

# The lost country of Doggerland explored in fascinating new book

River, Coast and Creek - An Exploration of Maritime Essex, delves into the history of once inhabited land now submerged beneath the North Sea.

By **Danielle Lett**



Some may argue there are few spots more beautiful in the UK than the East Anglian coast – and one woman who'd certainly agree with this sentiment is Judith Ellis.

Judith spent many years working as veterinary surgeon, and later as a bookbinder, but in her spare time her other passion is boats and sailing.

And it was a chance visit to the region that led her to pen her first book in a series of three.

"It all began in 2013, one May bank holiday weekend, when I decided to check out King's Lynn," she says.

When she got there, she saw the town was filled with 'amazing architecture, cobbled streets, and Georgian buildings'.

"It blew me away, so I decided to go back a few weeks later. I stayed there for three nights and took my sketchbook with me as I explored the area," she says.

Judith became so enamoured with what the east had to offer that she began visiting other towns and settlements – focusing on those near waterways and the coast.

"I was so interested in maritime history of the coast that I went to Great Yarmouth and did the same thing there. I started filling in my books, sketching and writing about the place. And because I'm a bookbinder, it was too tempting to turn what I had written into a book, and that's what happened."

Judith's first book, *Two Points East – a View of Maritime Norfolk*, covers the coast from

King's Lynn to Great Yarmouth – and she had such a great time putting it together that she soon got working on a second and third book.

"I'm obsessive by nature. I'd go away a week at a time by myself, rent a place and completely immerse myself in maritime history," she says.

For *Curlew Coast – Diversions on Maritime Suffolk*, Judith continued from Lowestoft to Harwich. Visiting places such as Woodbridge along the way, she uncovered nautical subjects such as ropemaking, the early navigators and Viking ships, the rise and fall of the east coast harbours over the centuries, and the development of ship design from medieval times to the Thames sailing barge.

"Most of my research is done by visiting local libraries and museums, as well as talking to people. I've always loved boats and wandering around waterfronts, and it's really made me realise what a wonderful history this coast has."

And her most recent book, *River, Coast and Creek – An Exploration of Maritime Essex*, uncovers the waterways of south Suffolk and north Essex – with great focus on the River Stour, and the lost country of Doggerland.

Explaining what it is that makes the River Stour and that part of the Suffolk-Essex border so special, she says: "When I'd go up to London, as you pull out of Ipswich and go past Manningtree, you catch a glimpse of this water and it's incredibly beautiful. But because you only get a glimpse of it, it's intriguing."

"When you get down there, you realise there's actually not much there. Mistley has merged into Manningtree, and it's quite shallow. It's not much use in terms of navigating as it's such a central channel. But it's still intriguing and very beautiful nonetheless."

In her book, Judith colourfully sketches a map of the Stour, carefully plotting the few settlements that can be found along the way, including Manningtree, Mistley, Parkeston

When I'd go up to London, as you pull out of Ipswich and go past Manningtree, you catch a glimpse of this water and it's incredibly beautiful







Above, the River Stour at Manningtree

Picture:  
ANDY ABBOTT

Left, author Judith Ellis

Picture:  
DENISE BRADLEY

Quay and Shotley Point.

Within her chapter on the River Stour, she writes: “The River Stour marks the boundary between Suffolk and Essex, thus Felixstowe is in Suffolk but Harwich, just across the water, lies in Essex. The river is oblivious of this arbitrary boundary, though, and continues to flow eastward towards the sea: Harwich and Felixstowe, its twin ports, belong to the river not the land.

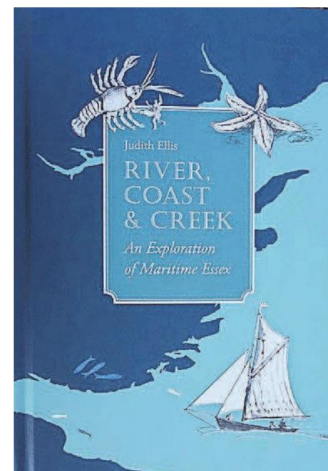
“As the train pulls out of Manningtree on the journey to London, it lifts the spirits to see, all too briefly, the broad, shining expanse of water as the Stour opens out before joining the Orwell on its way to the sea. You have had a glimpse into a world of sail, ships and shore-birds; a passing glance into a different world as the train hurtles on its way, leaving a fleeting impression of another way of living, in another time.”

‘Another way of living, in another time’ harks back to the days Doggerland – a former area of land that is now submerged under the depths of the North Sea, and once connected Britain to continental Europe.

Research conducted over the years suggests that Doggerland stretched from the east coast of Britain to what is now modern-day Holland, Germany, and the Danish peninsula of Jutland before rising sea levels caused it to disappear around 6,500-6,200 BCE.

Within her book Judith examines the former land, and what life could’ve been like all those thousands of years ago.

“Doggerland appeals to the imagination in much the same



way as the lost island of Atlantis. The difference is that Doggerland really is a lost country; it is still there under the sea, although its human inhabitants are long gone. Study a chart of the North Sea and you are looking at a map of Doggerland. The shoals and sandbanks marked on the chart were once the hills and ridges of dry land.

“My old Admiralty chart marks the depth of water over much of the North Sea as being generally between 10 and 20 fathoms, but there is a large area between Flamborough Head on our east coast and northern Holland, marked on the chart as Outer Silver Pit, where the water is up to forty fathoms deep. This was once a vast lake in Doggerland, fed by rivers which are now gone but can apparently still be detected as channels in the seabed if you have the right equipment. The bed of the North Sea is well known to the

fishermen who fish its waters for plaice, bass and sole, knowing where different fish like to make their home, and it is becoming familiar now to geologists surveying for natural resources: their mapping provides an accumulating mass of information about the geography and the nature of this country now lost to us.”

Explaining what inspired her to look at this now-gone land, Judith says: “It was really interesting, trying to get to grips with the facts, and stumbling across a whole different way of life we’ve lost sight of. It says at the end of my book that Doggerland is a place suspended between fact and imagination, and I spent many weeks trying to get some order in it – the results of which are three maps of different times in the book, to get it clear in my own head. I took it upon myself to read loads of old books, take in the information, and weave them into stories and sketches to make them more accessible.

“If we turn the map of Britain on its side, so East Anglia is at the top, pointing towards Germany and Northern France, suddenly the North Sea looks like a lake – and you start to see this world differently. All of these countries and regions – Germany, Denmark, Belgium, Yorkshire, and East Anglia – were likely coastal communities. So boats would’ve been going across this stretch of water the whole time, and our ports would’ve been full of sailors from different countries, all speaking different languages.”

**To find out more about Judith and her books, visit [thebookstudio.co.uk](http://thebookstudio.co.uk)**