



Historic port: a fisherman unloads his catch in the 1990s. The industry is set to benefit from a new handling facility, so shellfish will no longer have to be sorted in the open.

# Fresh from the sea

Fishermen at Wells work hard to provide a delicious local speciality. **Sandra Bush** describes how their industry is set to get a boost, local chef **Chris Coubrough** shares some ways to enjoy what they catch – and **Adrian Underwood** outlines harbour history.

**W**ells-next-the-Sea has been a port and a largely natural safe-haven for ships and boats for over 600 years. Protected by salt marshes behind a sand bar, the Port of Wells was one of England's major harbours in Tudor times and a thriving, busy centre for shipping and maritime industry in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Through the years the Port of Wells has retained a small fishing fleet, with working boats slipping out early on one tide and returning as soon as is practical on the next.

Wells plays host to thousands of holiday-makers and visitors almost all year round, making for a unique mix of people and activities. The long tradition of gillying (fishing for shore crabs) from the quayside is as popular

as ever and inquisitive visitors flock to the area on high tide to watch the fishermen unload their catch from the only remaining commercial port in the district.

Over the last four years Wells Harbour Commissioners have been working with North Norfolk District Council, local fishermen and other bodies, on a project to secure investment of more than half a million pounds of European money, and funding from other sources, including a £25k grant from the Norfolk Coast Partnership's Sustainable Development Fund, to provide a facility to support, maintain and sustain the local shell fishing industry.

Shellfish, principally brown crabs, but also lobsters and velvet crabs, are landed at Wells Harbour, from boats to the open quay. The shellfish are handled, sorted, graded and packed in the open. This is incompatible with good practice, especially for velvet crabs which are less robust than brown crabs and are sensitive to temperature change and drying out in air, leading to loss of quality and high mortality. These poor conditions leave fishermen in a weak bargaining position when selling their catch.

The project proposes a shellfish handling facility comprising a single storey building equipped with a freezer room, cold room, packing and loading areas. Outside the building,

part of the quay, which is in poor condition, will be resurfaced to provide a landing stage for boats and a hard standing and manoeuvring space for lorries and trucks servicing the facility. The new facility will support fishermen along the whole of the north Norfolk coast to adapt to changing species – velvet crabs and in time any other species that can benefit from a chilled controlled environment.

In February of this year a full funding package was secured, subject to conditions, for the development of the facility and it is hoped that work can now commence on site in April.

Wells Harbour Commissioners will supervise the construction and own the building. The land will be provided by North Norfolk District

Council, as an in-kind contribution to the project. The facility will then be leased to a local fishermen's association at a peppercorn rent, reflecting the Harbour Commissioners' desire to support the local fishing industry and facilitate local economic development; especially that associated with the port.

It is hoped that this project will facilitate and support the long term viability of the fishing industry and provide fishermen with the conditions through which they can compete with other suppliers where handling facilities are the norm and adapt to a changing species over time. A fresher, higher quality product will gain a higher price thus ensuring a more stable economic future for the fishermen and will attract a new gen-

eration to continue this tradition in a modern world.

Apart from velvet crabs that are exported live to the continent, much of the landed catch is sold locally to restaurants, shops and for processing.

Many fishing vessels along the north Norfolk coast have now signed up to the Seafish Responsible Fishing Scheme which has been developed to raise standards in the catching sector, enabling the fishermen to demonstrate their commitment to the responsible sourcing of seafood and thereby helping to create a distinctive local brand.

*Sandra Bush is assistant to North Norfolk District Council's strategic director, community*

## BACKGROUND: AN HISTORIC HARBOUR

Since 1675 in the reign of King Charles II Wells Harbour Commissioners have looked after the harbour.

The commissioners were set up 'for the better preserving of the Quay and the Harbour of Wells'. Their powers and authority are most recently defined by in the Wells Harbour Revision Order (1994).

Wells Harbour is a self-financing non-profit making body. All income derives from harbour dues, light and buoyage dues, car parking and other harbour services. All profits are channelled directly back into the harbour operation.

Currently, there are ten commissioners who support the work of the harbour master, the deputy harbour master and the staff team. The commission is responsible for:

- Maintenance of the channel and navigation equipment to Trinity House standards
- Maintenance of buildings, craft, equipment and quays
- Liaison with harbour users including the fishing fleet
- Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and the environment

- Health and Safety issues
- Communications with the public and harbour users
- Moorings for local boats and visiting craft
- Finance

In addition, it supports new projects, as appropriate. For the last three years it has offered administrative support to the local fishermen's project to build a fish handling facility on the quay. In the last year it has been working with wind farm companies who are keen to use the harbour as a base for building and servicing the wind farms.

The commissioners are always conscious of the need to balance innovation and economic growth with the maintenance, as far as possible, of the unique atmosphere and environment that is Wells Harbour.

Full details about the life and work of the harbour can be found at: [www.wellsharbour.co.uk](http://www.wellsharbour.co.uk)

*Adrian Underwood is Wells Harbour commissioner responsible for communications*

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## RECIPES

### TRY COOKING LOCAL SEAFOOD YOURSELF

When it comes to seafood and fish, locally caught produce is essential, believes local restaurateur and TV chef Chris Coubrough. Try his recipes and enjoy the taste of the area...

#### Tempura Oyster

**Ingredients**  
Oysters  
4oz flour  
1 tbsp Cornflour  
Pinch salt  
1 tsp baking powder  
1 tsp cumin

**Method**  
Mix all dry ingredients together and add 4fl oz of cold water. Take the oysters from the shells, dip in some flour and then the batter. Deep fry for 1 minute until golden brown. Serve in cleaned shells with lemon wedge and Tabasco.



#### Cockle Fritters

**Ingredients**  
250g cockles  
2 1/2 fl oz milk  
5 oz flour  
1 1/2 tsp baking powder  
1 egg  
Pinch paprika  
1 tsp chopped dill  
1 lemon

**Method**  
Sieve flour and baking powder. Whisk in the egg and milk, paprika and dill. Add cockle meat, a squeeze of lemon juice and seasoning.  
Cook in frying pan with a little oil for 2 – 3 minutes each side until golden brown. Serve on dressed leaves with crème fraiche and lemon wedge.

#### Crab & Avocado

**Ingredients**  
250g crab meat  
1 avocado  
2tsp chopped coriander  
1 lemon  
Cayenne pepper  
1 tomato  
Crème fraîche  
Red chilli finely chopped  
seasoning

**Method**  
Peel and dice avocado, add 1 tsp of lemon juice, small pinch of chopped chilli and season. Finely slice the tomato and season. Flake crab meat and add 2 tsp lemon juice, pinch cayenne pepper, 1 tsp crème fraîche and chopped coriander and mix.  
Arrange tomato slices on a plate, press some avocado into a small cutter on top of tomato, top this with the crab meat and garnish with crème fraiche and coriander.



Chris Coubrough runs the Crown Hotel in Wells-Next-The-Sea, Crown Inn at East Rudham and King's Head in Letheringsett, and is a TV presenter for Coastal Kitchen ITV Yorkshire, Anglia and the Discovery Channel, and various other programmes for Channels 4 and 5.

#### Spring Rolls

**Ingredients**  
500g crab meat  
1 lemon juice & zest  
2 tbsp sweet chilli sauce  
Pinch cayenne pepper  
1 tsp ground coriander  
2 tsp fresh coriander chopped  
2 tsp mayonnaise  
Seasoning  
2 sheets spring roll pastry

**Method**  
Flake crab meat and add all the other ingredients and season to taste.  
Place two sheets of spring roll pastry on top of each other and brush eggwash around the edges. Put a spoonful of crab mix to one edge of the pastry. Fold the sides over and roll up into a cylinder shape. Deep fry for 3-4 minutes until golden brown. Serve with chilli sauce.

#### Mussels

**Ingredients**  
1 small onion  
1 clove garlic  
500g mussels  
1/2 glass white wine  
50ml fish stock  
100ml cream  
seasoning

**Method**  
Sweat onions & garlic in saucepan, add mussels, white wine and fish stock. Put lid on, shake pan and allow mussels to steam for 4-5 minutes. Take off lid and make sure all the mussels have opened, discard any that are still closed.  
Add cream and turn heat down slightly and simmer for 1 minute. Check seasoning and serve with warm crusty bread, lemon wedge and chopped parsley.

#### Mussel Crumble

**Ingredients**  
1 small onion  
1 clove garlic  
500g mussels  
1/2 glass white wine  
50ml fish stock  
100ml cream  
Seasoning

**Crumble Topping**  
50g flour  
50g butter  
Seasoning  
**Method**  
Grate butter into flour and rub between fingers until it resembles breadcrumbs and season.  
Sweat onions & garlic in saucepan, add mussels, white wine and fish stock. Put lid on, shake pan and allow mussels to steam for 4-5 minutes. Take off lid and make sure all the mussels have opened, discard any that are still closed. Remove mussels from the cooking liquor and leave to one side. Add cream to the cooking liquor and reduce this by half. Take mussel meat from the shells and add tomato, parsley and cream, check seasoning.  
Put mussel mix into two ramekins and cover with crumble topping. Put in hot oven or under grill for 2 minutes for topping to brown.

## ADVERTISERS FEATURE

### Buy local – a guide to producers in the Norfolk Coast area

#### Crafts

**A & J Young Pottery**  
10 High Street, Holt  
T: 01263 713163  
Common Farm, Gresham  
T: 01263 577548.  
W: [www.young-pottery.co.uk](http://www.young-pottery.co.uk)  
We design and make unique, beautiful and practical stoneware pots. See our tableware and plant pots at 10 High Street, Holt or at Common Farm, Gresham.



#### Drinks

**The Real Ale Shop**  
Branthill Farm, off the B1105 Wells-Fakenham Rd, Wells-next-the-Sea NR23 1SB  
T: 01328 710810  
W: [www.therealaleshop.co.uk](http://www.therealaleshop.co.uk)  
We sell over 50 bottle-conditioned ales produced by 14 Norfolk Brewers. The shop is located on a classic malting barley farm, which supplies much of the malt.



#### Fish & Shellfish

**Cley Smokehouse**  
High Street, Cley, Holt, Norfolk, NR25 7RF  
T: 01263 740282  
W: [www.cleysmokehouse.com](http://www.cleysmokehouse.com)  
At Cley Smokehouse we use traditional methods of curing & smoking selected fresh fish. Why not try our smoked pâtés or dressed crabs. All products freshly prepared in the smokehouse to our own recipes. For our full list of products, please see our website. See our new range of cured meats!



**Letzers Seafood - The Crab Hut**  
Brancaaster Staithe Harbour  
W: [www.letzersseafood.com](http://www.letzersseafood.com)  
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#### Fruit & vegetables

**Bagthorpe Farm**  
Bagthorpe, Gt Bircham, King's Lynn, PE31 6QY  
Contact: Tid & Gina Morton  
T: 01485 578528  
M: 07979 746590  
Seasonal, organically grown vegetables and fruits. Available from the farm or Fakenham Farmers' Market. All produce sold is home grown on Bagthorpe Farm. B&B accommodation available.

**Plumbe & Maufe Farming**  
Nelsons Barn, Burnham Thorpe, King's Lynn, PE31 8HW  
Contact: Nina Plumbe  
T: 01328 738311  
E: [pmmfarming@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:pmmfarming@tiscali.co.uk)  
Plum orchard with over 30 varieties. Ready picked and PYO. Also apple juice and jams, both produced from our own products. 10-4.30pm in season, mid July – mid September. Located just off B1155 near Burnham Market

**Wiveton Hall Fruit Farm**  
Wiveton Hall, Holt, Norfolk, NR25 7TE  
T: 01263 740525 T: 01263 740515 (Cafe)  
W: [www.wivetonhall.co.uk](http://www.wivetonhall.co.uk)  
Wiveton Hall Fruit Farm, on A149 between Blakeney and Cley. Strawberries, raspberries, currants and asparagus. Lovely marsh views for PYO. Also delicious pork and sausages. Cafe open May-October, please call or visit website for opening times.



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