of the *Rye Harbour Boat Owners Association* is down to 160. The *Rye Harbour Lifeboat Association* musters 75, the fishermen continue to decline as quotas are withdrawn and as for the *Sailing Club*, the *Sea Scouts* and the *Sea Anglers* these are but shadows of their former selves despite all the work **John Collard** has done over the years to keep *Rye Harbour* alive. What to do? A *Rye Confederation of Maritime Businesses* open to any firm or organisation dependent for its livelihood on the *Rye Bay* and *Romney Marsh* navigations would be one answer. Would it have enough support? If you don't think so, try this. Walk away from *Rye Citadel* in any direction and within a couple of hours you will have reached the furthest frontier of one of Rye's adjacent parishes of *Camber*, *Icklesham*, *Udimore*, *Peasmarsh*, *Rye Foreign*, *Iden*, *Playden* or *East Guldeford*. At the time of the 1991 census Rye and these eight parishes had a total population of a little over 11 000. A day's horseback ride from Rye would get you as far afield as *Beachy Head* or *Ashdown Forest* and several hundred parishes in Kent and East Sussex would be included within such a radius. The 400 000 souls living in these parishes once looked to the *Port of Rye* rather than to *Chatham* or *London* for their local shipping needs and to *Rye Bay* for their fish. When **Daniel Defoe** took the coach to Rye in 1724, he could report that the road from Rye to *Chatham* was the most densely trafficked road anywhere in the kingdom, if not the empire. A well-produced monthly *Rye Maritime Gazette* could reckon on a 1-2% response from advertisers and readers which would give it a readership within the 35-mile catchment area of 4000 to 8000. This represents a viable publishing project and a profitable commercial proposition for a local Rye-based publisher. Rye has had to sink or swim as a port for twelve hundred years. It should carry on doing so. ■

## INACCURACIES

We live in an age of spin & rumour. We try to get it right but when we fail, corrections & retractions will be in a future issue.

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