

NOWHERE ELSE I'D RATHER BE

Sara Green talks to Suffolk author, William Blyghton about his enduring love for the Suffolk Coast and how it features in his novels

WORDS: Sara Green

Author William Blyghton's love affair with the Suffolk coast spans more than four decades. So deep does it run that the coast provides the setting for the novels that comprise *The Suffolk Trilogy*. The first, *The House by the Marsh*, takes the reader swiftly from London to a house on a shingle beach surrounded by marsh. In the second, *Abraham Soar*, Thorpeness dunes are the location for another beach house overlooking the North Sea. In the third, *Noah: An Old Fool*, the River Alde takes centre stage – reed beds, shingle beaches, waves, river and tide.

William would rather be on the Suffolk coast than anywhere else. He first brought his family to Aldeburgh for a holiday more than 40 years ago. They rented a cottage on Crag Path and liked it so much they returned year after year, waking each morning to see the sun rising above the horizon, except, of course, on the plentiful days of cloud and rain.

Years later, William and his late wife bought a flat overlooking Crag Path and the sea. It was a bolthole, a refuge. So when they retired they bought a house,

hidden in a garden, set back from the sea, and came to live in Aldeburgh full time. They joined the yacht club and sailed on the River Alde. William had sailed as a teenager and the couple had sailed throughout their married life on the Blackwater river. They bought a Norfolk Gypsy, a gaff rigged boat. Then, when his wife became ill, a wooden clinker workboat called Springtide stole William's heart.

Built at Upson's Boat Yard, at Slaughden Quay, by Brian Upson for his father, 40 or 50 years ago, it was later sold. William then rediscovered it, damaged and twisted in another yard in Aldeburgh. He bought it and sent it home to Upson's where it was restored and rebuilt.

He describes the incredible 'muscle memory' of the boat as it untwisted, seemingly remembering its original shape. A new 75 horse power, beta-max diesel engine was installed and a wheelhouse added, the inspiration and shape for which came from a Lowestoft trawler.

In its new glory, Springtide was moored on The Alde by Aldeburgh Yacht club and William likes nothing better on a wet morning than to take her up

RIGHT: Author, William Blyghton at his Suffolk home.

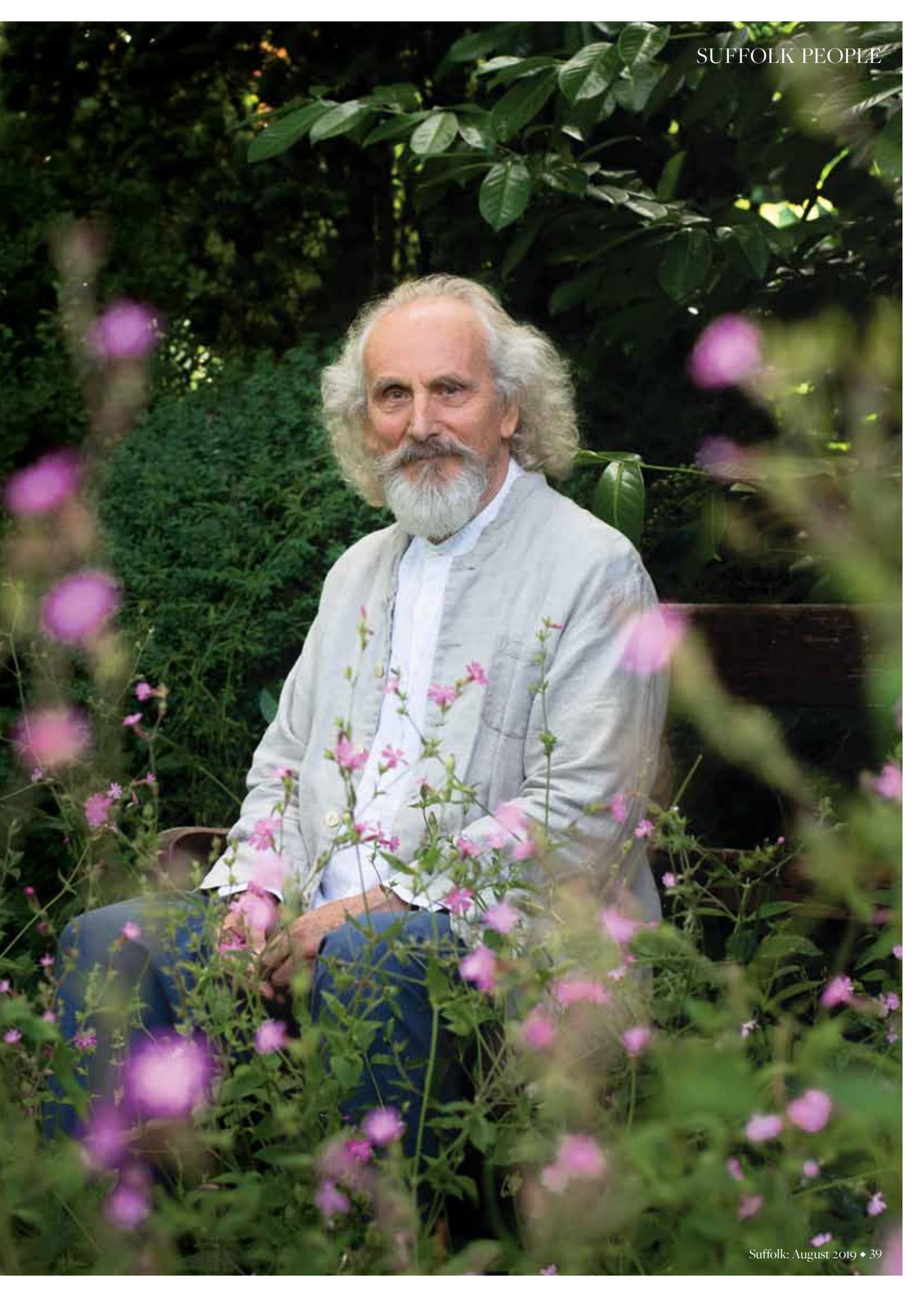
to Iken or down south to Shingle Street. Whatever the weather, whatever the season, blue skies or grim overcast damp mornings, the river casts an air of magic that can't be found anywhere else.

Sometimes, as the weather closes in, it's as if nowhere else even exists, he says, especially if you have a wheel house.

William's novel, *The House by the Marsh*, was written as a response to the death of his wife and the ensuing and engulfing grief and loneliness. The main character, William, bears an incredible likeness to the author but is, nevertheless, not him. He escapes London to live in the imaginary village of Frampton, overlooking the marsh, the shingle and the sea.

The novel deals with the subjects of grief, love and hope for men and women as they get older, with a humour and compassion that is so often missing in books tackling this subject. It makes the reader feel that grief can be seen as a journey to somewhere else and William (the character) finds immense healing in this journey – the house, the village and the people he meets take his life in an unexpected direction.

"Quite by chance, although ▶



nothing is by chance, William came to live in Suffolk, in the house by the marsh, and here a sense of ease slowly enveloped him. With each ebbing of the tide, his madness seemed to diminish.”

The second novel, *Abraham Soar*, tells the rather extraordinary tale of Abraham, a fictional character created by the fictional William. From the book:

“When William places Abraham on the page, he thinks he’s in command. After all, isn’t that what authors do, create people to say things for them that they cannot say for themselves?”

Seeking love, William introduces Abraham to another character called Bryony whose house overlooks the sea.

“Before we go in, we stand for a while on her veranda looking out towards the sea and I feel refreshed by the cool, salty air. The wind is strong from the south-east, sweeping long white-crested waves along the coast from Aldeburgh and crashing them onto the shore. We stand and look.”

William’s boat, *Springtide*, also features in *Abraham Soar*. The character, Abraham, says:

“There is something special about letting go of the mooring. Letting go and feeling the flow of the tide; feeling the direction of the wind, which today is strong, but not cold. It’s mesmerising. I enter another world, and I



think William does too. An ancient sense of adventure and possibility mixed with fearfulness. We take Springtide down river towards Orford.”

The final book in the trilogy, *Noah: An Old Fool* is much darker. The river Alde, in flood, leads to chaos as the sea walls are breached by the rising tide,

ABOVE: Shingle Street, a favourite place for William Blyghton to sail his boat and a setting for his stories

BELOW: Two of the titles in *The Suffolk Trilogy*

and there are wildfires in the heathland further up the coast.

Trying to come to terms with the changing climate and terrifying storms, Noah takes refuge in his lifeboat and tries to find a way to live in troubled times. Thank goodness for Molly, who comes to live in the house next door, although her somewhat mysterious past life and her bookshelves full of books about Russia, bring their own disturbance. But then, mystery and mysterious people are part of the Suffolk coast.

William is now working on a sequel to *The House by the Marsh*, exploring “the voices of women” through one of the characters from that book, Mary, who ran the village shop in Frampton. He’s also examining the ways in which people who live in remote villages in Suffolk survive wider social and economic turmoil by taking care of each other.

It is a story of the true nature of love and its enduring presence in our lives . . . even when we think it has left us behind. ♦

The House by the Marsh and Abraham Soar are published by Panacea Books. Noah: An Old Fool will be published at the end of the year williamblyghton.com



‘It is a story of the true nature of love and its enduring presence’