

Manningtree Regatta: 170 years & still going strong.

The first Manningtree & Mistley 'Regatta' we know of took place 170 years ago in 1846. Large numbers came to the Town using the new railway just opened between Manningtree & Ipswich, with special trains laid on by the Eastern Union Company. These aquatic sports were promoted to get people out of their homes for a 'day of healthful and rational recreation'.

There were matches for both large and small sail boats, Skiffs and a Duck hunt (the Duck being a person pursued by boat, within a set time). It was a large and successful event for the Town, with the best sport being provided by the rivalry of five local 'Punts' that took part, with the atmosphere enhanced by the 'gay decoration of the craft with bunting and flags'.

The following year it was held on Monday the 4th September under the patronage of Sir John Tyrell and Major Beresford, the two local Members of Parliament. As well as trains, the "Gipsy" steamer left Ipswich in the morning and after calling at Harwich, arrived with nearly 500 people on board. One estimate was of 5,000 people packed all along the 'Walls'. Pavilions with Punch & Judy shows were set up and brass bands played throughout the day. Mistley Park was opened up for people to picnic under the shade of its fine old trees.

By 16th August 1873 the Regatta was being run by the Manningtree and Mistley Boat Club, set up some years before in keen competition with other rowing clubs in the area. Held on a Wednesday, £30 was raised in advance to help fund prizes for events including four oared galleys & races for crews under 16yrs. The famous Punts competed in both 'sailed' and 'rowed' classes. Later in the day came the Duck race and a 'Piggy' in the box competition. Afterwards there was entertainment by the Wivenhoe Brass band, topped off by fireworks. The racing rivalry at that time was mainly with boats and crews from Ipswich. 1873 also provides the first record of the Pittocks, another large, local family living and working down the years on the quay, as both Fishermen, Dockers and Sailors. This time one of the family coming second in the two handed Skiff class.



The Boat club were still in charge for the 1878 event on Thursday 20th July when everyone in the town was given the afternoon off to attend. There were races for yachts under six tons, sailing boats, a one mile swimming race, skiff races for men & boys, four-oared outrigger boats, ships boats and punt races for boys. On the lighter side was the shovel race, duck hunt and walking the greasy pole. The band this time was provided by the Essex Rifles Militia.

It was not all plain sailing and the 1891 event on Wednesday 15th August was a bit 'choppy', with some of the four-oar outrigger boats shipping water. There was continued rivalry with Ipswich with the Horlock family dominating all the racing events. The family were so successful they were banned by some race organizers, with the excuse that they were 'professionals'. Another of the Pittocks did try and take them on in the Punt rowing race in 'Saligot', but failed on that occasion to make a mark.

Unfortunately the Regatta on the 9th July 1893 was poorly attended due to torrential rain.

We also have records for the annual series of Regattas from 1912, with the famous local punts still going strong and providing the keenest racing. July 1914 saw the innovation of a Ladies skiff race for paired oars. Local press reports talk of these being 'Water Carnivals', with all the shops closing, bands playing and hundreds of spectators flocking to the riverside to watch. The prizes (some cash) were presented by Sir Harry Kottingham Newton, then Member of Parliament. The 'Duck' was a Jack Tar from H.M.S. Bonaventure, an old cruiser based in Harwich as a support ship to the 6th Submarine Flotilla at the outbreak of war.



By 1935 they were known as Manningtree and District 'Water sports', with Ladies still taking part in their own class of punt rowing races and more pair oared skiff racing for boats under 15 foot long. These events also included lots of swimming and novelty races. One for 'Pram' dinghies, using shovels for

oars. The events became more formal and the printed programmes record the Pittocks helping on the committee for many years.

The Stour Sailing Club was established 80 years ago this year and becomes more of the driving force, the sail racing becoming more serious with the main challenge switching to the Harwich & Dovercourt Sailing Club. The range of events was extended to include school teams in the swimming events, including relay racing, diving and a balloon race.

These continued on, apart from the period around the war when the river was declared a prohibited area and cleared of boats due to the threat of invasion. Sailing club member Jim Pittock continued the family tradition, sailing for many years in the Punt races, and with his father, supporting the annual regatta.

It is not clear when the Sunday morning 'Mud Larks' started up, covering the period when the tide was out and not much else was going on. Certainly they have taken place since the early 1970's about the time the Stour Sailing Club formally took over the running on behalf of the Town's committee. The last few years have seen more children events on the beach with races, egg and spoon and Tug-of-War, including taking on one of the adult teams.



170 years on, this year's Regatta takes place over the weekend of the 23rd & 24th of July, with the rowing festival on the 4th & 5th June.

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