

Broadland Memories

Yarmouth's Vanishing Pleasure Craft



Norwich Belle has made her last voyage after years of taking holiday-makers to see the seals on Scroby Island, off Great Yarmouth. The recent photograph, above, shows her with upper-work, including saloon cabin and after shelter. She was originally steam powered as the photograph, right, indicates.

Any more for the Skylark? A lovely day for a sea trip, sir! How about a nice trip to Scroby Island to see the seals?

How much longer will these cries of the pleasure boatmen assail our ears?

Alas, it's recently been announced that the pleasure vessel *Norwich Belle*, which has taken Yarmouth holiday-makers out of Scroby Island and back for half a century, has made her last voyage. Her absence from the river will be greatly missed. Unfortunate, too, is the news that another popular holiday craft, the *Golden Galleon*, a former naval craft, has been refused re-registration by Yarmouth Port and Haven Commissioners because of speeding during past river trips.

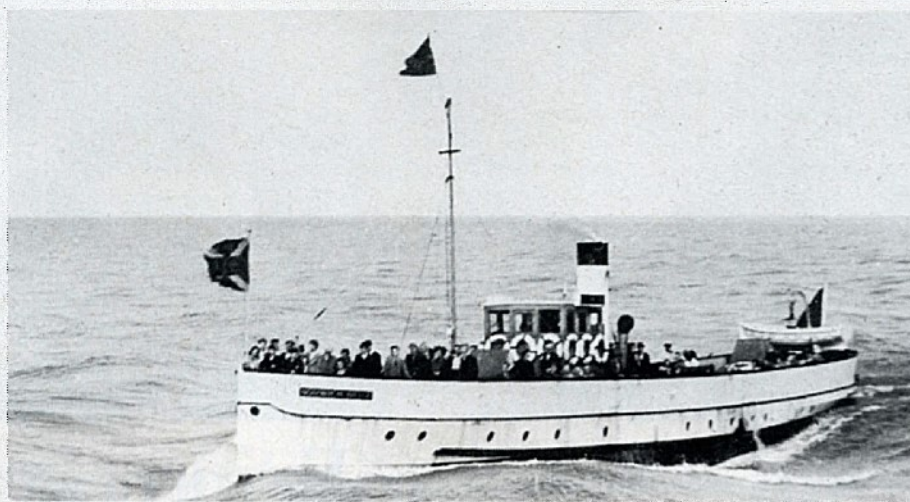
For over seventy years holiday-makers took advantage of the ferry service of the two-ended boats which plied the river from Yarmouth to Gorleston and back. This service is now no more. The vessels which operated it were the

cold and shivering holiday-makers were rescued from her by lifeboat. She set out on a routine evening trip in bright sunshine for Scroby Island with some 200 holiday-makers — men, women and children, all lightly clothed — when on the return trip she encountered a sudden thick blanket of fog which brought visibility to nil. For hours she steamed about seeking the narrow entrance of Yarmouth harbour which in due course she made. But she grounded first on the Spending Beach where she remained stuck — just a few hundred yards or so away from the lifeboat shed. The lifeboat, under Cox George Mobbs, was launched on its shortest ever journey and made three round trips to take off the 117 people.

by C.R. Temple

A similar happening in fog was experienced by both the *Queen of the Broads* (another vanished pleasure craft) in 1979 when she got stranded on mud at Breydon with the subsequent rescue of 121 passengers by lifeboat, and the *Golden Galleon* too, stranded Breydon in the July of 1957 when 180 holiday-makers spent the night on board, returning to Yarmouth at 7.30 the next morning escorted by lifeboat.

It was only two years previously that



Southtown, Cobholm, Resolute, and Yarmouth. The Yarmouth, however, has been preserved at St. Katherine's Dock, London, and the Resolute, after lying idle and rusting away in a Broadland backwater, has been taken over by a charitable trust and when repaired and in ship-shape order will be used as a floating grandstand during sailing barge races on the Thames.

Another favourite holiday craft was the *Eastern Princess*, similar in some respects to the *Golden Galleon* in that she too was a former naval craft. In 1963 she created front page news when 117

the same vessel had run on to Breydon mud at 10.30 p.m. while her many passengers were singing and dancing on deck. A total of 124 of them were taken off — 75 by lifeboat, and 49 by two privately-owned motor boats.

Sea trips were also made from Britannia Pier by the *Brit*, an open craft with just a funnel — no cabin — amidships, which was later replaced by another retaining the same name. This had a cabin and wheel-house and looked very smart and very similar to *Norwich*



Until a few years ago, Royal Sovereign took Yarmouth holiday-makers to the Continent and on tours of the oil rigs. But after being bought at an auction for £100,000 she was converted to a car ferry.

for during the winter months she was stripped down and became a port tug helping to tow — in and out of the harbour — sailing fishing vessels, timber-laden windjammers, large steam cargo vessels, and by no means least, lifeboats on their errands of mercy when they were only propelled by oar and sail. She met her end during the last war when a warship crushed and sank her in Yarmouth harbour. She was later raised but had to finish in a ship-breaker's yard.

The beach sailing boats have long since disappeared from Yarmouth's shore, the last being Mr. Harper's

One of the Edwardian paddle-steamers which brought Londoners to Yarmouth.

Belle. In turn, these two were replaced with a squat little vessel called the *Hotspur* which once came in very useful for ferrying (free of charge) commuters between Gorleston and Yarmouth while the Haven Bridge was under repair.

For sheer thrill and excitement, however, there was nothing to beat that universal favourite the paddle-steamer *United Service*, while Lowestoft (and sometimes Yarmouth) were favoured with her sister ship, the *King Edward VII*. Holiday-makers were always fascinated and thrilled to just watch the giant paddle-wheels churn up the blue sea into whiter-than-white foam — and to see the pistons of the engines work in and out. It was only during the summer season that the *United Service* was used for passenger traffic,



Cambria. Most of these were former yawls, converted to cutter rig for easier handling. Holiday-makers loved the sensation of being able to trail their hands in the sea when outward bound, only to find themselves high up and very much out of reach of the waves on the return trip owing to the vessel luffing-over in the wind, making it — at times — quite difficult for them to retain their seats.

The *Cambria* caused some excitement when she got stuck on Scroby sands with a boat-load of passengers. Every available motor boat on Yarmouth sands was summoned to her aid to tow her off. What a sight it was to see a

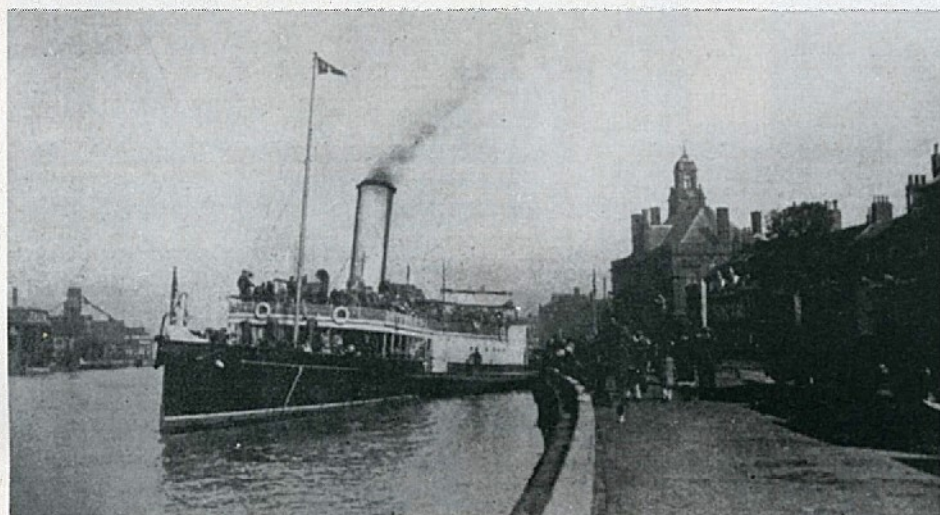
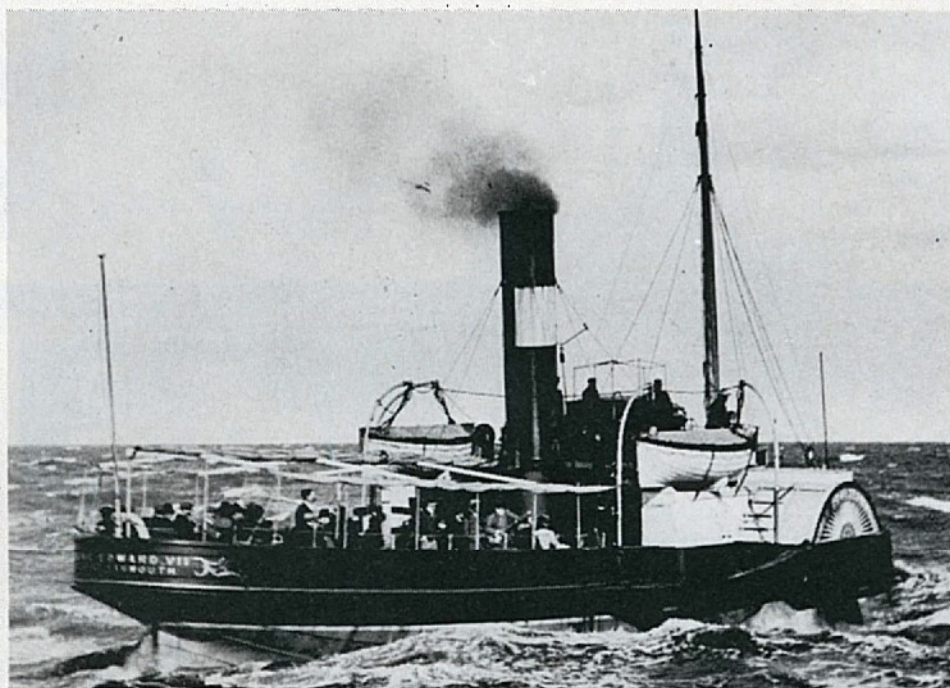
Built at Cobholm in 1889, the Queen of the Broad's, one of Yarmouth's oldest pleasure crafts, is now just a memory.

When is a tug not a tug? When she's used in the summer as a pleasure craft. This photograph of paddle-steamer King Edward VII was taken in 1909,

dozen or so of them pulling and straining at ropes to get her off!

Then came the era of speed with Britannia Pier being used as a base for a couple of speed-boats — as they were then called. These certainly gave a thrill to the more venturesome holiday-makers, for dashing through the waves at forty miles an hour was vastly different to the six to eight miles of the average passenger boat.

Now long since gone is the era of the famous *Belle* boats. They came to Yarmouth bringing thousands of holiday-makers from Tower Bridge, London. Berthing at South Quay they would disgorge their human freight and the following morning take them aboard for the return trip. Also aboard were



A Belle boat at Yarmouth in 1900. An 11-hour voyage to London — calling at various seaside resorts on the way — cost 50p single, 87½p return.

day-trippers bound for Felixstowe or Southend. (They were brought back to Yarmouth by a vessel which called for them when finishing her daily voyage from Tower Bridge). There were seven of these vessels which took it in turns to end up at Yarmouth: they were the *London Belle*, (the largest), the *Walton*, *Southend*, *Yarmouth*, *Southwold*, and the *Woolwich*, (the smallest). All of the vessels ended their names with *Belle*. They were unique in their day, with luxury accommodation and electric light (other vessels had oil lamps). Special piers were built by the companies just to accommodate the pass-

Even in 1909 Yarmouth visitors enjoyed a trip on the briny. The craft is a converted yawl.



engers, including Lowestoft's *Claremont* and that at Southwold.

The service was broken up in 1929 and the trip to Yarmouth came to an end. Vessels were sold to various firms and renamed ... the *Yarmouth Belle* became the *Queen of Southend*, then the *Thames Queen*, and a queen she remained until 1947 when she was broken up for scrap.

After the demise of the *Belle* paddle-steamers Yarmouth was favoured for a short time with the modern screw-driven *Queen of Channel*, a double-funnelled vessel resembling a small liner. She took passengers from

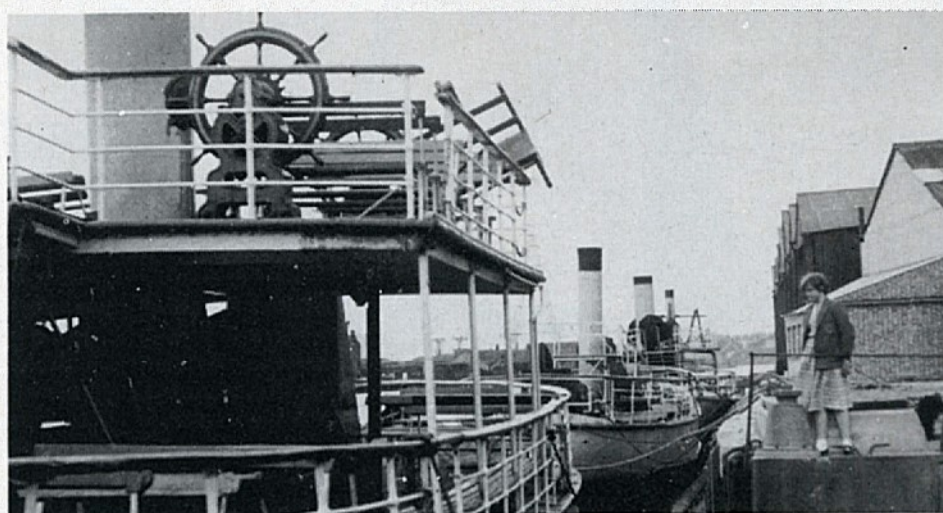
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All the vessels in this photograph have disappeared from the Yarmouth scene. They include the pleasure craft Cobholm, Yarmouth, Norwich Belle, and Eastern Princess. Also gone is the Trinity House tender, Warden, and former Gorleston lifeboat, Louise Stephens.

Yarmouth to the Continent for day trips. Owing to the Hitler war, however, these visits were stopped and the vessel utilised for war purposes. She sank, I believe, during the Dunkirk evacuation. Then, just a few short years ago, Yarmouth had another fine luxury vessel which took holiday-makers to the Continent and on tours to the new and imposing oil rigs. This was the handsome-looking *Royal Sovereign*. Alas, yet again, the duration of her visits was brief and the vessel was eventually put up for auction when £100,000 was given for her and she was converted to a

Four in a row — the Yarmouth, Resolute, Southtown, and Cobholme. Now no longer operating, they were known as the backwards-and-forwards river steamers, for they never turned round.



car ferry.

Thus, Yarmouth has indeed seen and been favoured with a vast assortment of vessels devoted to providing pleasure and thrills for summer holiday-makers. Just looking through a Yarmouth guide book of 1962 I see there were five separate advertisements drawing attention to various sea and river trips.

S.S. Resolute — two hour Broadland cruise; *S.S. Yarmouth*, a cruise to Reedham village; *M.V. Norwich Belle* — two hour cruise to Scroby Island seal colony; *M.V. Eastern Princess* — two hour sea cruises to Scroby Island. Thus five trips to choose from. For this summer season of 1981 with all these vessels gone (or almost) what will the visitor

who fancies himself a would-be captain of a ship, do? A visit to the seaside without sampling the delights of a sea-trip is unthinkable. In fact, almost as bad as a pub with no beer.

Miss Britannia, named after the Yarmouth pier, taken in about 1950 in what was then the speed-boat era. Back seat passengers were drenched with spray as the boat bounced across the waves at high speed.

