



The Shotley Peninsula

A visitor's guide to Suffolk's most surprising destination

The Nancy Blackett and Arthur Ransome's East Coast

How a humble Hillyard 7-tonner became one of the most famous boats in fiction





ARTHUR RANSOME'S boat *Nancy Blackett* is a familiar sight sailing on the Orwell – the same river Ransome himself sailed her in the 1930s. He also put her, and the river itself, and Pin Mill in particular, into one of the best of his *Swallows and Amazons* books, *We Didn't Mean to Go to Sea*.

The Ransomes, Arthur and his Russian-born wife Evgenia, moved here in 1935, in search of some sea sailing after years of dinghies in the Lake District. They very much did mean to go to sea, and Arthur promptly began looking for a boat to sail. He found one in Poole Harbour, renamed her *Nancy Blackett* after the heroine of *Swallows and Amazons* and sailed her back to Pin Mill, through some atrocious weather.

It all served to inspire the book, in which *Nancy Blackett* appears as the *Goblin*, the 'little white cutter with red sails' that we meet right at the beginning, coming up the river towards Pin Mill. Her mooring is *Nancy's*, off Harry King's yard (which is still there). Her skipper, Jim Brading, is planning to have 'breakfast' (it's evening) at the Butt and Oyster pub. The four children, the 'Swallows' from *Swallows and Amazons*, who somehow end up having to sail the *Goblin* to Holland by themselves, are staying, with their mother and younger sister, at Alma Cottage, run by Miss Powell, next door.

Alma Cottage is still there, though nowadays the name is attached only to the

upper part of the terrace. In Ransome's day the whole building, formerly the Alma pub, made up Alma Cottage and Miss Powell's dining room was at the end nearest the river. There was a real Miss Powell, and her brother John, 'sailmaker and practical chandler,' worked in the lean-to, now the Pin Mill Studio, at the end.

Nancy Blackett's presence on the river now is the result of her own real-life adventure story. She was found in the 1980s, lying near-derelect in Scarborough Harbour, by a local man Mike Rines, who persuaded her owner to sell her, loaded her onto a lorry and brought her to Fox's boatyard to be restored. Later on, in 1997, the *Nancy Blackett* Trust was set up to preserve her, and make her available for anyone to sail.

Since then she has sailed to all sorts of places – including Holland, as in the book.

She's also inspired renewed interest in Ransome's connection with this area – where he set two books (the other one is *Secret Water*).

There are now Ransome-related information boards around the area, and an Arthur Ransome Trail, as part of the Stour and Orwell path, along the river, following the course of the *Goblin's* sail down the Orwell in Chapter 4 of *We Didn't Mean to Go to Sea*, from Pin Mill to the Bristol Arms at Shotley. In fact the whole area has now come to be known as Arthur Ransome's East Coast.

NANCY BLACKETT

28ft 6in long, plus the 10ft bowsprit. She's been painstakingly restored to make sure she is just as Ransome would have known her, and as the *Goblin* is described in the book.



"I say, just look down," said Titty. They looked down into the cabin of the little ship, at blue mattresses on bunks on either side, at a little table with a chart tied down on it with string... a little white sink opposite the tiny galley where a saucepan of water was simmering on one of the two burners of a little cooking stove."



FINDING OUT MORE

There are open days throughout the summer, at Woolverstone and elsewhere. Or visit her website, www.nancyblackett.org. And if you'd like to sail her yourself, why not join the *Nancy Blackett* Trust, and book a day-sail or even a trip to Holland? More details on the website, or call 01394 387907.

Arthur Ransome's photos of *Selina King*

On show at the Pin Mill Studio

IN 1938, Arthur Ransome commissioned a new yacht, *Selina King*, to be built at Harry King's boatyard in Pin Mill. And he chronicled her building and launching with a series of photos that he planned to turn into a book.

The boat, the successor to his *Nancy Blackett*, was launched in September 1938, but exactly a year later she was laid-up for the duration of World War II. By the time the war was over, Ransome's doctor advised him she would be too heavy for him to handle, and, reluctantly, he sold her.

He also abandoned the proposed book, but the photos survived, about 60 of them, black-and-white, and very small.

Last year, the Nancy Blackett Trust, in collaboration with Pin Mill photographic expert Anthony Cullen – and with a Heritage Lottery Fund grant – set out to enlarge a selection of them. From high-resolution digital scans, Anthony has cleaned up the images, and revealed the amount of information embedded in each one. The result is a stunning series of 24 images telling the story of pre-war boatbuilding at King's, through the progress of *Selina King*, in a permanent exhibition at the studio.

Anthony has also created two very large transparencies, See Through Time prints, on moveable frames which can on occasion be located at their original viewpoints to show how little Pin Mill has changed over the last 80 years.

FINDING OUT MORE

The Pin Mill Studio

t: 01473 780130

www.thepinmillstudio.com

www.nancyblackett.org



TOP: Pushing *Selina King* down the slipway at Pin Mill. **CENTRE:** one of the photos enlarged and mounted in a moveable frame by Anthony Cullen, which can occasionally be seen in situ at Pin Mill. **ABOVE:** Mrs Ransome looking out over the hard at Pin Mill from the deck of *Selina King*.



Pottering around Pin Mill

Highlights of Suffolk's most famous hamlet

WHAT I LOVE about Pin Mill is its timelessness," says Anthony Cullen, internationally acclaimed photographer and owner of The Pin Mill Studio. "It's still a working port, where barges are restored and yachts are maintained. But it's also a place where people can come and enjoy the scenery and an atmosphere that's changed little over the centuries."

The Pin Mill Studio has a commanding position above the hard, where at high tide the water laps the barges and fills the stream along the green. Inside the Studio there's a permanent exhibition of beautiful black and white photos of the boats and boatyards, taken in the 1930s by one of Pin Mill's most famous visitors, the writer Arthur Ransome. It's also the location for Photographic Day workshops run by Anthony. From his 25 years as a professional photographer he has honed the art of photography into very simple techniques, which he passes on to his students. The workshops run throughout the year and consist of instruction, practical work and imaging techniques, plus lunch in the iconic Butt and Oyster pub next door! In addition to the photography workshops there are painting workshops held throughout the year with tuition from local professional artists.

The Studio is primarily a portraiture



studio, where Anthony takes portfolio, family and commercial photographs. It is also available to hire, with facilities for up to 16 people. The building used to be a sail loft – and on the walls is an enlarged photo of Jack Powell carrying a sail up the very steps outside the Studio. Jack's sister, Miss Powell, was the landlady of *The Alma* pub next door, mentioned in Ransome's book *We Didn't Mean To Go To Sea*.

The boatyards Jack worked for are still in operation on the waterfront. The Webb brothers, of Webbs Boatyard, have restored the barge *Melissa*, in which they won the Pin Mill Sailing Club 48th Barge



Preserved in time: Jack Powell, left, carries sails up the steps outside the former sail loft, now The Pin Mill Studio and The Sunshine Store. Above, children enjoy the simple pleasures of Pin Mill. little changed a century later.

Match in 2009. This annual event starts at Buttermans Bay, downriver from Pin Mill, and is a wonderful sight as the barges head out to sea under full sail.

Harry King & Sons Ltd, who built two boats for Arthur Ransome, continues under the ownership of Gus and Sarah Curtis, and offers boat servicing and repairs, maintenance and restoration.

Continuing round the sweep of the bay, past the boatyards and holiday cottages, on the path to Woolverstone, is Pin Mill Sailing Club. As well as hosting the Barge Match, and the annual Smacks and Working Boats Race, it organises



ARTHUR RANSOME WALKING TRAIL

An Arthur Ransome Walking Trail, with leaflet, and geocache route, follows the footpath along the bank of the Orwell from Pin Mill to Shotley. There are information boards encouraging you to learn about the writer, and the area, with a glossary of sailing terms. The leaflet can be downloaded at: www.suffolkcoastandheaths.org

A series of events across the Shotley Peninsula in 2017 commemorated 50 years since the death of children's author Arthur Ransome, 80 years since his book *We Didn't Mean To Go To Sea* was published, and 20 years since the formation of The Nancy Blackett Trust.

[ArthurRansomesEastCoast](https://www.facebook.com/ArthurRansomesEastCoast)
www.geocaching.com



GETTING TO AND FROM PIN MILL

Pin Mill is a very small hamlet, with one road in and out. You are advised to park in the public pay and display car park on the left before you reach the river. If you are travelling by bus, catch the 202 running between Ipswich and Shotley, alight in Chelmondiston at the Red Lion, and walk down the road to Pin Mill.

Food and drink is available at the Butt and Oyster pub, and at The Sunshine Store (see box), or if you are self-sufficient, there are picnic tables on the green alongside the Orwell. Lovely walks along the shore connect Pin Mill with Woolverstone, and in the other direction, Shotley; and behind Pin Mill, within walking distance, is the village of Chelmondiston, with shops, butchery, Red Lion pub and restaurant, and bus route.

FINDING OUT MORE

www.sbmelissa.co.uk

The Pin Mill Studio: 01473 780130

www.thepinmillstudio.com

www.photographicday.com

www.pinmillpaintingday.com

www.thesunshinestore.co.uk

Webbs Boatyard: 01473 780291

Harry King & Sons Ltd: 01473 780258

www.kingsboatyard.co.uk

Pin Mill Sailing Club: www.pmsc.org.uk

National Trust:

www.nationaltrust.org.uk/pin-mill



THE SUNSHINE STORE

The Sunshine Store, within the Pin Mill Studio, is run by friends Cindy Sunshine (hence the name) and Neha Rippeth. They have a tempting array of homeware, gifts, handbags and jewellery and a dog-friendly café serving delicious homemade cakes and locally roasted coffee. Enjoy the view from the picturesque outdoor terrace overlooking the Orwell (blankets available in the winter) or buy an ice cream in the summer from the well-stocked 'Orla Kiele' freezer!

Details of craft workshops for all ages and abilities, including arm knitting, paper cutting and silver clay jewellery, are posted on the website. Over the winter months The Sunshine Store pops up at local Christmas gift fairs, as well as hosting in-house shopping events and wreath-making sessions.

local cruises, supports the Combined Clubs Series of races and holds an annual Regatta.

Pin Mill is also home to an eclectic community of barges and their residents. They are situated just beyond the Butt and Oyster pub, and can be viewed from the lovely Stour and Orwell Walk, part of the

Suffolk Coast Path, running through the National Trust's Cliff Plantation and on to Shotley. This stretch is also part of the six-mile Arthur Ransome Walking Trail (see box). There are also shorter circular walks in the National Trust's woods and heath land – see local signage on the footpath for details. ■