

Dedham Vale Society unfurls flag at church in memory of Wilf

# We've won 7-year battle for flagpole

CAMPAIGNERS have declared a victory over red tape after winning a seven-year battle to get a memorial flagpole on top of a church.

Members of the Dedham Vale Society wanted the memorial to Wilf Tolhurst, its chairman, who died in a sailing accident in 2008.

Mr Tolhurst, of Langham, had been competing in the famous Regates Royales sailing regatta, in Cannes, France, when he was struck by a falling mast while aboard his yacht, Safir.

The 64-year-old millionaire died of multiple injuries.

The society decided a flagpole on the tower of St Mary's Church, in Langham, would be a suitable memorial.

By **ANDREA COLLITT**

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But after five years of work, the scheme collapsed as church officials said the whole church building was required by insurers to be protected against lightning – described as an act of God.

A kit to protect the church against bolts from above would cost £6,000.

Sarah Carr, the Dedham Vale Society's honorary secretary, said: "We thought the diocese would bite our hands off at getting a flagpole for nothing.

"The fact they dragged their feet was amazing, particularly as Wilf Tolhurst had been a huge benefactor to the church."

Mrs Carr said donations from

members, parishioners, relatives of Mr Tolhurst and a grant from the Essex Communities Foundation, would have paid to insure the church tower.

But Mrs Carr said: "The huge cost was far more than the Dedham Vale Society could afford, so the project was abandoned in July 2013.

"We were upset to say the least."

But in May last year, things took a dramatic turn.

Mrs Carr said: "They suddenly came back and said they would cover protection for just the tower, I have no idea why."

Planning permission for the flagpole was obtained in January.

At long last, the flagpole was successfully put up in May, light-

ning protection was installed in June and the flag flew for the first time last week, on Waterloo Day.

Mrs Carr said: "We are absolutely delighted.

"Wilf was the most charming, charismatic man who would have been very proud of our tenacity."

Charles Clover, the current chairman of the Dedham Vale Society, thanked Mrs Carr for "her extraordinary persistence in the face of difficulties that would have deterred anyone else".

He added: "There could not be a more fitting tribute to Wilf Tolhurst, one of our best chairmen, who died before his time."

Mr Tolhurst was married to Ann. He had a daughter, Katherine, and a son Julian, and five grandchildren.