

# Ways of Knowing

## Understanding the past to inform the future

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### Introduction

Our lives are lived in the continuing present where change is inevitable but imperceptible unless recorded and measured. This is why the capacity to collect and collate data is essential to our grasp of the pattern of change and the creation of benchmarks against which it can be made tangible and is also why, for the community at Bawdsey, the weekly activity of measuring beach levels has become a transferable source of information that can contribute to the understanding of evolving coastal systems at a local, regional and national scale.

Whilst coastal systems are obviously severely under stress and prone to dramatic and sudden change, other systems continue to evolve quietly and the realisation of incremental change only becomes apparent in retrospect, which is why the narratives that attach communities to their landscapes can be helpful as a foil to other, more exacting ways of knowing.

The discovery of the painting ‘Bawdsey Ferry near Felixstowe, Suffolk’ by John Moore of Ipswich circa 1880, provides just such an opportunity to examine a sheltered estuarine landscape where change happens but in a more covert manner one step removed from the dynamic coastal frontage.

This artwork is both a reassuring evocation of the continuity of essential aspects of the landscape, and a subtle reminder of how layers of human activity, stress of weather

and the need to work with estuarine systems in continuing evolution collude to offer quite a different view over a century later.

Whoever views this painting, there will be references and associations that stimulate their own memories and narratives, preoccupations or beliefs. In our effort to bring an alternative dimension to the analytical approach to landscape systems, we are seeking to enrol memory, association and innate knowledge towards a parallel understanding of how a landscape works, how we care for it and inhabit it.

We have received substantial input and advice from local residents, specialists and landowners in assembling the information recorded here and welcome you to make your own speculative journey through the landscape as it was, has become and, how it might continue to change into the future.

This publication was conceived as a part of ‘The Co-produced Estuary: understanding the past to inform the future’, a research project funded by the Environment Agency’s 3C’s programme and managed by Simon Read and Helene Burningham to explore a model for a more inclusive approach to knowledge gathering and sharing, very much in the spirit of the pioneering work of the community-run Deben Marine Centre at Bawdsey and the recent Deben Soundings research project.



“I think you will like Bawdsey—only about a dozen fishermen’s houses built where our river runs into the sea over a foaming bar; on one side of which is a good sand to Felixstowe and on the other, an orange coloured cliff towards Orford Haven; not a single respectable house or inhabitants or lodger; no white cravats, an inn with scarce table and chair and only bread and cheese to eat. I often lie here with my boat; I wish you would come and do so”

Edward Fitzgerald 1863



Bawdsey Ferry near Felixstowe, Suffolk, circa 1880  
by John Moore of Ipswich circa 1880.  
Courtesy: Ipswich Borough Council

### Setting the scene:

It is a clear dry day, light cloud cover softly illuminates the landscape highlighting the foreground and the lower grazing marsh, leading the eye towards the entrance of the estuary, where there is enough of a light south-westerly breeze to reveal the rising tide as a line of foam on the shingle bar.

Two vessels are entering the estuary, one a Thames Sailing Barge with its conspicuous tan sail has just crossed the bar, whilst a smaller cutter-type yacht leans to the breeze in the safety of the tideway. On the far horizon a plume of smoke betokens a steamship in the offing.

On the Felixstowe shore are the two Martello Towers still there today. One of them seems to have a flagstaff from which a flag hangs limply. Once the fear of Napoleonic invasion had evaporated, many of the towers were repurposed as HM Coastguard stations, which could account for the flagstaff.

The view over the land is idyllically pastoral: in the foreground, a group of labourers in their shirtsleeves provide a sense of human scale, cutting and stacking wheat, their clothing and refreshments piled on the ground behind them. Lower down, the rich green marshland is dotted by grazing cattle.

The sloping field in the foreground is obviously free-draining and suitable for arable cultivation, whilst the grazing marsh is the product of ongoing reclamation and drainage from late medieval times to the present day.

The flood wall protecting the marsh can be distinguished as a darker green band where it meets the tidal river.



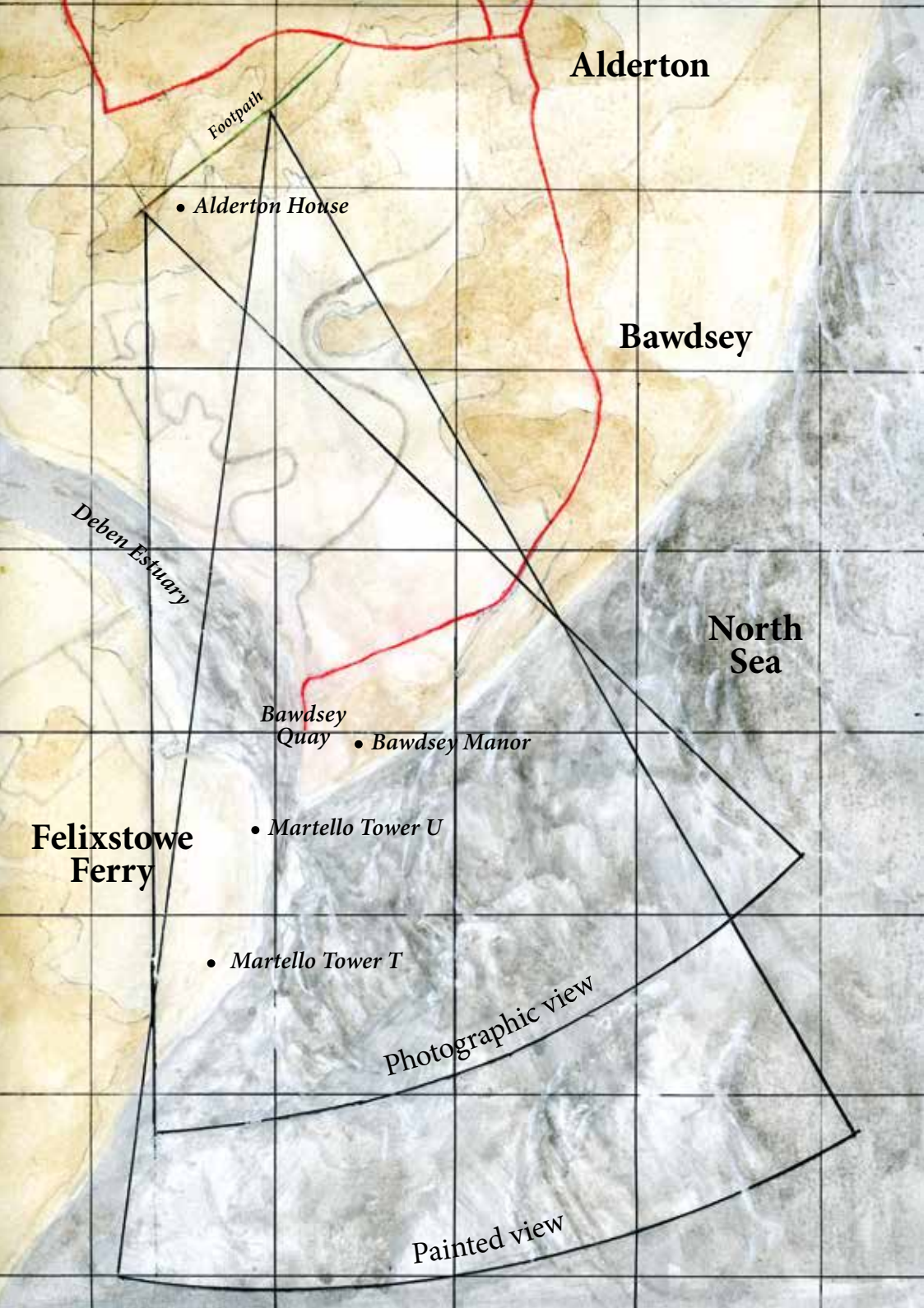
### John Moore of Ipswich

John Moore 1820-1902 was a Suffolk artist specialising in marine and landscape painting. This landscape appears to have been made during the construction of Bawdsey Manor by Sir William Cuthbert Quilter between 1886-1895, and although evidence for the actual date is limited, we can assume the substantial red brick building above Bawdsey Ferry to be the manor, and although a tiny detail rendered in very loose brushwork, it appears to be at an early stage of its construction, still a Tudor style brick building before the proliferation of towers including the White Tower that came later. This suggests a date for the painting of between 1886-1890 when the Quilters were consolidating their holdings in the area.

Although there is no evidence that this view over their estate was commissioned by the Quilters, or even made with their patronage in mind, it would be consistent with Moore’s standing as a locally based artist and prominent member of Ipswich Art Society, that he should be alert to the opportunity. He has certainly paid scrupulous attention in this work to topographical detail and has been sensitive to the need to show the estuary landscape and the kind of activity that would be expected on a warm summer’s afternoon in a benign light.







## Contemporary Change

By the relationship of key landmarks to each other in the John Moore painting, it is clearly based on a verifiable view. The amount of time he spent working on location may be questionable, but he would have decided upon the exact orientation and basic structure on the spot and made enough of a start on the painting to carry on with in the studio. Although he may have revisited the site, it is likely that the composition and inclusion of detail characteristic to the place and time of year was carried out in the studio.

In contrast with a photograph of the same landscape by Jeremy Young, Moore has used a foreshortened perspective to concentrate the engagement of the viewer in a more theatrical way. This is reinforced by reference to local detail such as Bawdsey Manor, and the Martello Towers of Felixstowe Ferry, the presence of a gang of labourers in the foreground, desultory cattle grazing in the floodplain below and the Thames Trading Barge, having just cleared the shingle bar.

These bestow a level of documentary credibility that was probably never so much the intention as it was his desire to populate the image appropriately.

To be able to compare the painting with the appearance of the landscape today, we needed to identify the location selected by the artist. We know that the orientation of the view is approximately north south but to be more exact, we took the parallax relationships between key landmarks as

they appear in the painting, such as the Martello Towers and Bawdsey Manor and transferred them to the OS map. Taking the representation of the estuary mouth as open to the North Sea and the need for enough elevation to permit an overview, it was possible to identify a single most likely location but when we visited it, the tree cover on the floodplain had increased over the past century to the the extent that it obscured a part of the estuary and Felixstowe shore from view.

As a compromise and to ensure an uninterrupted view of the estuary, we moved our location 765m southwest, which gave a compatible view minus the focal connection of the painting between the estuary and a clear view to the horizon.

In comparison with the photographic view by Jeremy Young, it is immediately striking that this is as much a meeting of contrasting pictorial conventions as it is of two historical perspectives: although John Moore has



Tree cover on the flood plain 2025

manipulated the perspective of the view to dramatic effect, the same landscape through modern optics cannot be so selective and with disarming neutrality, suggests a much flattened landscape with a greater impression of distance and less pronounced range of elevation.

According to the map, there is no alternative vantage point higher than 15metres and closer than the shortest distance of 3.5km from Bawdsey Ferry, which emphasises the scope of the painted perspective to keep the relationship of landscape features to each other and to the picture plane, whilst foreshortening the measured distance to retain the theatrical illusion that it is a real accessible space.

This convention is so embedded in our cultural psyche that we don't even notice it, but since it most easily corresponds to the selective processes of cognition, we accept it as a way of looking.

## Viewpoint

Although the exact location John Moore chose for this painting may be subject to discussion, even allowing for more than a century to have elapsed, it is for most local people an instantly recognisable and timeless view.

A comparison between the narrative of the painting and the evidence of the photograph is a point of departure on a journey into nearly a century and a half of incremental change, some of which will be obvious from what we see, some will be informed by what we know has come to pass and still more is hidden in the recesses of local memory:



Bawdsey Ferry near Felixstowe Suffolk 2025 - Jeremy Young



Flood wall and pumping station

The sea still breaks over the shingle bar and incoming vessels must still consider the state of the tide and sea conditions before negotiating the entrance. In response to increased storminess and more frequent tidal surge events including the disastrous flood of 1953, the entrance to the estuary has become increasingly protected by hard defences. Due to sea level rise predictions and the increased frequency of abnormally high tides, sensitivity to flood risk has made flood preparedness within the estuary more urgent. Although the configuration of the floodplain landscape and its defence walls remain the same, there is an underlying awareness of the need to improve the resilience of the estuary flood walls by raising them to a consistent height throughout and improving the standard of gravity and pumped drainage.

## Farming Practice

In the John Moore painting, the distinction between free draining arable land and reclaimed wetland used for grazing was to change during the 20th century with the advent of modern drainage and pumping systems, when farming activity moved incrementally away from livestock towards arable production.

The two world wars of the 20th century stimulated demand for increased domestic food production. Combined with the need to improve flood defences and drainage after the catastrophic floods of 1953 and incentives from government to improve productivity of the land in the 1960's, the transition of farming practice to arable in the Alderton and Bawdsey marshes had become complete by the end of the century.



## Bawdsey Manor

The redbrick building on the skyline of the painting appears to be an early stage in the construction of Bawdsey Manor after 1886 but before 1895 when the Red Tower was added. With the building of the White Tower on the West Front in 1904, the main construction work for the Quilters was complete. Since then, alterations to the site have come and gone: in 1936, ownership was transferred to the RAF and the view became dominated by the wartime radar array, which was dismantled after the war except for one remaining pylon, which too was eventually demolished. During the Cold War a Bloodhound missile battery occupied the Bawdsey cliffs. This was decommissioned in 1991and the estate sold in 1994 to house Alexanders College, a boarding and day school until 2016, when it was sold to PGL Travel Ltd to establish a children's adventure holiday facility.



## Felixstowe Ferry

Felixstowe Ferry hamlet has increased in size and become busier over the past century, with a boatyard that provides hard standing storage for up to 150 boats and maintains swinging moorings in the sheltered water just upstream of the entrance. There is a small fishing community with storage for fishing gear near the quay and Felixstowe Ferry Sailing Club, which started life as Felixstowe Dinghy Club in 1926 as Felixstowe Dinghy Club. The foot ferry to Bawdsey Quay is operational during the summer months. Since the beginning of the 20th century the residential community has grown and despite the constant threat of flooding and the uncertainty over coastal stability, there are even bespoke architect-designed properties to compliment the idiosyncratic accumulation of sheds and shacks that occupy the site. The two Martello Towers that appear in the Moore painting are still there, the one flying a flag is Tower U, which was taken over by HM Coastguard after the Napoleonic War and is now a residence. Tower T on the golf course is untenanted.

**What can you add to this story, and given what we know now, how would this landscape continue to change into the future?**

