

*The following article is published by kind permission of the author Mr. "Jim" Paine whose son David now operates Bridge Boat Service at East Farleigh. Jim wrote his boating memories in the 1980's and first had them published in the East Farleigh Cruising Club magazine. In this issue we reproduce Bulletin 27 of the series:-*

### **Medway Memories of an old Boatman 27**

In recent years most boating activities seem to be concentrated on making long voyages to foreign ports, the farther away the better, and I can certainly see the attraction in this activity. As I know for myself, there is nothing to equal the thrill of discovering that the Continent really is over there, just beyond the horizon more or less where the chart said it would be, and the knowledge that you have done it for yourself in your own boat and without help from anyone else adds spice to the enjoyment, particularly if you have had to weather a modicum of rough weather during the voyage. The fact that the modern cabin cruiser has become so utterly reliable has opened up the possibility of undertaking this sort of trip to a much wider section of the boat-owning community than was the case when I started my boating career - boats were mostly homemade to a greater or lesser extent, engines were very often converted for marine use from road vehicles and were generally unreliable in the extreme, and there were none of the sophisticated navigational aids which now form such a large part of a boat's inventory. In retrospect, most of our navigation seems to have consisted of keeping the beach on the right, watching out for seagulls standing up rather than swimming and Keeping out of the way of absolutely anything else afloat, particularly anything bigger than oneself. The latter clause I still regard as the most useful tip for any small boat owner - never mind what the Collision regs. say, just get the hell out of it!

Given the foregoing, it cannot be too surprising that we had a tendency to do much of our boating within a much shorter radius from the home base. A voyage to Queenborough was just as great an achievement then as would be a quick dash to Calais or Boulogne these days, and although our range was so much less, it did have the effect of broadening our knowledge of our home waters. Modern boat-owners seem to regard the Medway mainly as a means of getting somewhere else, whereas we older hands revelled in the infinite variety of creeks and quiet anchorages to be found. The names themselves are a sort of poetry, bringing back memories to some of us. Even now, everyone knows the popular ones - Stangate and Sharfleet are the obvious ones - but how many modern boaters have spent a quiet few hours at anchor in the lesser-known ones - Colemouth, where you can be at anchor in a deep-water pool with no company but the occasional seabird's cries, and no sound of commerce to disturb the

uncanny silence. Stoke saltings, Bumble-Bee creek, which leads into Damhead which winds its way behind the huge Kingsnorth power station, Middle creek, twisting and turning its unbelievable course behind Hoo island, or Whitewall, which is now, alas, no longer worth navigating because of the tunnel workings.

On the South side of the estuary the choice is even wider. As I have said, we all know Stangate and Sharfleet, but the creeks leading off these two are very largely unused by pleasure traffic apart from strictly local boats. At the bottom end of Stangate, for instance, lies the delightfully named Bedlam's Bottom, which is reached by way of The Shade and Funton Creek. Incidentally, in my view Funton is one of the most delightful anchorages in the whole estuary. Although only a mile or two from the busy commercial river you can lie there in perfect peace and watch the almost unbelievable variety of wild life - the Chetney and Barkshore marshes swarming with rabbits, the tideline patrolled by bird predators of all sorts and, especially at low water, the shallows of the creek itself alive with (I think) mullet. As you may gather, my knowledge of the fish species is far from complete! Anyway, whatever they are, they seem to feed along the extreme edge of the tide as it is just beginning to make.

If you choose to take the other arm at the end of Stangate, you leave Slaughterhouse Point to starboard • The name is derived from the fact that cattle for the ships of Nelson's navy were gathered there for slaughter before being barrelled in brine tubs and loaded aboard. From there you are faced with the choice of Halstow, Twinney or Milfordhope creeks, the first leading to the pleasant little villages of Halstow and Lower Halstow and the other two, by more or less circuitous routes, across the saltings into Half Acre creek. From here there several choices available - to port you have Otterham, Bartlett and South Yantlet creeks, while if you turn to starboard there is a wide and deep channel back to the river at Kethole Reach. I cannot conscientiously recommend Otterham Creek for anything but a quick look-see because it is in fairly frequent use by commercial traffic to and from the busy Otterham Quay. The others, however, are all worth exploring • The Rainham, Copperhouse and Gillingham marshes are all available at the right state of the tide and are all used by the many local boats, while some of the secluded little wharves such as Bloor's Wharf at Rainham are visited by quite sizeable coasters whenever there is a worthwhile cargo.

I hope that what I have said may lead those who have not tried it to sample some of the places I have mentioned - when it is too lumpy outside to get across to fill your boat with duty-frees it is well worth exploring the delights which lie on your own doorstep. I have mentioned only some of the possible spots - if we include the Swale there are many others well worth the effort, especially if you have a taste for peace and solitude - all you must remember is to watch the tide and keep a canny eye on the depth sounder!

More next time,

Jim