

Osea Island



Osea Island has never been within Goldhanger Parish, but as the island is less than a mile (and a pleasant dingy sail) away, and there have been many associations between the island and the village in the past, so it is appropriate including a short history of the island here. . .

Name of the Island

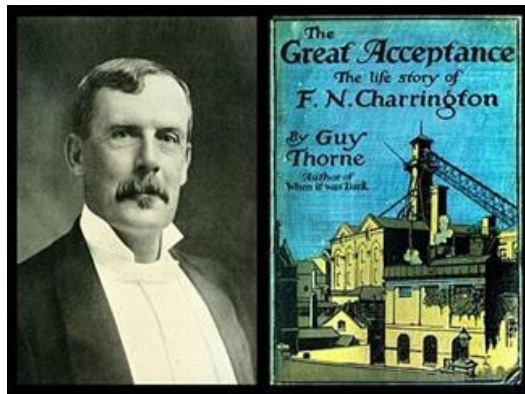
Over the centuries the island has had many names and variations of spellings, some associated with the islands Roman, Danish/Viking and Saxon past, and have included:

Uvesia, Vuesia, Osgybes ieg, Ovesey, Totham-Oveseye,
Totham-Magne-cum-Ovesem, Awsey, Oosy, St. Osyth, and Osey.

It is probably not a coincidence that it has been called St Osyth island, a name used by Daniel Defoe. The village of St Osyth, just 10 miles away by sea, was previously called Chich. A seventh century Saxon nun called Osyth was murdered there by Danes in a Viking raid for religious reasons. It is said that when the Danes were finally defeated and left, both the village of Chich and the island, then occupied by Saxons, were re-named after the beatified nun.

Owners of the Island

A total of 23 owners have been identified over the past 1000 yrs. Seventeen are identified in the biography of Mr Charrington's: *The Great Acceptance* written by Guy Thorne in 1913, which includes a very interesting chapter about Mr Charrington's involvement with the island.



Here is an extract from that chapter of the book (which is freely available on-line) describing the history of the island and its the past owners, which in turn is taken from a booklet produced by Mr Charrington in 1907 entitled: *Osea island - the new temperance seaside resort...*

In the first place, to the history of Osea. This has been compiled by his friend Mr. Rupert Scott for an excellent little publication issued by Messrs. Partridge, which is in itself a complete guide to the island.

Mr. Scott tells us that before the Norman Conquest the name of this jewel of the Blackwater was Uvesia, and later Ovesey or Osey and Osyth's island. During the reign of Edward the Confessor (1042-1066) it was owned by one Turbert, who was Lord of the district.

At the time of the Norman Conquest it was in the possession of one Hamo Dapifer, nephew to William the Conqueror. He held it as a manor, and four hides of land, and there resided on it one bordar or resident. According to the Domesday survey book (1086), there had always previously been on the island three serfs, one fisherman, and pasture for sixty sheep, and at the time of the survey belonged to the Bouchier family, afterwards created Earls of Essex; and was included in the Capital Manor, or Parish of Great Totham.

During the reign of Henry II (1154-1189), it was held by Henry Malache, from the king, as one knight's fee. This is found in a MS. Of the time of Henry VIII, viz: 'Totham Magne cum Ovesem, alias Ovesey. It is not known how this Henry Malache was related to the Bouchier family.

In the reign of Edward II (1315), the Island of Osea was owned by Gilbert de Clare, Earl of Gloucester, and then came into the possession of Bartholomew de Bouchier and his wife, who retained it from 1410-1411 under Henry VI. Its next owner was Sir Hugh Stafford, who married Elizabeth, daughter of Bartholomew, Lord Bouchier, who died in 1420, and was held 'by him as the Manor of Oveseye from King Henry V, as the Honor of Bologne, by the service of half a knight's fee.'

The island next came into the hands of one Ludovic Robbesart, and Elizabeth his wife, in 1431, during the reign of Henry V, and upon their death for the following two years was held by Anne, widow of the Earl of March. The next possessor of Ovesey Island was Henry Bouchier, created first Earl of Essex, and he held the manor of Totham-Oveseye from King Edward VI, and died in 1483.

He was followed by Anne Bouchier, Marchioness of Northampton, who brought the island to her husband under the title of 'Manor or Isle of Ovesey, with free fishery, free warren, and wrec of the sea.' She died in 1570, during Queen Elizabeth's reign. Her husband forfeited his estates for espousing the cause of Lady Jane Grey, but this Manor of Ovesey was returned to him by a letter patent from the Queen dated August 8, 1558, for his

maintenance.

On the death of Anne Bouchier, Marchioness of Northampton, this manor descended to the heir-at-law, one Walter Devereux, who was the first Earl of Essex of that name; but in order to carry on his warfare in Ireland he mortgaged and sold his estates in Essex, including 'Ovesey Island,' which was purchased by a Mr. Thomas Wiseman, of Great Waltham. Mr. Wiseman held it of Queen Elizabeth by a Knight's service. He died July 15, 1584, without issue. It then came into the possession of his two sisters, Elizabeth, wife of Richard Jennings, and Dorothy Wiseman.

Osea Island was purchased by a Mr. Charles Coe, of Maldon, but it is not known from whom, and it was still owned by him at the time of his death in 1786, and afterwards was conveyed to the Pigott family, who were evidently related to him, because on the south wall of St. Peter's Church at Maldon there is a mural monument to 'John Coe Pigott,' and dated March, 1802.

The next owner of the island known was Mrs. Pigott, who married Henry Coape, and was succeeded by his son, **Henry Coe Coape**, who, through troubles, had to make it over to his brother [in the 1700s].

Henry Coe Coape is identified as one of our past Goldhanger Authors and lived at Vaulty Manor which was and still is within the Goldhanger Parish boundary.

Seven other owners have been identified since *The Great Acceptance* was published in 1913. . .

1880s Henry Coe Coape son Henry Coape-Arnold. Both were Lords of the Manor of Goldhanger.

1903 Frederick Charrington, heir to the London brewery company (more below)

1910-26 The island was occupied by the Royal Navy (more below), but still owned by Frederick Charrington

1936 Wealthy philanthropist Major Alfred Allnatt (sold to him by the trustees of the Charrington estate) He is best known for donating Ruben's *Adoration of the Magi* to Kings College Cambridge.

1960 Michael & David Cole, founders of *Metals Research* and the *Cambridge Instruments* companies. The *Metals Research Company* was the first to grow silicon crystals, which is one of the foundations of today's digital equipment. *Cambridge Instruments* produced very high quality electronic instruments and were the first to market electron microscopes. Michael Cole's entry in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biographies quotes him as: *an inventor Michael Cole was a genius.*

1968 Cambridge University

1986 The Cole family re-purchased the island from the University

1990s The Cole family sold the island to the latest owner

A summary of activities on the island

4K BC Neolithic occupations on the island

100 AD Romans built the causeway, saltworks and pottery

800 Holmbyggja - Viking settlement & burial ground

991 Vikings warriors were probably based on the island in preparation for the *Battle of Maldon*

1086 The Domesday Book entry for the island:

Steward: Richard from Hamo, 4 hides, 1 smallholder, always 3 slaves, 1 fishery, pasture, 60 sheep, value 60s.

1700s James Wentworth Day wrote in the Daily Mail in 1977 that 24 revenue men were murdered in *Death Creek*

1722 Daniel Defoe wrote about the island in: *Tour through the Eastern Counties of England.*

1880-90s Dr Salter took Prince Nicholas, later the Tsar of Russia, shooting on the island and had lunch at The Chequers Inn.

1890s Oysters cultivated commercially in the salt marshes on the northern shore (still visible today).

1903 Frederick Charrington created and developed his *Cure for Inebriety* on the island.

1903 Mr. Charrington purchased the steam ship SS Annie to provide transport to and from Maldon

1903 on Many newspaper and magazine articles were written at home and abroad about the developments on the island, including articles in... *The Times, The Manchester Guardian, Punch, The Spectator, Country Life, Christian World, NZ Ashburton Guardian, NZ Oamaru Mail, AU Launceston Examiner, USA Indianapolis Journal*

1903 Postcards showing life the island at that time were distributed (to date seventeen have been identified)...



1904-06 Mr. Charrington developed a *menagerie* on the island that included: seals, kangaroos, parrots, and Australian swans.

1906-9 London County Council operated summer open air schools on Osea for children with learning difficulties.

1906-9 The Boys brigade held summer camps on the island. There are many photos of the 1906 activities at... www.3rdenfieldbb.co.uk/history-19001909.php#1906

1907 Mr. Charrington published a booklet entitled: Osea island - the new temperance seaside resort.

1907-9 Many advertisements appeared in the Times and the Manchester Guardian.

1907-12 Much alcohol was smuggled onto the island by local fishermen, The Chequers Inn customers and island workers.

- 1913 Seaplane trials based on the island (see Seaplane Trials below)
- 1917-26 HMS Osea (see below)
- 1919-23 Foreign Office secret missions to the Baltic using CBMs based on the island.
- 1924 Former Goldhanger curate Douglas Vale, employed by Mr Charrington as the island's hotel manager, died of alcoholism.
- 1927 Essex county council declined to purchase the island from R Charrington for use as a sanatorium.
- 1927-30 May & Butcher of Heybridge purchased the WW1 huts and moved many of them to Heybridge where they remain.
- 1934 The recently formed Rural Community Council of Essex (RCCE) started a 'reconditioning camp' on the Island to help the unemployed improve their fitness and readiness for work.
- 1936 Major Allnatt, wealthy philanthropist, formed the Society for the Promotion of Old English Pastimes and each year held a week-long 'Conventical' parties for the wealthy on Island. Tractor slaloms, mud walloping, searching for ping-pong balls buried in the mud at low tide. He also used the island for shooting and greyhound-breeding.
- 1939-45 Dummy submarines placed around island during World War-2,
The army manned Pill-boxes on the island and occupied Rivermere
A German V2 rocket exploded near the island
- 1960s While living on the island Lord Gawain Douglas wrote poetry about the island, published in his book entitled: Fortuna.
- 1981 The BBC made a half hour TV programme about the island. (see BBC TV programme below)
- 1980s The Goldhanger postman made daily collections and deliveries to Osea, crossing the causeway on his bicycle.
- 2006 A semi-biographical novel *Once upon an Island* by former resident Joe Canning is about Osea island and Goldhanger.
- 2007 The Chequers landlady's autobiography: *The Licence*, has a chapter about the pub and her family links to the Island.

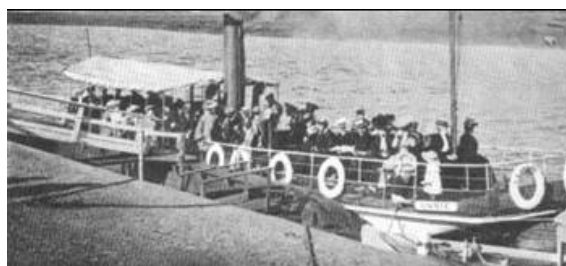
ABBC TV programme about the island

In 1981 the BBC made a half hour television programme about the island entitled *Causeway's End*. Several Goldhanger residents were interviewed in The Chequers who had connections with the island. The programme explained how they residents traditionally supported the island's activities and that island residents frequently used the Chequers Inn as their mainland base. The film was made by BBC producer Andrew Gosling, who at the time lived on the island. Goldhanger people described Charringtons retreat for *inebrates*, and it has scenes from HMS Osea, and more recent scenes of the island, including horses at work, barges sailing by, and vehicles on the causeway.



The pleasure Ship SS Maldon Annie

In the early 1900s F N Charrington purchased Osea Island and set up a treatment centre for alcoholics in the main residence called Rivermere. He also purchased the steam ship *SS Annie* to travel between Maldon and the island. The boat was later re-named the *SS Maldon Annie* and was used for many years as a Maldon based pleasure steamer and was a familiar sight in the Estuary.



Steam Ship Maldon Annie

Maldon Annie took part in the evacuation of Dunkirk, but sadly did not return to Maldon.

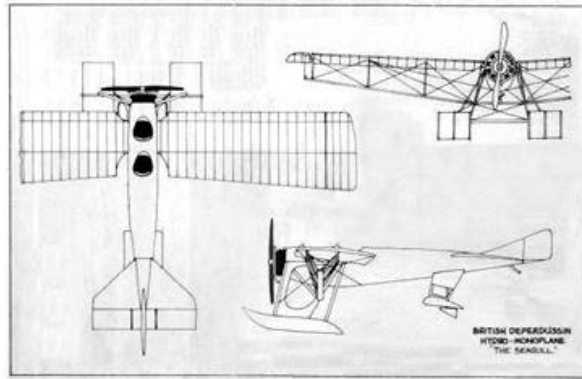
Military Activities on Osea

Seaplane Trials

In 1913 Osea Island was enveloped in tight security while the Royal Navy conducted a series of tests on a revolutionary new two man Seaplane called the *Seagull* which was intended to be the main line of defence against enemy submarines and Zeppelins. The British Deperdussin Aeroplane Company demonstrated the seaplane in the Blackwater Estuary on the south side of Osea Island. The aeroplane was a single engine monoplane with large floats. The Seagull did not prove successful during the trials and was not taken into service by RNAS. Some of these photos where in a Flight Magazine in 1913. . .



The Deperdussin Seagull on trial at Osea Island in 1913



a contemporary drawing of the Deperdussin Seagull

It seems however that the Osea Island involvement with seaplanes, later to become known as Flying Boats, did not end in 1913. The Deperdussin's test pilot during the Osea Island trials, John C Porte went on to become the commander of the Felixstowe Naval Air Station, later called the Felixstowe Marine Aircraft Experimental Establishment (MAEE). Lieutenant-Commander John C. Porte is credited with designing the Felixstowe F1 and F2 seaplanes and the Felixstowe F3, F4 and F5 Flying Boats and finally the *Felixstowe Fury* Flying Boat. During WW1 Shorts Brothers built many Felixstowe F3 and F5s to MAEE specifications and then after WW1 in 1926, the Blackburn Aircraft Company built the *Iris 1-3* range of Flying Boats again to MAEE specifications, and these were known to be delivered to Felixstowe for trials. One of these machines was photographed during trials in the Blackwater Estuary off Osea Island, and although the quality of the photograph is not good, the machine looks very similar to the Blackburn Iris 1 model. However, it could be one of several early Felixstowe designs and related aircraft as they are all of a very similar appearance...



the seaplane photographed near Osea Island

examples of very similar seaplanes. . .



The Felixstowe Naval Air Station was created in 1913 and Lieutenant-Commander Porte joined it in 1915, and on his recommendation the station was initially equipped with USA built Curtiss flying boats. The HMS Osea base for Coastal Motor Boats (CMBs) began life in 1917 and it seems that the two establishments worked closely together throughout the war. For example, in 1918 Commodore Augustus Agar was awarded the VC for his involvement in the CMB raid on the Russian fleet at Kronstadt. That raid was supported by four Shorts seaplanes carried there on the converted *Aeroplane Carrier* HMS *Vindictive*.

World War I

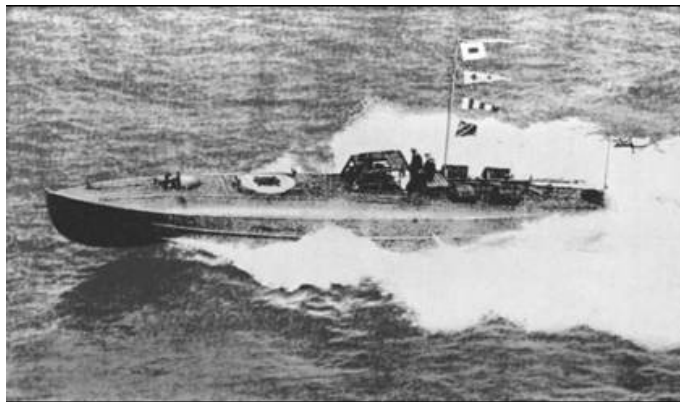
During World War I forty Coastal Motor Boats (CMBs) were stationed on Osea Island. At one point there were 1000 sailors stationed there.



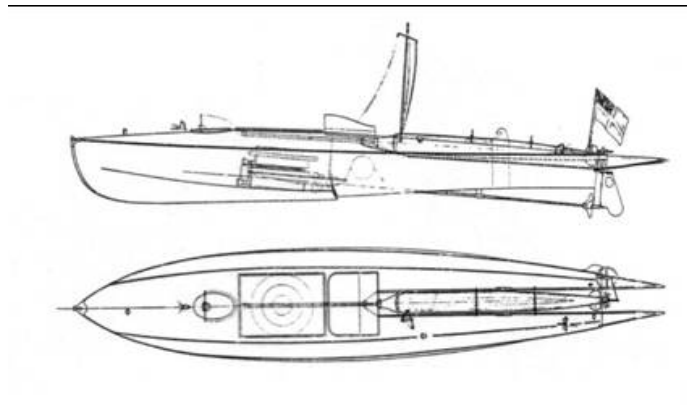
a 180 degree panoramic view of the HMS Osea during WW-1 shows many of the buildings

HMS Osea in the Great War

Although not part of the Parish, the story of Goldhanger's involvement in the Great War would not be complete without including HMS Osea, which was just across the estuary on Osea Island. A very large naval base was established there with all the facilities for a fleet of fast torpedo boats. Work became in 1917 using existing facilities built by Frederick Charrington as a retreat for those suffering the effects of alcohol. The new occupants rapidly developed and expanded the site into a base for over 1000 personnel with 40 operational boats and all the support facilities. In fact, military involvement with Osea Island started as early as 1913 when trials of prototype seaplanes were held there.

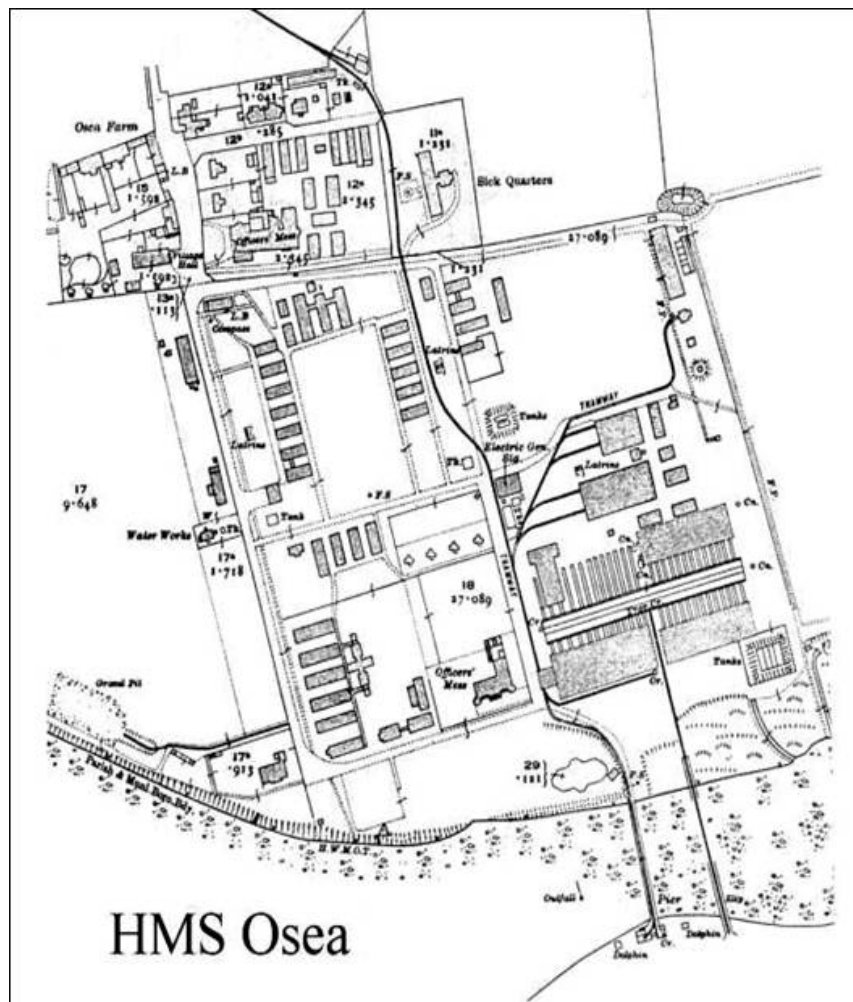


CMB from HMS Osea at speed



plan and elevation drawings of a CMB

The real purpose of the base was kept very secret at the time but the Coastal Motor Boats (CMBs), or "skimmers" as they were called, were very active on the Blackwater Estuary practicing and working up their plans to take on the German fleet. In total 40 Coastal Motor Boats from the base patrolled the North Sea searching for German submarines and small naval vessels and laid mines. They also took part in famous raids on Zeebrugge and Ostend when the Royal Navy attempted to block the entrances to the German submarine bases there.



map showing the maintenance buildings, rail tracks, pier, CMB slipway and accommodation huts

H.M.S. OSEA

BOATS CREWS

12 Lieutenants or Sub-Lieutenants in command,
 12 Lieutenants, Sub-Lieutenants, Midshipmen,
 24 C.M.M. and H.M.
 12 Ordinary or Boy Telegraphists.

BASE STAFF

1 Commander R.N. in command of Flotilla.
 1 Engineer Lieutenant.
 1 Temporary Engineer Sub-Lieutenant R.N.R.
 1 Gunner (T).
 1 Electrical Artificer.
 3 L.T.O.
 4 S.T.
 1 Wireman (trained in depth charges).

WORKSHOP

3 C.H.M.
 7 M.M.
 8 M.R.M.
 4 Shipwrights.
 3 Carpenters Crews.

BOATS CLEANING, DOMESTIC, DISCIPLINARY STAFFS

12 M.R.M.
 12 A.R., R.N.V.R. (unfit for sea service).
 1 Ship's Corporal.
 1 Petty Officer.
 4 Privates, R.M.L.I. (unfit for sea) as sentries.
 1 Chief Steward.
 10 Officers Stewards.
 1 -do- Cook.
 1 Ship's Cook.
 1 Third Writer.
 1 Ship's Steward.

a list of personnel stationed on the Island



North

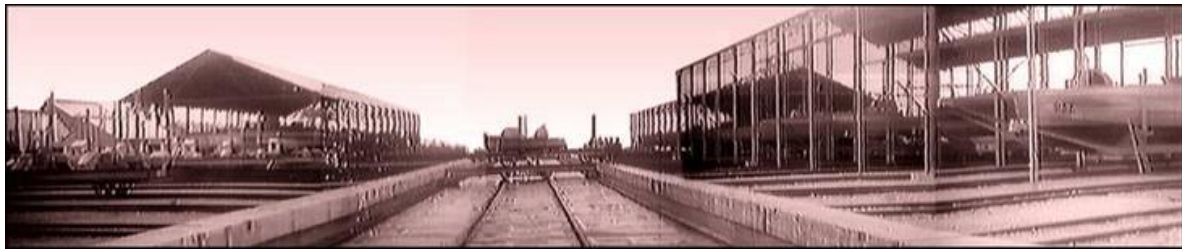
East

panoramic views of the island taken from the water tower (water works on map above) showing most of the buildings on the base



East

South



CMB boat sheds and launch tracks



HMS Osea



HMS Osea CMB Sheds

postcard views of HMS Osea



HMS Osea - a photographic re-construction of the CMB sheds, tracks and slipway on the island

The map and panoramic views indicate that over 40 huts were built on the island to accommodate over 1000 navy personnel, which including a large number of personnel from the newly formed Women's Royal Naval Service (WRNS). The Imperial War Museum website has a collection of photographs of HMS Osea showing the personnel at work (search Google images for: IMW HMS Osea).

About 30 large accommodation huts were built on Osea island and another eight on the Goldhanger aerodrome site. After

the war, it seems most of these, and another eight on the Goldhanger aerodrome site, were purchased by *May & Butcher* of Heybridge Basin and were sold on as private homes and holiday cottages. Many were re-built along the Goldhanger Rd, Basin Rd and Wharf Rd in Heybridge.

The huts were known as **Armstrong huts** having acquired the name after a Major B H O Armstrong of the *Directorate of Fortifications and Works*, that issued sets of drawings and orders for the huts in August 1914. Although all of the same design and appearance, there were several sizes: The basic size was 60 feet by 20 feet designed to accommodate 30 men, other sizes included 60 ft by 15 ft, 24 ft by 15 ft and 12 ft by 9 ft. The huts were assembled on site by teams of carpenters, including many women, using prefabricated parts and could easily be dismantled and moved. The history of these buildings is given at...

http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archiveDS/archiveDownload?t=arch-460-1/dissemination/pdf/Stage_1/army_camps_history.pdf

About a dozen buildings remained on the island and have been adapted and re-used...



Of the many that were moved to the mainland and re-used as private homes, sixteen can still be seen in Wharf Road, Basin Road and the Goldhanger Road in Heybridge. Most have undergone much re-modelling over the years...



Many other smaller huts were also sold on and re-used as farm buildings and garages, etc. and remain in private hands the vicinity...



The remnants of the slipway can still be seen on the island and other relics remain. The large number of people and their operations on to the island are said to have had an effect on the water table in the surrounding area and the wells that people relied on for drinking water in Heybridge and Goldhanger had to be re-dug to maintain local supplies.

Two IWM WW1 films of **HMS Osea** have been identified...

www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/1060023109 The Home Of The CMB on Osea Island, Essex, ca 1920 (IWM 566)

vimeo.com/5437242 WRNS personnel at work and leisure at HMS Osea (also IMW video 641)

There are also many photographs of **HMS Osea** held in the IWM (search within www.iwm.org.uk for "coastal motor boats")

Commodore Augustus Agar



Commodore Augustus Willington Shelton Agar, VC, DSO, RN (1890-1968) was a recipient of the Victoria Cross while based at **Osea Island**. In late 1918 he was asked to "volunteer" for a mission in the Baltic Sea and CMBs were to be used to ferry British agents back and forth from Bolshevik Russia. Agar and his crews dressed in civilian clothes, they had a uniform on board in case they were in danger of capture. Without the uniform, they could be shot as spies. The Bolsheviks had seized much of the Russian fleet at Kronstadt, Agar considered these vessels a menace to British operations so took it upon himself to attack them. They attacked a Russian cruiser, the 6,645 ton Oleg and sunk it, after which Lieutenant Agar retired to the safety of the open bay under heavy fire. For this he was awarded the Victoria Cross and was promoted to Lieutenant Commander on 30 June 1919.

On 18 August 1919, Agar took his remaining boat against the Russians, acting as guide-ship to a flotilla of six others,

leading them through the minefields and past the forts. Agar's boat was ordered to stay outside the harbour, and the attack was lead by Commander Claude Dobson, but they entered Kronstadt harbour, this time sinking two battleships, the 23,360 ton dreadnought Petropavlovsk and the 17,400 ton pre-dreadnought Andrei Pervozvanny, and a submarine depot ship, the 6,734 ton Pamiat Azova.

Osea Island World War 2

There were many rumours that Osea Island was used by the Royal Navy during World War 2, and much talk of a Clandestine miniature submarine base. However no documented evidence of this has been found and several years ago the Royal Navy Museum offered the following explanation: It is know that during WW-2 a base at Wivenhoe was involved in constructing wooden mock submarines for use in confusing the enemy. These were towed to various location around the Essex coast and left for the enemy to find and bomb. Some were probably located for a while at Osea Island and Heybridge. The Blackwater estuary was also used by both the army and the navy as part of the build up to the D-Day landings at Normandy. Landing craft were seen at many locations including: Osea, Stone, Heybridge Basin and Mill Beach.

A German V2 rocket landed in the estuary near Bounds Farm and its remains lay there for many years.

These paragraphs are taken from the CHELMER CANAL TRUST NEWSLETTER issue 24, November 2003

From Darby Stebbens' life story. . .

The 28th Company Royal Army Service Corps was stationed in the Basin during the war. They had three or four motorised wooden barges to carry their machinery, together with a 'Tid Tug', a bit like the old steam tug Brent which you can still see at the Hythe in Maldon. There were also a dozen or more Thames lighters tied up all along the sea wall as far as Mill Beach ready for D-Day. They must have been in one heck of a hurry to get away because on the day they left they just threw all their mooring chains overboard and left them on the shore. What they used to tie up with when they arrived I'll never know.

There was a lot of military activity around the Basin with soldiers and sailors billeted at The Towers in Heybridge and in the Manor House on Osea Island. Certain boats in the Basin were commandeered for military services: the yacht Francis II, for example, was turned into a river patrol boat and was moored off Osea.

One night Lord Haw Haw told us on the radio that German planes were going to bomb the submarine base at Heybridge Basin. The attack happened several nights later: six people were killed and several houses received direct hits. There were frequent air raids as German planes flew up the river thinking it was the Thames. At night our family went and slept on our boat, Gracie, moored on the saltings, so that we would not have the house fall down on us if we were bombed. One night a land mine landed right next to the house on Northey Island making quite a thump, but there wasn't much damage because it went into the soft mud. When I was at Mill beach one day I saw a Hurricane crash near the Doctor's buoy off Osea.

More Osea Island Scenes

