Memories of Maritime Ipswich:

‘The New Cut and Over Stoke’

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During 2020, and while Covid-19 regulations inhibited many of the Trust's regular activities, the idea grew of seeking out and recording stories of those whose memories of maritime Ipswich stretched back to the days of the working Wet Dock, and when many of those who worked there lived in the surrounding streets. Although not a resident of Stoke, one such person is Barry Girling, whose book 'Ipswich – Memories of a Special Town' the Trust helped to get into print. Such was its popularity, the book has since been reprinted and updated a number of times.

Reproduced below is an article that Barry recently wrote for a local group describing his recollections of local maritime life in the 1960s, and which can now be illustrated with contemporary colour images taken by a then youthful Stuart Grimwade while working for the Borough Planning department before leaving to study at Nottingham University. Other older images from the Image Archive are also included to illustrate some of the buildings and businesses Barry mentions.

The New Cut and Over Stoke Ipswich

This man-made tidal waterway enabled the Rivers Gipping and Orwell to be diverted, thus allowing c.1840 the construction of Ipswich's great dock. The 'Cut' also provided access to St Peter's adjacent to Stoke Bridge, as well as the original failed entrance to the dock itself.

New Cut West afforded the many Works' access to waterborne traffic. From the south and their quay near Griffin Wharf, Ransomes & Rapier shipped engineering products mainly courtesy of Horlocks barge fleet to the London Docks for onward trans-shipment to all parts of the world.

The Cut from Cranfield's Mill c.1970. *IMT Image Archive Jacques Roberts Collection*

New Cut East c.1960.

IMT Image Archive David Kindred Collection

The next area of interest near Harland Street was that of Wilfred Christopherson described at various times as cattle food manufacturers corn and coal merchants who were entrusted with the care of the sailing barge ***Memory.***

Nearby in the region of Bath, Bright and Robinson Streets could be found the works of Eldred Watkins - lime-burner, stone and cement merchant. At various times he owned the eponymous sailing barge ***Eldred Watkins*** as well as ***Ethel Ada***, ***Fredrick William, General Jackson and Novator.***

Novator and other barges connected with the stone trade from Ipswich moored at the Melton Bridge wharf in earlier years.

IMT Image Archive SSBR Ron Green Collection

Moving on, and close to the end of Purplett Street, were formerly the berths of the well-known paddle steamers that operated a service to the Harwich area.

New Cut West in the days of the paddle steamers. The steamer services linked Harwich and the Essex coastal piers en route to London through almost all of the 19th century. This and the below image c.1900.

IMT Image Archive
Leonard Woolf Collection

My memory recalls the remnants of the long terrace of houses that used to decorate the remainder of New Cut West from Purplett Street to Dock Street, near Stoke Bridge (Nos 2 - 114) only interrupted by the Steamboat Tavern and the large assemblage belonging to the Ipswich Malting Company. This of course is not to deny the existence of Pauls large malting complex in Felaw Street, the company, which incidentally, owned the largest fleet of sailing barges in the town. The IMC was another that took full advantage of the maritime facilities with the vessels ***Hector, Mary Anne, The Sisters and Three Sisters*** all serving their needs. They were all registered in the name of company secretary Thomas Damant of Burlington Road.

New Cut East was less commercial than its Over Stoke counterpart, as witnessed in my day by the tumbledown remains of the 'Umbrella' near the lock. This marked the extent of a fine avenue of lime trees known as the 'Promenade' which was subsumed many years ago by the railway.

It was along the riverside here that in times past ferrymen Collinson, Walter ‘Budger’ Flory, W. Gostling, Bob Lumkin, Henry ‘Caps’ Smith and even earlier Messrs Bell, Frost and Garnham would congregate awaiting a fare to row across to the other side of the 'Cut'.

At the northern end of the picture postcard favourite 'Promenade' there is a collection of buildings including Lock Cottage and the Harbourmaster's office which remain as a reminder of the original dock entrance. Adjacent I can well recall the 'Lock Tavern' but as to Nethercoat the sailmaker - I cannot. The journey is made complete by examination of William Brown's timber sheds and yard and in previous times a substantial building at Flint Wharf, opposite Cranfield's that used to house the dock workers canteen.

St Peter’s Dock which was the extremity of sea going barge traffic, is a tidal basin which could accommodate many craft. This enclave was an important and extremely busy part of town, containing as it did, operators of national interest. There were pockets of specialised concerns in Ipswich, none more so than the St Peter’s quarter, where, within a few hundred yards, the food industry was well represented. If Cranfield's was the flagship with the 'staff of life', near neighbour Burton's was the 'icing on the cake'. However, not to be outdone, close by, The British Fermentation plant triggered the ingredients. These firms like Cranfield's with a string of industrial scale regional bakeries, Burton's with its UK wide influence, together with the ubiquitous Paul's, all counted thousands of workers in their employ.

St. Peter’s Dock and Stoke Mill 1962. *IMT Image Archive Stuart Grimwade (ICBC) Collection*

The Yeast factory with its aroma of distinction was perched precariously by Stoke bridge; the narrow frontage belied its considerable depth - it was a rare beast, one of only two suchlike in the country. In addition, St Peter's Quay was also home to R & W Paul's warehouse of the same name cum the BOCM Oil Mill, Burtons Jam factory a small warehouse set behind a large weighbridge and in later times Pauls massive silo. Today there are plans for a theatre in part of the now derelict buildings, however the remainder continue to await a more appreciative audience.

Urban Over Stoke was a fascinating part of Ipswich, almost a self-sufficient town within a town, perhaps the original local manual powerhouse. It was an area loosely defined by New Cut West, Burrell Road, Luther Road, Croft Street and the railway - (black) bridge in Wherstead Road.

Although this was not a prosperous area the local inhabitants lived dignified orderly and uncomplicated lives, would look out for one another and have no qualms about leaving their front door open. The residents of this settlement of terraced houses provided the skilled and unskilled labour for such as Cocksedges, the Locomotive Depot, Maltings, and Ransomes & Rapier, not forgetting the maritime. Here were the engineer, the railwayman and the sailorman, those who tightened the bolts, raised the steam and set the sails.

Riverside villages such as Lower Holbrook, Harkstead, Shotley and especially Pin Mill provided the manpower for the nucleus of the Ipswich Fleet. In the past a young man would have found that barging was a better paid proposition than working on the land. However, it was still difficult to make a living owing to the vagaries of wind and tide together with the problem of obtaining a freight, not to forget the sacrifice of an ordered home life.

Over Stoke was also a stronghold of the sailorman. For instance 'streets' - some now long gone, such as – Austin, Bell, Bright, Bulstrode, Gt. Whip, Hawes, Kemp, Croft, New Cut West, Pauline, Purplett, Tyler and Wherstead, played host to such notable bargemen as – Denis and Johnny Blanchard, Ernest Blumfield, Alan Crawford, Joe English, David and Bob Greenleaf, Derek Ling, Joe Mason, Percy Meekings, George Markham, Lesley Potter, David Sadler, Percy Scott, Fred Smy, Mervyn Stafford, Russell and Walter Todd, Joe Trotman and Harry Westley.

In 1962 Stuart Grimwade worked for a year as a photographer in the Borough Surveyor's planning office before going to university. His job included taking photographs of these same terraced streets, concentrating on those that were shortly to be demolished as 'unfit' for reasons such as having no hot water supply or bathroom. On the following pages, Stuart's colour photographs have been captioned by Barry and Stuart for this Paper.

Vernon Street had always been a hub of the Stoke area, and is seen in this photograph, probably taken in 1930 at the time of the visit to Ipswich of the then Prince of Wales.

IMT Image Archive David Kindred Collection

Little traffic gives time for the Vernon Street residents to have a quiet chat.
IMT Image Archive Stuart Grimwade (ICBC) Collection

Great Whip Street going down towards Dock Street and with Little Whip Street on the left.
IMT Image Archive Stuart Grimwade (ICBC) Collection

Gower Street looking north towards Dock Street .
IMT Image Archive Stuart Grimwade (ICBC) Collection

Arthur Ramsey's shop at 55 Bath Street on the corner of Kemp Street.
IMT Image Archive Stuart Grimwade (ICBC) Collection

Left: Another view of 55 Bath Street showing the Ransome and Rapier Walking Dragline building on the far corner of Kemp Street.

IMT Image Archive Stuart Grimwade (ICBC) Collection

Right: Bulstrode Road at its junction with Felaw Street.

IMT Image Archive Stuart Grimwade (ICBC) Collection

Upper Tyler Street at its junction with Hawes Street.
IMT Image Archive Stuart Grimwade (ICBC) Collection

Lower Tyler Street at its junction with Hawes Street.
IMT Image Archive Stuart Grimwade (ICBC) Collection

Purplett Street running down from Hawes Street - Miss Freeman's shop No.18 on the corner.
IMT Image Archive Stuart Grimwade (ICBC) Collection

Probing the annals of anxiety, tragedy was never far away. David Greenleaf of Tyler Street (who lived near his son Bob), having escaped with his life after his barge ***Millie*** was run down in 1930, was sadly lost in 1941 by drowning in the Thames.

Stuart at the wheel of ***Millie*** in the 1960s. Millie had earlier sunk in Surrey Docks but had been raised by Richard Duke and was then bought by her ex-skipper 'Roddy' Rodwell in his retirement.

Stuart then helped with her conversion for Roddy to live on board at Pin Mill, and in return Roddy taught Stuart to sail her throughout the Thames estuary as the Mate.

IMT Image Archive
Stuart Grimwade Collection.

There are some intriguing recurring names connected with the local maritime, one such being Hooker. There is a record of Alfred Charles of Upland Road, John of New Cut West (May Villa) who was associated with the vessels ***Davenport, Inflexible*** and ***Tertius***. However, the most interesting appears to be Joseph Thomas (1851 - 1906) described as ship owner and Master Mariner of Farringdon Villas.

He was reputed to have been skipper/owner of the Ipswich ***Lady of the Wave*** as well as owner of the ***Mystery.*** It is also possible that he was the master of the Ipswich Malting Company's ***Mary Anne***. Joseph's wife was Happy Ada nee Aldous (1862 – 1917). They never knew that their son Edward Reginald (1894 – 1918) would be KIA in WW1. Perhaps a poignant reminder as to the fragility of family life a century ago.

Should there be a case to answer, I would find in favour of the people from Over Stoke. That individual respected community which made such a major contribution to the town itself.

Barry Girling 2020

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The following images taken by Stuart Grimwade are included here as they illustrate the character of the dock area at the time of Barry's descriptions and recollections. The first is of Myrtle Road at the corner of Unity Street. Opposite these houses a 'bouncing' bomb intended for the gas holder, destroyed many houses, killing their residents during WWII. The explosion crippled the following bomber which then crashed into the lock.

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A selection of historic photographs from the extensive IMT Image Archive Collections can be accessed from our website.

www.ipswichmaritimetrust.org.uk

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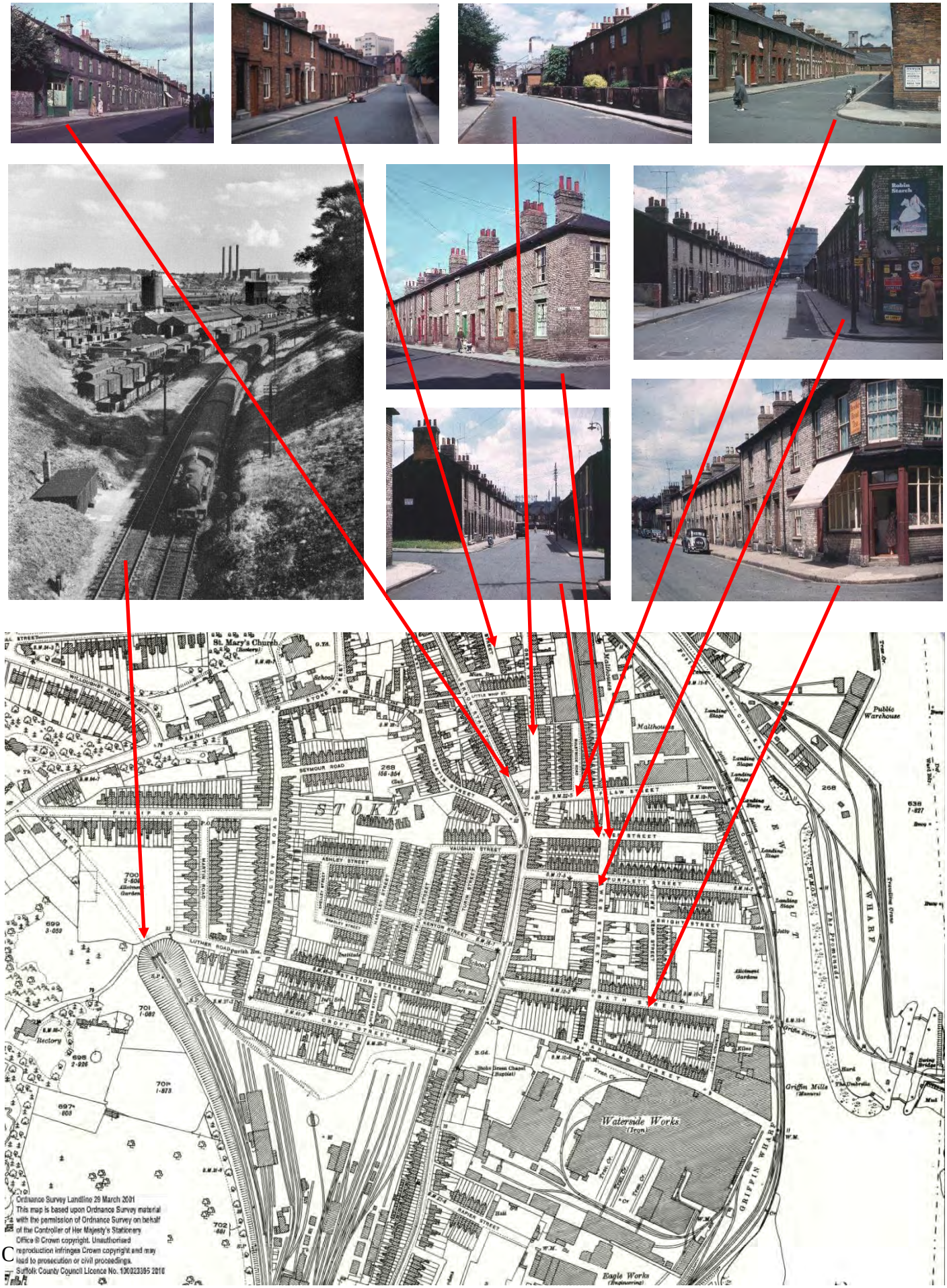

Locations of some of the images on a 1924 map of the Over Stoke area

In compiling this paper, the fifth Occasional Paper to be published by IMT, I am grateful for the help of Barry Girling, Bob Kindred, Bridget Hanley of Suffolk Archives, Dr. Chris Wiltshire and Tony Marsden of the Ipswich Society, and my colleagues at the Trust.

Stuart Grimwade, January 2021

Ipswich Maritime Trust
Registered Charity No. 286603

The Trust began life in 1982 at a time when the Wet Dock was in serious decline with very few vessels and many redundant historic buildings. Its aim was to find ways of bringing life back to the Wet Dock, and its success in this endeavour was largely achieved when its 'Sail Ipswich' event in 1997 drew over 35,000 people to the Waterfront over a single week-end.

Today, the principal aim of the Trust is to bring to everyone's attention the astonishing maritime history of the Orwell and its Port, reaching back to before the 7th Century, enabling Ipswich to claim to be the oldest English town.

We undertake a wide range of activities which includes holding a series of winter and spring talks on a maritime related theme, and running the Window Museum on Albion Wharf for which we are always keen to collect and display maritime artefacts.

More details about the Trust and its activities can be found at the IMT website www.ipswichmaritimetrust.org.uk, or by contacting Des Pawson on 01473 690090.

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