



## **A BRIEF HISTORY OF BLAKENEY HARBOUR ASSOCIATION (BHA) and BLAKENEY HARBOUR BOATMAN'S ASSOCIATION (BHBA)**

BHBA was established over 50 years ago by a small group of professional fishermen and boatmen who were earning their living from Blakeney Harbour. The Association was entirely voluntary - a group of local people sharing a mutual concern about the potential dangers relating to the harbour entrance at times of adverse weather and heavy swell conditions. Working with extremely limited funds, the group shared the work involved in buoying the harbour entrance channel and re-positioning these buoys on a regular basis to reflect the constantly shifting sandbanks, particularly in the volatile areas surrounding Blakeney Bar, the Hjordis wreck and the West Sands.

Whilst BHBA was established by professional boatmen, the Association welcomed leisure users of the harbour to become members and pay a nominal membership fee to assist with funding. However, when it came to decision making (generally at the association's AGM held in the Morston Anchor Inn), only professional members were allowed to vote.

For many years BHBA managed to ensure that the harbour entrance channel was kept safely marked for daylight entry, using all manner of drums and other flotation devices which were donated by locals. An impressive achievement by any standard.

The sinking of the local fishing boat Concord, attempting to enter the harbour in darkness and in very stormy seas some 40 years ago, with the tragic loss of five lives, highlighted the need for some buoys to be lit - an aspiration unfortunately not achieved until many years later because of shortage of funds to buy the necessary very expensive equipment.

In addition to the important buoyage work undertaken by BHBA, the Association was increasingly gaining respect as "the voice of Blakeney Harbour" and was often consulted by statutory authorities prior to infrastructure projects being undertaken, or when they were planning to impose new regulations on the harbour. Although BHBA has never had any authority to act as a Harbour Authority, the Association proved itself very effective on several occasions in preventing unwanted legislation being imposed on the harbour and surrounding land.

For many years BHBA had established a group of local boatmen and ferrymen to act as Harbour Wardens, to offer advice to visitors using the harbour and 'policing' those boats seen to be ignoring the speed limits in the harbour and creeks and the designated water ski areas.

With the passing of time, membership numbers of BHBA grew slowly and reached about 100 members. However, in recent years there has been a huge increase in leisure vessels based in the harbour and the number of professional boatmen and fishermen earning their living from the harbour has been decreasing. The time had therefore come for change to better reflect the views and needs of the majority of people using the harbour and increase the Association's funds by recruiting more members. It was also decided to apply for charity status to benefit from grant funding and tax rebates on membership fees and donations.

In order to encourage a wider membership of the Association, it was decided to rename BHBA to become BLAKENEY HARBOUR ASSOCIATION (BHA). As this new name suggests, we wanted to include all users of the harbour rather than just professional boatmen. In August 2015, BHA was approved for Charity status by the Charities Commission and a new constitution was drawn up. This principally alters voting rights from exclusively those earning a living from the harbour to all paid-up BHA members.



Membership numbers have quickly risen since BHA was founded and currently the Association has almost 600 members. We are confident that this number will continue to grow. Members now include not only boat owners but also all those who use and enjoy the harbour including bird watchers and walkers.

A large team of volunteers have come forward to offer help with all aspects of running the BHA and as the list below confirms, the Association now undertakes a wide variety of activities throughout the harbour. Almost 100 new buoys and beacons have been installed, many of which are fitted with lights, ensuring safe night entry into the harbour. The entrance channels to Blakeney Quay and Cley Harbour are also now fully buoyed for daylight entry.

There is close liaison between BHA and Trinity House, the national licensing authority for Navigation aids (lights, buoys and beacons). They undertake a rigorous annual inspection of all navigation aids in Blakeney Harbour and over the past five years have issued the BHA with a 100% approval rating.

BHA also maintains a close working relationship with the National Trust who are the principal landowner around the harbour.

With growing support from all who love Blakeney Harbour, we are confident that BHA will go from strength to strength, protecting and conserving this unique and stunning harbour.

#### **PRINCIPAL ACTIVITIES CURRENTLY PROVIDED BY BHA VOLUNTEERS:**

- Installation, monitoring and servicing of all navigation buoys, lights and beacons throughout the harbour.
- Removal and safe disposal of wreckage and abandoned boats from the harbour, creeks and surrounding marshland.
- Provision of pilotage advice for visiting vessels.
- Regular pilotage updates via 'Notices to Mariners' to all members, RNLI, Trinity House and chart / pilot book publishers.
- Maintenance of slipways at Morston Quay.
- Provision of a weather station situated in the centre of Blakeney Harbour which can be accessed remotely for accurate data relating to wind strength and direction.
- Signage around the harbour to indicate speed limits.
- BHA Harbour Wardens offer local advice and monitor power vessels to ensure speed limits are not exceeded and wash is kept to a minimum to prevent saltmarsh bank erosion.
- Undertaking monthly drone surveys of the harbour entrance to monitor sandbank movement and ensuring accurate navigation buoy positioning.
- Provision of detailed information about the harbour via a comprehensive website and large information notice boards situated at Morston and Blakeney Quays. These provide a wealth of local information including tide times and weather forecasts for the coming days. Both website and notice boards are updated every week throughout the year.
- Provision of CCTV coverage (in close collaboration with the Police) to enhance security at Morston Quay.