

# Two wheels, one leg, no lycra

(Adrift with a bike in Suffolk)



**Rob Barber**

# **Two wheels, one leg, no lycra**

**(Adrift with a bike in Suffolk)**

**Rob Barber's bike ride around Suffolk  
to raise funds for  
Walsham le Willows Memorial Village Hall.**

**Photographs by various members of the Barber family  
Rob, Jon, Nic and Maggie**

**Format and preparation for printing – Maggie Barber**

Printed by

## Prologue

I have often heard it said, and in Walsham's Village Hall Coffee Shop too, when people come to look at someone else's life or to re-assess a situation of their own "Ah well, you can't turn the clock back". Yes, the years slip by so easily and entry into that select company of octogenarians does make one take stock of one's self. But I am of the school which believes even if "you can't turn the clock back"; you can at least try to "wind it up again".

So, as I am entering my eighties, I have given myself a challenge to cycle around Suffolk, revisiting familiar places and finding some, as yet, unexplored corners, to experience what cannot be felt in the car, the physical, sensory and emotional feel of the diversity of Suffolk's landscape. It is a beautiful place, bearing comparison with my home county of Norfolk!

This record of my odyssey in April 2015 will, I hope, highlight something of Suffolk's unique character, its landscape, its buildings, its history and be of interest to other lovers of where we live. I take note of Benjamin Franklin's observation, "We do not stop playing because we grow old. We grow old because we stop playing".

## The Journey

- Day 1** Walsham le Willows to Risby
- Day 2** Risby to Clare
- Day 3** Clare to Sudbury
- Day 4** Sudbury to Ipswich
- Day 5** Ipswich to Grundisburgh
- Day 6** Grundisburgh to Blaxhall
- Day 7** Blaxhall to Blythburgh
- Day 8** Blythburgh to Bungay
- Day 9** Bungay to Billingford
- Day 10** Billingford to Walsham le Willows

## **Day 1 (Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> April 2015)**

It seemed appropriate somehow that I should replace the elastic band securing my left trouser leg, with the single cycle clip given to me by Neville Ellis. He was one of a number of young Walsham men who volunteered to help build the Village Hall in the 1950s as a memorial to those men of the village who died in the war. The second cycle clip of the original pair is long lost, so I reverted to normal practice and tucked the second trouser leg inside my sock. Thus organised and already generously sponsored in support of Phase 4 of the complete refurbishment of the Hall, I prepared to leave. I secured the Post Office's dated stamp in my cycle route passport, enjoyed a mug of coffee and slice of apple cake at the Coffee Shop which Community Council runs alongside the twice weekly Post Office.

### **Apple Cake from Queen's Head, Hawkedon, Suffolk**

200g (7oz) melted butter	250g (9oz) Demerara sugar
(9oz) raisins	250g
375g (11oz) self raising flour	2 eggs, whisked
1 teaspoon cinnamon	250g (9oz) apple
Demerara for top sprinkling	Milk to loosen the mix

You can use a 9" round baking tin to produce quite a deep, thick cake or an 11" square tin. Line the tin to enable easy lift-out after baking.

#### **Method:**

1. Peel and chop the apples
2. Mix all the dry ingredients
3. Add apples, then butter, then egg
4. 'Loosen' with milk
5. Bake 1½ hours Gas Mark 3, 170 deg C

Nice served warm with extra stewed apple and cream!!

## On my way ..

Leaving **Walsham le Willows** via West Street and Posters Lane, I am keenly aware of a sense of history, for the lane is described in Sir Nicholas Bacon's 1577 survey as the "Quenes High Waye leading unto Thetford". Today it is a wide green lane with large ash trees and massive, coppiced boles of hazel around the expansive junction with Colmere Lane to the west of Potash Farm. This ancient highway was inaccessible to the public for many years after the war but was reopened as a byway following a successful Public Enquiry in the late 1990s.

**Bardwell** is a compact village held within its square of roads, encompassing church, a working windmill, Post Office and The Dun Cow Inn but with a string of vernacular cottages and farmsteads leading south towards Ixworth following the line of the River Blackbourne, which shares its name with Blackbourne Hundred, an administrative area dating back to Saxon times and abolished in the Local Government Review of the 1970s.



*Bardwell Mill with the church in the distance*

**Sapiston** is a village of very different halves. The main street is lined with mostly modern houses and bungalows, their gardens pretty with spring flowers, while three quarters of a mile to the south, along a private track, lies a triangular village green yellow with daffodils and overlooked by three large properties, the redundant church and the remains of a derelict mill. Between the two, rabbits have established an extensive warren amid the brightest of gorse bushes above carpets of blue ground ivy, quite beautiful. Elsewhere verges are thick with the fresh green of burgeoning cow parsley, and made colourful by dense patches of celandine, clumps of purple and of white dead nettle hovered over by the occasional bee. Outside the village, is a pair of cottages built of grey and black flint with a random admixture of red brick and sporting black glazed tiled roofs. *'The plural of roof for people old enough to read the Oxford Dictionary of the English Language, in fact old enough to know that the real Napoleon was not dynamite or a brandy.'* (Taken from the Urban Dictionary) These two dwellings have been converted to a single house with a new extension, conservatory and garage. The land behind, now landscaped with lawns and borders was, no doubt, once a well husbanded garden of fruit and vegetables to supplement the meagre wages of farm workers. Further on, an extensive range of brick and tile farm buildings has been converted into bijoux residences: The Dairy, The Hayloft, and The Granary. It's not much by which to recognise a forgotten way of life.

Just across the river, we enter the neat village of **Honington** set about a rectangle of roads and birthplace of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century poet, Robert Bloomfield, who wrote the immortal poem 'The Farmer's Boy' while working, with his brother George, as a shoemaker in London. It has been said of him that "he can reveal chapters of rustic truth and pastoral triumph previously unimparted".

*"The plough moves heavily, and strong the soil,*

*And clogging harrows with augmented toil*

*Drive deep: and clinging, mixes with the mould*

*A fat'ning treasure from the nightly fold."*

(Light lands benefitted from cattle dung. How the way of life has changed!)

The joy of cycling along quiet country lanes is the excitement of the unexpected, for, between **Troston** and **Livermere** I had to stop, watch and listen to a symphony of sweet sound as a skylark rose to soar into the sky before becoming invisible in a pale blue ceiling.

**Little Livermere** Park, built in the time of Charles II, was demolished in 1923. The village is still recognisable in crop marks but the church is abandoned. **Great Livermere** however, has attracted considerable new building; its thatched church and traditional buildings giving it a sense of long standing and a picturesque backdrop for skaters on the mere when we next experience a long hard winter.

Today's 'spectacular' was seen in Great Livermere Church Road where, in the deepest of leaf litter against a flint wall, a small speckled hen scratched vigorously for food, all the time clucking to her brood of eleven fluffy chicks which were but a few days old. Here the antithesis of today's farming which is repeated across the land every few miles: corrugated iron shelters for many hundreds of pigs, the smell of their dung heavy in the air, the large number of road-kill carcasses proof of the attraction of these intensive feeding grounds for rats.

Road repairs force a detour from my planned route but I am amply rewarded as I enter **Fornham St Martin** with the sight and unrehearsed raucous cacophony of rooks. In one small area is a collection of over 100 very untidy nests and a road generously splattered with bird lime. In the Three Kings pub at **Fornham All Saints**, such ideas of dishevelled pandemonium were replaced by couples of mature age, smartly dressed in crisp white blouses or shirts under shiny black suits. On leaving, they

wrestled to find cigarettes in their unfamiliar clothing and one man spent time changing his black and white trainers for immaculate black patent leather shoes. Why this charade, this conventional dressing up for a funeral? Who is it for? Certainly not the deceased!

My way from Fornham All Saints is along Mere Lane, which starts beside a small pond of clear water with spreads of daffodils across the grass fronting a low, thatched, thoroughly English cottage called Twitchetts End. I head into a stiff westerly breeze between field after field of fine brown soil neatly ridged with newly planted potatoes. A solitary field of wheat produced another symphony of sound, a skylark so wonderful to hear along this quiet lane. As I approach **Risby**, I become aware of the relentless thrum of traffic on the A14, and wonder how I will sleep at The White Horse Inn which sits close by the busy dual carriageway. Once in the village itself, sheltered by buildings, flint walls and hedges, a large clutch of sparrows tweet merrily, reminding me of their noisy assault from lilac bushes outside my boyhood bedroom window. The village sits high in a landscape of light soils overlying rolling chalk lands parcelled up between belts of coniferous trees. There is no surprise at the ponds situated by the greens which give the village such an open aspect, but it's a bit early for one of them to be dry already. One wonders how, in times past, new settlers coped in such an exposed dry landscape. Ekwall's study of place names evidenced in his Dictionary of Place Names, suggests that Risby, Ashby and Barnby, being Danish names, were late infill settlements following the Danish Interruption of 869-917AD.

## Day 2

I sit in the garden of Risby's White Horse Inn to write this at the start of another day, assailed by the thunderous noise of traffic on the A14 road below. Yet, above it all, there is the piping chant of birds and the cooing of doves.

I emerge onto a wide straight carriageway with barely visible white-linings of the once busy A45, now a mere slip-road from its new neighbour, and home to Symonds Farm Greenways Recycling; the massive complex of Derek Cooper Transport; a small-holding with pigs, goats and poultry; and a plant nursery; all, leaving a small thatched cottage almost unnoticed! But two bridges, one over the A14, the other over the railway, and I am in a narrow lane overlooking rolling country where trees, still dark and bare from winter hibernation, mix with new acid, yellowy greens and the darker evergreen conifers which dominate on these light soils, almost white from the underlying chalk where freshly cultivated.

The village of **Barrow** sits high on these chalk lands at about 100 metres and may explain the presence of three large ponds, maybe more. Although the village was granted the right to hold a market sometime in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, nothing seems to have come of it. The close proximity of Bury, and St Edmund's Abbey, was obviously a huge discouragement. Later traders identified in White's 1844 Directory intrigue me: Joseph Woods – Carpenter, John Crown – Hatter, William Death – Baker and Confectioner, Charles Bird – Carrier. Today it is a large and growing village with pub, shops, Rumbles Fish Bar, a developing estate of houses by Hopkins Homes, and yet its church and burial grounds are nearly a mile away near Hall Farm, the one-time focus of the village perhaps. Failing to find the Post Office where I hope to get my 'passport' signed, I am directed back to an 'out-of-village' development in a huge barn at Hall Farm, where the Post Office now shares space with a Coffee Shop, Hall & Sworder Estate Agents, and Forelock & Load operating a Countryside Sports Enterprise: the changing face of rural England!

I am now following ROUTE 51, a designated minor road recommended for cyclists but sounding like an American Highway! **Hargrave, Chevington** and **Chedburgh** are unremarkable other than being situated high above deepish, steepish sided valleys, which necessitate short periods of walking. Names tell a story however; Tan Office Green and its adjacent Factory Lane seem out of place in a quiet village, and the attractive Gibbons Farm is no more, having sold out to house builders who have named their development Gibbons End. Indeed!! At Chedburgh I cross the busy A143 where the onetime Vandos Farm has industrial sites to let. Elsewhere is YARA U.K, Strain Measurement Devices, a Volvo Truck and Van dealership, Focus Used Cars, all close to Brocket Park, site of '34 superb new dwellings' now being constructed.



*The Plough Inn, Rede*

Back on country lanes, I approach the village of **Rede** where Suffolk Punches are treasured at Rede Hall, and The Plough Inn offers excellent food in idyllic surroundings at the far end of a village green where only the drone of light aircraft, cooing of doves, the rasping cackle of a pheasant

and other general bird noises are apparent on this, the hottest day of the year. The building itself is colour washed plaster over an ancient timber frame beneath a roof partly pantiled and part thatch. Ken Stockton is here to meet me, to check up on me and my machine! We enjoyed a dish of deep-fried whitebait on a watercress salad, oh, and a glass of Adnams Southwold Bitter!

I negotiate another river valley on my way to **Hawkedon** and the church confirms my experience, for it is one of several parishes forming 'The Suffolk Heights Benefice', all of them being over 100 metres above sea level. The church sits centrally in a village green, with one-time farms and cottages around its flanks. It is a pretty place with strinklings of cowslips everywhere and no vehicles to disturb the peace. Inside, the building has a formidable variety of 15<sup>th</sup> century pew end carvings.



*Both sides of a pew end at Hawkedon*



*and both sides of a Choir Stall*

Here too is another country pub, The Queens Head, where Monty Duke serves excellent food from Wednesdays through to Sundays and, on Friday and Saturday mornings, offers the passing public a chance to purchase supplies of his grass-fed beef; Large Black Pig pork, ham and bacon; venison and game; as well as homemade pies, casseroles, curries and soups.

My last river valley of the day has the doubtful honour of splitting **Stansfield** village into two. Plough Hill to the north has church, manor and a derelict windmill, while High Street to the south has the Compasses Inn and becomes Upper Street as you climb further to gain the high ground. Here, at Shadowbush Farm **Poslingford**, you get a panoramic view of the Stour Valley and a freewheeling ride downhill for two miles or more, the road narrowing where cottages on both sides give an intimate feel to the place. From here, easy cycling brings you into the small town of **Clare**; some would say that it is 'untouched'. I know what they mean, but the town offers a complete history of our country through successive eras of change. A compact, friendly, small town, Clare is dominated by the impressive church at its centre. Norman Scarfe in 'The Suffolk Landscape' comments "*No other building gives so much to the street scene, the townscape of Clare as its church.*" The town was a formidably rich and powerful administrative centre under the de Clare family. Richard was Chief Justice and confidant of William the Conqueror and in time the town

became the centre of a huge, if scattered, estate of over 170 Lordships in Suffolk, Essex, Kent, Sussex and Ireland. Two members of the family were directly involved in the signing of Magna Carta and the sites of Clare Camp and Clare Castle attest to the Family's influence. The town was home to Benedictine Monks and Augustinian Canons, becoming very important in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries for the production of Suffolk broadcloth. The Norman market place between the church and castle by the river, together with the Old English market place on the north side of the church, have both been subject to infill.



The Compton Census of 1676 which followed the restoration of the Church of England in 1660 after the early years of Puritan rule, records the depth of non-conformity to the established religion with as many as 300 in Clare alone. Toleration of these Dissenters did not come until 1689. Making the River Stour navigable as far as Sudbury in 1709 was followed by the decline of both rope and candle making businesses, while the arrival of the railway in 1865 led to the decline of the livestock and produce market. Then, in 1913, the commercial Corn Hall was replaced with the new civic Town Hall.



*Pargetting & brickwork in Clare*

Of the businesses lining High Street and Church Street, an old fashioned but comprehensively stocked shop under its 19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> century name board HUDGIES IRONMONGER OIL & COLOURMAN, sits amid antique shops, small boutiques, bookshops, hairstylists, health therapists, English cafes and Indian restaurants like 'The Cardamom'.



The small Market Hill of today is a designated car parking area containing the 1914-18 War Memorial which has 38 names inscribed, including five of the Bareham family and three of the Martin family.



Elsewhere, the inner bailey of Clare Castle, which became the railway station, has been made into a Country Park. For those who feel that Clare is a pretty, 'unspoilt', 'unchanged' town in this 21<sup>st</sup> century, the clues to its multi-layered history abound.

### Day 3

Leaving Clare, I cross into Essex and find **Pentlow** and **Foxearth**. An uneventful journey being notable only for cooler temperatures than yesterday, and gentle easterly breezes following the overnight passage southwards of a cold front weather system. From its days of relentless rain in the north, it has degenerated to a narrow band of an infinite number of soft pillows of cloud – altocumulus – lying over north Essex. Approaching **Sudbury**, I pick Cycle Route 13 and follow the Stour Valley Trail along the track of the railway, built in 1865, which so changed the economic fortunes of Clare and which Dr Beeching axed with many another in the 1970s. It offers a metre wide unmetalled track between mature hawthorn bushes, briar rose, blackthorn, elder, ash trees, an occasional small oak and a noisy profusion of birdsong above fast growing nettles and cow parsley. Suddenly I find myself wheeling into a huge car park with people, pushchairs, cars and one-way systems to negotiate. Ugh, urban life! Away from the central street market, there are some fine buildings but I cannot appreciate them in the melee of traffic, despite detailed information brochures. These barely mention the Sudbury Commons Trust which manages the beautiful Stour Valley Water Meadows.



These include Freeman’s Great Common, gifted by the de Clare family in the 1300s and still grazed traditionally, while the Great Fullingpit Meadow is associated with the medieval woollen cloth industry. How fortunate that my room for the night has unbroken views of the whole area. Interestingly, Charles Dickens’ exposure of electoral corruption in Eatanswill is a thinly disguised reference to Sudbury after his visit of 1834.



***‘The Election at Eatanswill’ by Phiz (Hablot K. Browne)***

**Scanned by Philip V. Allingham and taken from  
victorianweb.com**

## Day 4

Oh to be clear of Sudbury! The Bures road, B1508, went on forever, vehicles desperate to overtake until I saw the line of walking giants carrying power across the land and knew that a left turn would mean a steep climb to Workhouse Green and the winding lanes towards **Stoke by Nayland**. Much of the climb had to be walked but rich rewards were on hand, not least sparrows in the hedgerow to accompany my slow progress. I am approaching the Sudbury communications transmitter when patches of white on the roadside verges catch my eye.



Not instantly recognising them, I cycle on only to find that they proliferate and demand closer examination. The deeply cut, fernlike leaf is the giveaway of the wood anemone on the verges, shoulders of ditches, and deep in the ditches themselves where there is a good thickness of debris. There were even two other patches of a pinky mauve colour too. Manoeuvring myself to take photographs as instructed by 'she who must be obeyed', I find thick clumps of purple violets. I am so astonished at the sight which continues to Stantons Farm, that the ubiquitous primroses were half forgotten.



Approaching Stoke by Nayland from the north, one is aware of acre upon acre of twenty five to thirty feet high poles, erected in serried lines across the fields, so reminiscent of the hop yards of Worcestershire and Herefordshire. Here, they are covered in net to protect the fruit trees of the Boxford Fruit Farm and Copella. What a massive investment over this huge area. The provision of employment in this intensive system must be much greater than in comparable acreages of cereals.

Fortunately Stoke by Nayland has retained its Post Office within a smart provisions shop and I am able to get my 'passport' stamped. On the opposite side of the road, The Crown Inn offers an excellent venue for lunch and an opportunity to meet up with more friends who have come to check on my progress and effect a laundry change!

The village is a most desirable place to live and, in addition to the 4 star Crown Inn, boasts another 4 star inn, The Angel, just across the road. This must reflect, in part, the area's association with the wool trade from medieval times. In a Muster Roll for 1522, which survives for Babergh Hundred only, the numbers of wool trade workers are recorded. In Boxford there were sixty, mainly weavers, while Lavenham and Nayland had mostly clothiers, thirty four and fourteen respectively. Parishes had specialisms – Long Melford more fullers than elsewhere, Nayland more shearmen, although all were linked and dependent upon each other. How fortunate when the wool trade went into decline that so many of its timber framed buildings survived to become the very desirable residences of today.

I leave Stoke by Nayland along Scotland Street, a lane which twists and turns steeply into the valley of the River Box with all manner of individual and beautiful properties hugging its flanks. To gain the higher ground and the lanes which snake towards the Brett River crossing at **Shelley**, I must walk again, but not for long, and am soon taking a picture of the timber framed Chapel House in this so peaceful valley.



Wades Lane, Raydon, and Lower Barn Road, Chattisham, are a delight for the ever changing scene and the unexpected surprise, like the mass of golden marsh marigolds in the swampy sides of the Hintlesham Brook.



As I climb out of the valley I hear again the roar of traffic and know that I am approaching **Ipswich**.

## Day 5

Bypassing Ipswich has been much less of a problem than I imagined; an overnight stay with son Nic and his family on the outskirts of Ipswich and the earlier reconnaissance by car helped to ensure that I knew where I was going. Apart from the noise and the frantic rush of traffic, the harsh changing of gears as vehicles made their frustrated way past this slow moving antiquity, the nature of the urban/rural fringe interested me. No expansive, well ordered farming landscape here. Lanes wind between overgrown hedges, rough semi-derelict patches of land awaiting development perhaps, bare meadows tape-divided into individual paddocks for ponies, chaotic collections of tin sheds, abandoned caravans and whitewashed breeze block tack rooms beside an old cottage now swamped by an extension sporting diamond paned windows and flood lighting mounted in the garden. It is an area blighted by the construction of the A14 highway, some lanes now dead ends and my route now a rat-run around the north of the town marked by frequent 'car crafted' passing places.

**Westerfield** and **Tuddenham** villages soon follow with the latter providing a fine lunchtime break at The Fountain Inn. This old village 'beer' pub has been tastefully and comfortably extended for its 21<sup>st</sup> century clientele. My filled baguette with slow roasted salt beef, pickled cabbage, and side salad was absolutely delicious. It was on a par with yesterday's lunch at The Crown in Stoke by Nayland where I met Friday's usual 'domino crowd', relocated for the day from The Dog at Norton. 'Flat iron' steaks had proved excellent, my choice of mussels could not have been better, and beer-battered haddock was pronounced to be very good. In fact the whole week is becoming something of a gastronomic tour having started with my lunch of whitebait on a bed of watercress at The Plough Inn, Rede.

My short day, after yesterday's marathon of 29 miles, passes through the village of **Culpho**, a tiny parish with a tiny church, St Botolph's, having only 31 tombstones in the surrounding churchyard. The place is cared for, certainly not redundant; there are monthly services, lamps for floodlighting and a bench on which I sat to make notes of my journey. Yet, aside from Culpho Manor, along the road to **Grundisburgh**, there

are but five properties within my radial view. What is it that manages still, to hold us in some sort of awe of these ancient buildings, traditions, beliefs, in this age of universal knowledge and of scientific and economic, rather than religious, understanding? The fervour which fed peoples' lives in the past, as when John Thompson built Grundisburgh Baptist Chapel at the top of Meeting Lane, in 1798, with seats for 1,000 people drawn from 36 parishes, is now focussed on alternative idols.

## Day 6

A hugely satisfying day started outside The Dog in Grundisburgh, with the arrival of son Nic and his cycle to join me for the route to Orford. Rather than follow the roads through the centre of **Woodbridge**, he took me to the **Tide Mill** with its expansive views across the Deben estuary where shelduck, oyster catchers, and other waders held our interest for ages. Immediately opposite, at the top of the steep wooded sides of the estuary was a large hump, part of the Sutton Hoo site where an Anglo Saxon ship burial was excavated by Basil Brown in the 1930s. Moored all the way beside our pathway were boats of all shapes and sizes, some lived in, some just rotting hulks disappearing into the mud. Emerging onto the road at Wilford Bridge, we have a stiff climb to reach the road across Sutton Heath, unerringly straight, singularly unexciting for the dominance of conifers and heath but enlivened here and there by bold bushes of golden gorse.



We find Paul Thompson's Millennium Man at **Capel St Andrew**, and from there the rough track which leads to Butley Ferry, past reed filled dykes

to the steep sided banks of earth which are the 'river wall' and designed to prevent flooding.



The small row boat held us and our two cycles while, it seemed, Charon ferried us across The Styx to **Gedney** and the short ride to **Orford** once we had pushed our bikes along about a mile of track, so sandy that it refused to allow our pedals to push our wheels around. This small town was made famous in the 1160s when Henry II built Orford Castle to counter the ambitions of Hugh Bigod, Earl of Suffolk, who was based at Bungay. Between the castle and the church, a market place and town grew, where, today, The Pump Street Bakery produces beautiful breads and pastries and serves excellent lunches of soups and light savoury snacks. It was here that Nic and I met up with the rest of his family: fortunately they were inside when I was too slow getting off my cycle and fell to the ground instead of making the usual dismount. No harm done!

The whole of this area has very light soils where fruit farms, the growing of lawn turf and the cultivation of potatoes under seas of plastic fleece predominate. George Crabbe summed up the early poverty of these sandy heathlands:

*"Lo! Where the heath with withering brake grown o'er  
Lends the light turf that warms the heighbouring poor.*

*There poppies, nodding, mock the hope of toil  
There the blue bugloss paints the sterile soil."*

Yet, where the land failed, the sea provided, until shifting shingle banks, silting up with mud and the increase in the size of ships led to commercial decline. The merchants' houses remain and tourists are attracted to this pretty town with interesting places where you can spend your money. The pattern of farming under irrigation continues towards Snape Maltings with the pleasant surprise in **Iken** of colourful Lincoln Red cattle grazing in rich meadows divided by ditches lined with my favourite tree, the alder.

A boat burial on the heath, 800 yards east of **Snape** church, was excavated in the 1860s. The discovery was of a 50 foot boat which had been hauled up from the estuary in the early 600s and buried in a group of barrows. These were themselves plundered in the 1820a by two carriages of Londoners, and virtually destroyed by them. The occupant of the boat was assumed to be the chief of a tribe called Becclingas, meaning Beccle's people, and a small estate called Becclinga is recorded here in the Domesday Book.

Nowadays Snape is famous for its iconic concert hall created out of the complex of derelict industrial maltings beside the River Alde, by Benjamin Britten, and overlooking the beautiful desolation of the marshy Alde Estuary.





After a brief stop at Snape to photograph the Maltings complex, some regenerated, some still awaiting the developer as they moulder, I travel on to The Ship Inn at **Blaxhall** and enjoy an hour of folk music for free. Singers and musicians, fiddle, pipe, guitar and accordion, were meeting there this Sunday. Here was a wonderful atmosphere in the packed bars as traditional songs and music were aided by full audience participation.

Dating back to the year 1700 The Ship Inn, it is said, was originally to be called 'The Sheep Inn'; but the sign writer misunderstood the broad Suffolk dialect and, by the time the mistake was noticed, it was too late! This is one of the oldest Folk Music pubs in East Anglia, possibly in the whole country, is their proud boast. It features in many local tales, a few songs, and in George Ewart Evans' famous book about rural life 'Ask the fellows who cut the hay', a constant on my bookshelves since the 1970s. Just Google 'Blaxhall Ship' and, apparently, you will find a wealth of information, or so the more technology minded members of my family tell me!

One hundred yards away the Youth Hostel offers accommodation with the promise of Full English Breakfast from 7.30 a.m. Whether we are required to take part in domestic chores before we leave, as of old, I shall discover.

As it happened, the facilities were good, comfortable, clean and bright and included dormitories, lounge, dining room, self catering kitchen, showers, a drying room and, most importantly for me, a cycle lock-up! My only morning chore was to strip my bed and put the linen in a laundry basket in the main hall.

## Day 7

This coastal part of Suffolk is often referred to as 'The Sandlings' and is characterised by heath and coniferous forests planted by the Forestry Commission in response to timber shortages in time of war. Within this are richer areas of farmland and woodland together with damp, sometimes waterlogged, valley lowlands, each very distinctive. The valleys are a mixture of good grazing, of rough unused areas of alder trees and extensive reed beds. Where better soils occur, traditional cereal farming returns with areas of woodland supporting a rich birdlife as between **Friston** and **Knodishall** and where primroses and violets pepper the roadside verges. Above all though, the area is remembered for heaths and woodland and Jon and I enjoyed them at their best between **Eastbridge** and **Dunwich** travelling only 300 yards by road! Quiet sandy, stony, muddy tracks took us through ancient woodlands of oak and birch and then across gorse covered heath, the air richly vanilla'd in a warm sun. My usual difficulty with a camera prompted Jon to be cameraman and stuntman combined as he took shots of me travelling behind him, logs on the path and trees near the edges miraculously avoided with hoots of laughter – the joys of a second day of cycling in the company of my other son!





*Coming .. and .. going!*



*Leiston Abbey en route to Eastbridge*

From these capers, we arrive on the road to Dunwich Church and approach what there is of the hamlet of **Dunwich**, conscious that prior to a storm surge in 1328 it was once a great seaport rivalling Ipswich and supplying ships for England's wars with France. It was also an important medieval centre for both church and state having nine parish churches and holding markets each day of the week. Nowadays Flora Tearooms, the Dunwich Café, sits on the quayside of the old town with its houses, roads, public buildings, religious houses and many churches and graveyards a third of a mile out under the waves of the North Sea. Swinburne's poem evokes the destruction wreaked by that storm.

*“Naked, shamed, cast out of consecration,  
Corpse and coffin, yea the very graves,  
Scoffed at, scattered, shaken from their station,  
Spurned and scourged of wind and sea like slaves,  
Desolate beyond man's desolation,  
Shrink and sink into the waste of waves.  
Rows on rows and line by line they crumble,  
They that thought for all time through to be.”*

Today a cool breeze tempered the sun but an excellent lunch of fish and chips with Maggie, who was responsible for over-landing Jon and his cycle, and in the company of good friends Ann and David Daniels, made for a warmly memorable occasion.



Later, as I sit in the garden of **Blythburgh**'s White Hart Inn, looking across the quiet beauty of the expansive estuary to woodland and meadows, listening to the slap of table umbrellas and the call of birds on the water which laps the edge of the garden as the tide begins to recede, I realise how fortunate I am. My overnight accommodation with Mr and Mrs Sutton in The Old Custom House was immaculate and my supper of smoked haddock fishcakes, across the road in The White Hart, was quite delicious, enjoyed in this old, spacious, timber framed building with massive open hearths beneath huge bressemer beams. No visitor to Blythburgh can ignore its magnificent 15<sup>th</sup> century church and the lofty simplicity of its whitewashed interior full of light from so much glass. For me, viewing the exterior of this stunning architectural achievement in flint and glass, standing high across the emptiness of the estuary, is the most powerful and uplifting experience, fully deserving the title 'Cathedral of the Marsh'. Flint is such a difficult material with which to construct buildings, yet the work of 15<sup>th</sup> century craftsmen and engineers still stands in glorious testimony of their skill, despite a calamitous lightning storm on Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> August 1577 which, it is said, left two people dead, a man of 40 and a boy, and others scorched and grovelling on the floor.



*Blythburgh Holy Trinity Church*

## Day 8

Many will have visited Woottens Nurseries at **Wenhaston** yet not know that the village Post Office is a purpose built feature inside the Village Hall and open every morning. They are planning to open a Coffee Shop in May and are wondering what to do with a large and unwanted stage! At the far end of the village there is a raised section of the road for about four yards, a newish house called 'Railway Corner' and, close by, three cottages have a wallplate under the eaves which reads 'Railway Terrace 1881'. So where is the Halesworth to Southwold branch railway?

At **Mells** there is a very English scene where a small bridge carries the lane over the River Blyth. On the corner a small cottage, then, stretching away are the water meadows, sheep resting under the delicate greening of willow trees and the dense brown/black of clumps of alders. Skirting past Halesworth towards Bungay I find the Triple Plea Inn with its wonderful pictorial sign. An old man lies on his sick bed, a fearsome devil draped in red hovers behind him, while a Doctor, Clergyman and Lawyer seem to dispute papers which are strewn about – the old man's last wishes perhaps. I just hope there is nothing prophetic in my taking such a close interest in an inn sign!



My route is now a recommended cycle route which runs pretty well parallel with the main A144, itself a Roman Road. These two roads, together with long stretches of footpaths and straight field boundaries

produce a very distinctive, elongated landscape clearly aligned north south. Even the parishes themselves, Ilketshall St Andrew for example, are long and thin. This could suggest that the Anglo Saxons, led by the Ilketel family, who were Earls of East Anglia, took over a landscape already marked out by their Roman predecessors. Whatever, it is a landscape of large scattered farms, cottages, and, still, large areas of common now recognised as important areas of nature conservation and from which you get wonderful views across the broad uplands. It is an ancient, quiet landscape, rapidly adapting to the demands of modern agri-business where field boundaries are vanishing for the greater convenience of the combine harvester. Others diversify with B&B, convert unwanted buildings to holiday lets, invest in Yurts to hire.



*Two faces of farming*

Yet every so often one comes across ditch banks full of primroses, an ancient tree pollard, the flight of a kestrel, a skylark singing a silken canopy over my head. Passing Mettingham Castle, I soon find myself helter skeltering down Annis Hill, a narrow twisting ravine of a lane, before erupting onto the busy roads of **Bungay**. Here, I enjoy a late lunch/early tea at the Earsham Street Café where I savour an incredible Stilton, Cheddar and Sesame Seed Cracker with a crumbly crunch and huge depth of flavour. Sadly, their recipe is a state secret, but this one may work just as well. Why not try it!

### **Stilton, Cheddar and Sesame Seed Biscuits**

Mix together 6 oz plain flour, ½ teaspoon English mustard powder, ½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper, 1 teaspoon of thyme, 4 oz grated, mature Cheddar Cheese, 2 oz crumbled Blue Stilton. Add 6 oz softened butter and work into the mixture with warm hands until well combined. Add one large egg yolk and mix to form a dough. Divide the dough in half, rolling each half to about the thickness of a Christmas cracker, roll in sesame seeds, cover with cling film and chill for about an hour. Grease a baking sheet and preheat the oven to Gas Mark 4/180C. Slice the chilled sausages of dough into rings about 6mm thick, sprinkle with sesame seeds and bake for 10 minutes or until golden brown. Let the biscuits rest on the tray for a minute or two before removing onto a rack with a palette knife to cool completely. Can be frozen or stored in an airtight container for 2 or 3 days, unless eaten before then!

## Day 9

Encountering Bungay on the way to somewhere else, you may feel content not to stop. Those who dare to turn off the bypass and linger, will find a very genuine town with a wide range of independent shops including, in Earsham Street, a number of upmarket businesses lending an air of developing, but not extravagant, chic .. and the pawnbrokers!!



The old town is a delightful jumble of properties, tracks, paths and winding streets giving a feeling of intimacy amid the air of faded Georgian grandeur. The history of the town is well documented from the building of the castle by the powerful Bigod family, forebears of the Dukes of Norfolk, to the dreadful events associated with Black Shuck, a huge beast which ran down the nave of St Mary's Church during a lightning storm which struck the tower and killed two men on Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> August 1577. Is this the same storm which hit Blythburgh? It was certainly the same day and same year! A nearby lead panel commemorates the event like this:

*“All down the church in midst of fire*

*The hellish monster flew*

*And passing towards the Quire*

*He many people slew.”*

There are guided trails which explore the town including the castle and the beautiful water meadows along the River Waveney, which flows in a huge protective horseshoe loop, giving rise to the town's name in ancient times of 'Le-Bon-Eye' or good island, being surrounded by water on three sides.

The town is now bypassed by a fast new road, using the redundant railway line to Harleston, which has allowed the old A143 to become a quiet backwater and ideal for Cycle Route 30. It hugs the edge of the Waveney Valley closely and is a delight to follow. Here is a watery landscape of a slow flowing river meandering gently across meadows overseen by swans in winter and grazed by cattle in summer. Ditches are lined with willow and alder trees and the valley sides are flecked with groups of red brick buildings of the small holdings which produced milk, butter and cheese in the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries but of which many now lie idle.

At Low Farm, **Denton**, the impressive farmhouse, its yards and buildings seem in turmoil with the near stampede of young animals, the blare of cattle, raised voices of adults, the closure of a gate here, the opening of another and the eventual controlled passage of young heifers across the road to spring grazing by the river, where they gambolled and kicked their hind legs in their excited freedom from overwintering in yards. I helped by standing with my cycle across the crown of the road. “Wave your arms as well”, shouted the eighty year old Great Grandmother as she hustled to ensure a safe crossing for everyone, and I am reliving the identical experiences from my schoolboy youth. Sadly, this family no longer keeps a milking herd, shut down by the supermarkets' ridiculous squeeze on price. They have adapted their enterprise by utilizing their many acres of water meadows as a specialist nursery for up to 300 in calf heifers before they join milking herds elsewhere.

Other history has been made at **Homersfield** where the first British wrought iron bridge encased in concrete was opened in 1870. When restoration work was completed in 1990, the seven administrative divisions which meet in the centre of the bridge required seven ribbons and seven pairs of scissors for the official opening ceremony.

So beautiful and so environmentally important is this area that a Waveney Valley Trust has been set up to protect it and the former Otter Trust at Earsham is now a Waveney Valley Study Centre. The area fails to get the publicity of The Stour Valley and Constable Country yet, to my mind, the Waveney Valley is a far superior place, perhaps because it has yet to be 'found'!

The Bell Inn at Wortwell has been found, the extended and nicely refurbished building offering comfortable accommodation and affordable eating under the caring eye of Adnams Brewery. It was here that three good Walsham friends caught up with me for a most pleasant midday break before telling me to "Clear off and get the challenge completed"! So, on I go to **Billingsford**.

## Day 10

I ordered a 7.30 am breakfast at my overnight stay, The Horseshoes at Billingford, to guarantee an early start. There is a change in the weather; it is cloudy, cooler with the promise of rain. I am conscious that the oilseed rape, sporting very few flowers at the start of my ride, is now in full bloom, casting its heavy, penetrating, sour acidic aroma into the air. The sense of exhilaration which has been present for the whole of my journey, is evaporating on this my last day as I realise how much enjoyment has been due to the incredibly bright dry weather and the daily support of family and friends in person or by telephone. Yes. I have mastered the basics of using a mobile phone: there are times when the grumpy old technophobe has to shut up and get on with life as it is. That means being careful on the cycle for both rear brake cables have now ruptured; no more helter skeltering downhill! I like the open brickwork of boundary walls created by laying semi-circles of bricks one upon the other, a design which is very noticeable around **Eye**, **Brome**, **Thornham** and **Gislingham**, so I take my final photo.



There are, of course, more photos on my arrival at the Memorial Village Hall, together with the suggestion that, since this challenge has gone so well, I should consider taking my wheels around my home county of Norfolk to celebrate my next big birthday! Meantime, more coffee and cake, and sticky ginger lemon drizzle cake is pure indulgence.

## Sticky ginger lemon drizzle cake

5 oz butter cut into cubes	11oz SR Flour
1 tsp bicarbonate of soda	4 tsp ground ginger
2 tsp mixed spice	1 tsp ground cinnamon
5 oz dark muscovado sugar	5 oz black treacle
5 oz golden syrup	½ pt whole milk
1 large egg	

### FOR THE LEMON DRIZZLE

2 oz preserving sugar or crushed cubes	Zest and juice 1 lemon
	2 oz granulated sugar

### FOR THE LEMON CURD FILLING

About ½ jar good lemon curd,	2 balls stem ginger, diced
------------------------------	----------------------------

Heat oven to 160/140 fan/gas 3. Line a deep 20cm round cake tin with baking parchment. Put flour, bicarb and spices in food processor, add butter and whizz, then tip into mixing bowl.

Put sugar, treacle, golden syrup and milk in a saucepan and heat, stirring gently, till sugar has dissolved. Turn up the heat and bring to just below boiling point.

Pour the treacle mixture into the dry ingredients, stirring with a wooden spoon as you go. Beat in the egg till the mixture resembles a thick pancake batter. Pour into the prepared tin and bake for 50 mins – 1 hour until a skewer poked into the middle comes out clean. Leave to cool completely in the tin.

Split the cake through the middle. Stir lemon zest and juice into the 'drizzle' sugars and immediately spoon over the top half of the cake. Mix the lemon curd with the diced ginger and spread all over the cut side of the bottom cake. Sandwich together.

\*\*If you wish, you can also add a creamy icing on top of the lemon curd. Beat together 4 tbsp syrup from the stem ginger jar, 4 oz cream cheese, 7 fl oz double cream and 3 tbsp sieved icing sugar. \*\*

Dollop it on top of the curd before adding the top layer of cake and watch all your diet plans fly out of the window!!!

## Postscript

I have been fortunate to have had huge organisational and secretarial support from Maggie, cycling camaraderie from Jon and Nic, and the supportive interest of both my family and the friendly folk of Walsham le Willows. I have seen a good many parts of the British Isles in my lifetime and have marvelled at the variety of distinctive landscape within the compass of these islands, a variety generated by the underlying geological structure and type of rock together with a long evolving history. John Constable, who immortalised the landscape of the Stour Valley in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, commented in a lecture on the landscape:

*"It is the same that sees; the outward eyes  
Present the object, but the Mind describes."*

In another sentence he adds:

*"We see nothing till we truly understand it."*

My quiet travels have, I feel, helped me to understand a little bit more, while family, friends, villagers, have sponsored and gift aided a total of £4,228.36 for work on the Memorial Village Hall. Huge thanks to all of you.

Rob Barber (September 2015)



## **Appendix 1 Friendly & Comfortable B&Bs**

White Horse Inn, Risby, IP28 6RD, 01284810686

Walnut Tree Cottage, Clare, CO10 8QF, 01787 278 257

Mill House, Sudbury, CO10 2DS, 01787881173

Kirby Rise, Barham, family bookings only!!

Hawthorn Cottage, Grundisburgh, IP13 6UQ, 01473738199

Youth Hostel Association, Blaxhall, IP12 2EA, 08453719305

The Old Custom House, Blythburgh, IP19 9LQ, 01502478878

Bigod Holidays, Quaves Lane, Bungay, NR35 1DF, 01986892907

The Horseshoes, Billingford, IP21 4HL, 01379740414

## **Appendix 2 Good Eating**

The Plough Inn, Rede, IP29 4 BE, 01284789208

The Queen's Head, Hawkedon, IP22 4NN, 0128789218

The Cock Inn, Clare, CO10 8PX, 01787277391

The Crown, Stoke by Nayland, CO6 4SE, 01206262001

The Fountain Inn, Tuddenham, IP6 9BT, 01473785377

The Dog, Grundisburgh, IP13 6TA, 01473735267

Pump Street Bakery, Orford, IP12 2LZ, 01394459829

The Ship, Blaxhall, IP12 2DY, 01728688316

Flora Tearooms, Dunwich (Fish & Chips), IP17 3DR, 01728648433

Earsham Street Café, Bungay, NR35 1AE, 01986893103

The Bell Inn, Wortwell, IP20 0HH, 01986788025

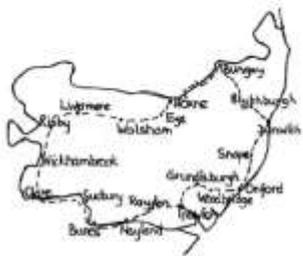
Horseshoes Inn, Billingford, IP21 4HL, 01379740414

**Appendix 3 – my cycling ‘passport’ signed at various ports of call!**

ROB BARBER, CYCLIST WAS HERE

DATE	PLACE / SIGNATURE
	EYE POST OFFICE 4 1/2 hours of hate cycling. Hope you have a good journey! <i>Caroline</i>
	Glad to see you home in one piece! Caroline, Walham Post Office.

Route of Rob Barber's  
'Into My 80s'  
Sponsored Cycle Challenge  
April 2015



SPONSORED CYCLIST ROB BARBER WAS HERE.

DATE	PLACE / SIGNATURE	DATE	PLACE / SIGNATURE
	Away at Walsingham to Wiltshire Post office.		Pump Street BAKFTY <i>Rob Barber</i>
			14 Apr 2015 <i>Rob Barber</i>
	AT BAKFTY P.O. 2nd DAY GOOD LUCK AND HAVE FUN!		BLAYFALL
	At close P/O	21/15	Welcome to Blythburgh and enjoy and rest of your journey! Katie & Toby at the shop
	Urine @ Snettisham P/O		
	Stoke by Nayland P.O. Park St GOOD LUCK to x.	22/15	Burying To Burying Snettisham N235 1HT
	MURWORTH P.O. GOOD CYCLING.		Harleston Post Office 1P20