

# Passages, Places and People

*Our 50 years  
of sailing*



BY **ALAN AND ANNE ROE**

INSIDE  
FRONT  
COVER  
IS  
BLANK

*For Anne, my first mate in all ways . . .*

## **SEA FEVER**

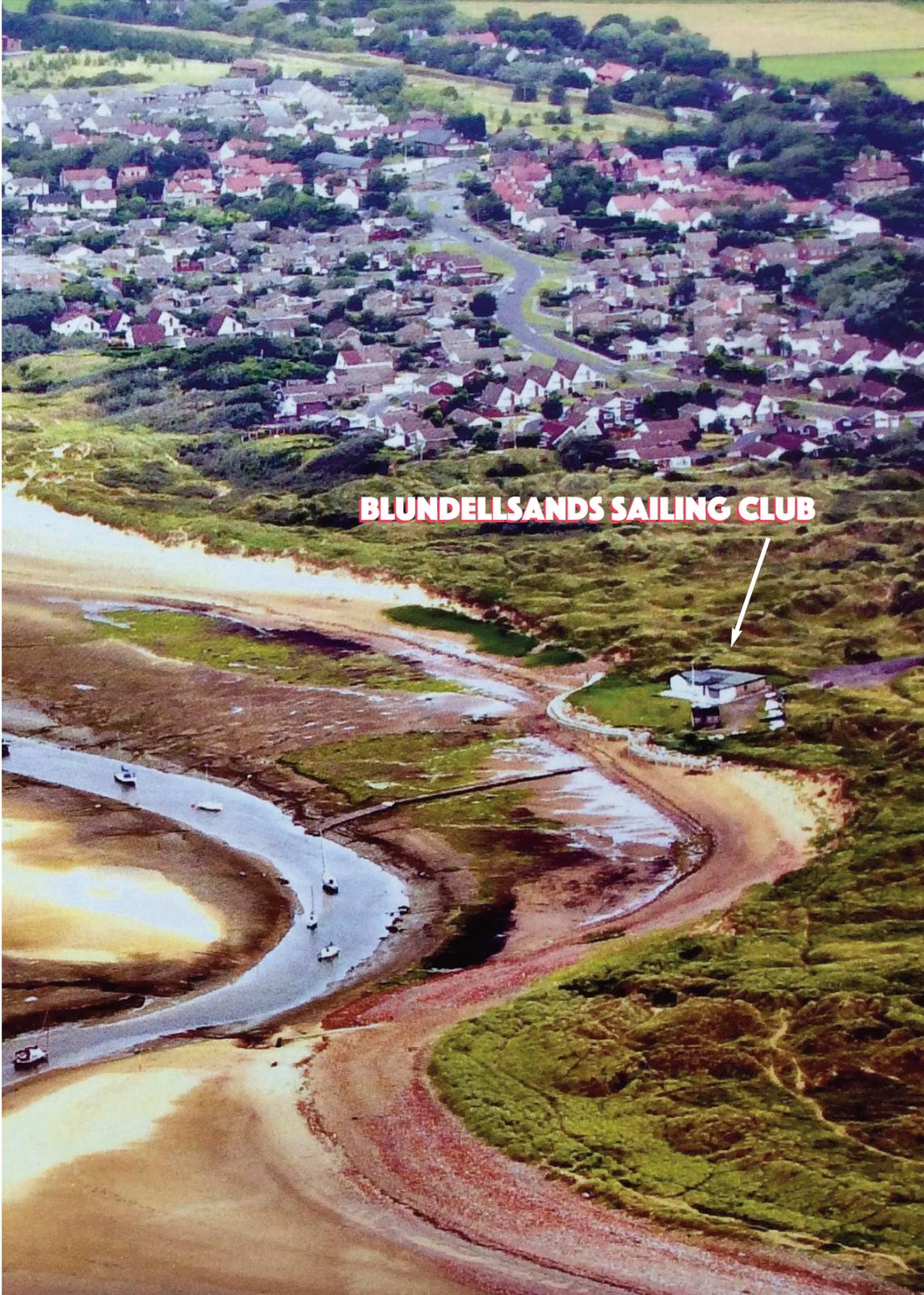
*by John Masefield*

I must go down to the seas again to the lonely sea and the sky,  
And all I ask is a tall ship and a star to steer her by;  
And the wheels kick and the winds song and the white sails shaking,  
And a grey mist on the seas face, and a grey dawn breaking.

I must go down to the seas again, for the call of the running tide  
Is a wild call and a clear call that may not be denied;  
All I ask is a windy day with the white clouds flying,  
And the flung spray and the blown spume, and the seagulls crying.

I must go down to the seas again, to the vagrant gypsy life,  
To the gulls way and the whales way where the wind's like  
a whetted knife;  
All I ask is a merry yarn from a laughing fellow rover,  
And quiet sleep and a sweet dream when the long tricks' over.





**BLUNDELLSANDS SAILING CLUB**

# IMAGINE . . .

CLOSE your eyes and clear your mind.

Imagine you are far out on a flat mirror like sea, it is calm. so calm you can see the reflection of the boat beneath you. Above is a perfect deep blue sky. The sails hang from their masts and the jib sheets lie on the deck and everything is still.

There is no noise just silence, THEN as if a gigantic whale passes deep in the depths or Neptune in his underwater kingdom far below, turns over in his seaweed bed, a swell gently rolls across the surface of the sea, imperceptible at first, then slowly lifting the boat until it passes underneath without a sound and it slowly disappears in the far distance.

THEN the surface of the sea changes, tiny catspaws start to play on it, little feathers of wind caress it and the sails stir. The wind fairies, the zephyrs have arrived and they gently start to blow and everything changes, the sea starts to develop small wavelets and the sails and jib sheets start to pay attention to the breeze.

As the wind increases the lines and pulley blocks start to rattle and jingle, the sails belly and slowly, very slowly the boat starts to move. A small wake trails astern, there is a chuckle of water from the bow as she pushes ahead. The breeze increases, the jib sheets are now bar tight, the sails are filled, our speed increases as the boat leans to the wind.

**YOU ARE SAILING !**

# THE BEGINNING ~ 1972

STEVE started it. Anne moved it on . . .

It was 1972 and my best friend Steve had bought an old fibreglass motor cruiser, sounds super, but in reality it was a ruin, practically needing a complete rebuild and it was never finished.

A couple of weeks later my wife Anne came home from work and said 'Look what I've bought you'! It was a yachting magazine, either *Yachting Monthly* or *Practical Boat Owner*; I can't remember. So I started reading and soon visions of billowing sails and a creaming wake as we left some foreign or exotic land became embedded in my head; and the more I thought about it the more magical it seemed.

I spoke to Steve and suggested that we buy a yacht between us and he readily agreed, It was like the blind leading the blind! Neither of us had a clue about sailing, but when you are young there are no barriers to your dreams.

I started looking through the ads in our local paper, the Liverpool Echo, and soon found a 25 footer which appeared to be just what we were looking for, so I rang the number and fortunately, very fortunately, spoke to a gentleman who realised immediately he was talking to a complete novice/idiot!

He suggested before we buy a boat why not join a sailing club and take it from there. He asked where we lived and then suggested a local sailing club to join.

The best advice I ever had, and to this day nearly 50 years later, I always advise potential boat purchasers to do exactly the same thing.

The club he suggested we join was the Blundellsands Sailing Club in Hightown – a village just north of Liverpool – which had moorings in the River

## The Beginning

Alt which flowed into the River Mersey, and had access two hours either side of high water.

The Clubhouse was a ramshackle building, quite low with a flat roof . . . obviously built that way to thwart the winter gales . . . and some 100 yards from the River Alt.

The facilities were crude, a small pot bellied stove, a small cubicle for the ladies indoors and a tin tray outside for us men – but it had a bar!

It seemed just right and we joined in July 1973 and we were on our way!

Friday night was club night and it was a totally different scene we entered. Most of the conversation was about sailing trips and stories that were to Steve and I, totally alien. However as the evening progressed, and the ambience grew, with the increased amount of alcohol consumed the characters of this hardy and very different group evolved and eventually after a period of time had elapsed a bond began to form between us and we became part of this magical group; which included Doctors, Solicitors, Engineers, Architects, ex-Seamen and all in between, a good cross section of working life.

We had a fair share of characters.

Rick for instance would offer you snuff from a small silver box. Derek, who smuggled a 12 bore shotgun into the clubhouse before a gentlemen's-only dinner and during the after dinner speeches discharged it into the ceiling! Fortunately it was loaded with blanks. Sam would take people out on his boat and you could hear him roaring instructions, with many expletives in between, as they moved downstream.

Jim who, as I passed his boat a few years later, dived below and as we passed him he held aloft a bra and an empty whisky bottle and shouted: "Can you fill these?" There was Fred, a mellow, kind gentleman, who only after his death did we learn that during the war he was an SAS Major with a Military Cross and was on the beach on D-Day two days before the invasion!

I think one of the outstanding events was every two weeks or so in the fifties, a certain Club member would sail out over the Christmas period to the Liverpool Bar light vessel and present the crew aboard with the Sunday papers and in payment a bottle of whiskey was passed over.

Marvellous memories! Little did I realise at the time that in the distant future I would become a Commodore of this wonderful club.

# MOVING ON

WE were advised before buying a big boat that we should buy a dinghy to learn the basics of sailing, and after asking around, Malcolm had a Heron to sell for a reasonable price . . . £75 I think . . . and the deal was struck and we were boat owners!

The Heron was a lovely little boat, 11 foot long, varnished both inside and out with buoyancy bags forward and aft, a dagger board, a lot of gear we didn't understand and it came complete with a road trailer.

We decided to have a day out in the Lake District to launch the dinghy for



## Moving On

our first sail, so Steve, his wife and two boys in one car, Anne and our two girls in another headed up the M6 in convoy, bound for Lake Windermere towing our precious little vessel.

When we arrived at Windermere we were disappointed to find that we had to pay to use the slipway and as we were short of money we thought there must be another way. After traversing the lake we could see it sparkling just across a field, so we parked in a lay-by and bodily lifted the boat over the stone wall then the trailer and then finally wives and children . . . and finally our little procession arrived at the waters edge.

Steve and I started to rig the boat but we appeared to have a spare mast and as we struggled a passing gentleman said "Would you like a hand?" "Yes please" we replied, and he explained it was a Gunter rig, which meant that once the small mast was in, the other mast was raised up it and Voila! we were ready.

The sails were raised and we pushed the boat and trailer into the water and once it was afloat Steve and I clambered aboard, sheeted in the lines and we set off – but not far; as we stopped suddenly and after searching around



## Moving On

discovered the mast head had caught in a small tree! We freed ourselves and headed out on to the lake.

It was a lovely day and although I thought we were sailing, however, with the lack of wind, it was more like a slow drift. Never mind, we knew now how to rig the boat and we had a nice day out, so onwards.

A few unsuccessful attempts followed, like turning up at the beach at Hightown only to discover the tide was out! But slowly we improved.

Steve, who worked for a large civil engineering company, had decided to work abroad on a contract in Africa, so we bought out his share of the boat.

We had some memorable outings: Camping by Bala Lake in Wales one Whit week, it was freezing. Anne and the two girls had a lot to put up with. This was followed by a visit to friends in Scotland. They lived in Strachur, which is at the head of Loch Fyne. One day I went sailing on Loch Eck, an inland loch, with Jane our eldest, who was about 12 at the time. We were surfing along, going great, when a katabatic gust from the hill above laid us on our side and we were dumped overboard.

As I struggled to bring the dinghy upright, a local man, a Mr Black, who had seen our capsizes from his house rowed out to us, and while I righted the boat, he took Jane to his house and his wife immediately put her in a nice warm bath and she was right as rain, I though, was losing interest in dinghies, and although I love water I want to be ON it not IN it!

## BIG BOATS

SO the Heron was sold and our first proper boat was bought from a club member – it was an Audacity, 22ft long, with a lifting keel and four berths. The method of construction was cold-moulded marine ply which made it immensely strong and it came with an inboard engine – a petrol Coventry Victor flat twin which never worked correctly for long !!

Our introduction to the vagaries of the River Alt was the delight of wading



## Big Boats

in thick and very smelly mud to dig in our mooring, which meant digging in anchors in either bank, with a chain joining them together with a another chain (the riser) attached to the centre, with a small buoy attached, so when the tide was in we could pick it up and moor the boat.

During this period I crewed for various people on their boats and took part in some offshore races including one of the big annual events in the Liverpool Bay area which was the Midnight race from Tranmere Sailing club to the Isle of Man (we never finished!) – but I was gaining important experience.

Sailing offshore requires a vast amount of know-how, including sail handling, engine maintenance, navigation, and above all weather forecasting. In those early years most boats were constructed of wood and many boats leaked to some extent, and to a beginner it was quite worrying when the shore was nowhere in sight and water was sloshing around your feet!

We sailed the Audacity on the Mersey and trips to Hilbre island which is



## Big Boats

off the Wirral coast at West Kirby and as our confidence grew we decided to sail to the Isle of Man on our annual holiday. So one July, Anne, our daughters Jane and Susan and I, got ready for our first big cruise. We carried our luggage aboard in suitcases! and got ready to leave. However during the night the wind blew up. I attempted to leave the mooring without success and our youngest, Susan, was seasick as the boat rolled around and the following morning the trip was abandoned and we returned ashore and that was the last time the girls tried sailing.

The River Alt is a drying meandering river and is perched with 21ft scaffold poles which means at low water the poles are driven into the river bank, so when the tide is in, we knew where the deep water was – so there was not much margin for error, and everyone at some time or other touched the ‘Putty’.

The hardy experienced types sailed to and from their moorings but people like us relied on our engines which at that time were usually unreliable petrol models and would invariably fail at a crucial moment.

## MY FIRST CRUISE – 1979

JOHN was a club member who had joined just after me, but had sailed a lot more with experienced people, and he had bought a lovely clinker built Stella called *Lodestar*, which was very similar to a Folkboat, but had an extra plank which gave it a higher freeboard (the height of the deck above the waterline) and it sailed beautifully.

We became friends and in 1979 he suggested a weeks sail to the Isle of Man, down to Anglesea then home. This was just what I wanted and jumped



My First Cruise



## My First Cruise

at the offer. Fred, another new member, showed interest and he was added to the crew list.

So after getting permission from Anne, I prepared . . . when I say prepared, the term was used loosely. My sailing suit was not one of your fancy Goretex all singing beauties you can purchase today, but an all-over oilskin delight, complete with hood, from a building site in heavy plastic – and to top it off it came in one colour: bright green!! a fetching little number.

So complete with a pair of yellow wellies and a flat cap I was ready to take my place with the yachting jet set!

As the Stella was a long keeler, she lay on her side when the tide was out and we had to wait for the tide to make, then once she was upright we inflated our small dinghy and moved ourselves and all our gear aboard.

The engine in the boat was a Stuart Turner 4-horse power single cylinder petrol 2-stroke and in the following years I became an expert in the vagaries of this little lump of machinery, which for some reason or another seemed to have a mind of its own.

However, today it performed just right, a tickle of the carburettor to get the fuel running, a quick turn over with the handle and she pop-popped into life. It did not have a gearbox but a centrifugal clutch which engaged when the engine revolutions increased. This meant when you wanted to stop forward momentum you put the throttle on tick over which stopped the drive and, fingers crossed, you stopped where you wanted to. It became an art form to stop where you intended to and not further on, as this could become very interesting in a crowded anchorage or marina, as we were to find out as time went on.

So we dropped the mooring buoy and moved downstream, carefully staying between the perches until we entered the Mersey and the Queens Channel, which is the dredged channel for the shipping entering and leaving Liverpool. A good lookout is needed here, as ships leaving on high water like us, to catch the tide, come charging along the narrow channel which is quite wide in some places, but narrow at others, so we had to be alert to stay close to the large channel marker buoys as the ships passed us.

The last channel marker is marked Q2 on our starboard side and ahead was the Liverpool Bar light vessel some 15 miles out from the port so a course was laid to Douglas on the Isle of Man, 320 degrees magnetic and we were on our way. Over the next 40 years I have read many books on sailing and I find

## My First Cruise



from personal experience that is practically impossible to describe life at sea in a small boat, you just have to do it.

The passage was to me fascinating, how do we find our way? The method then was dead reckoning, which meant from a fix (a known position, eg: Liverpool light vessel) we steered a compass course towards our destination. So far, so good, BUT you have to take into consideration the speed and direction of the tidal flow, which in Liverpool Bay could reach the height of 34 feet and run at up to 6 knots; and a magical thing called leeway, which is the wind with its different speeds and direction pushing the boat sideways and has to be allowed for.

All boats are different with their hull shapes and keel types and only with experience can you allow leeway for the boat you are sailing. Fortunately John knew his boat well and could estimate the leeway fairly accurately. We then had to know the distance run or travelled and this was usually a small ship's device called a Walker Log, which was clamped to the stern of the boat, and

## My First Cruise

a small propeller or spinner on a long line trailed astern attached to it, and as it spun it recorded the mileage on its little dials and was quite accurate.

So this is where navigating experience comes in, you can read lots of books on the subject but you only get it by doing it.

40 miles out, the sun was shining, the sea was a deep blue and I tried my hand at fishing using a mackerel trace and bingo, two lovely fish were hooked and brought aboard. What a day. I have never forgotten my first passage and the delight of sighting the island in the distance for the first time. We entered the harbour after a 14-hour passage and tied up to a large black buoy provided by the harbour authority.

This sounds easy, but the buoy was a large steel affair some 6 foot in diameter with a steel ring in the centre and the method of mooring was to drop the anchor some 75/100 feet away then reverse to the buoy to thread a line through the ring then centralise the boat – but our craft had no reverse gear, so we anchored, blew up the dinghy and rowed a line to the buoy and then positioned ourselves.

During the passage John noticed when the engine was running it was not charging the battery and because of my engineering background and general



## My First Cruise

know-how about engines, I was tasked to investigate. I soon found the voltage regulator had failed. It was identical to the type universally used on most cars those days so after enquiring where the local car scrap yard was we found just what we looking for – 10 shillings I think it cost. Once aboard I fitted the replacement and it seemed to work OK.

Two days later we slipped our lines and headed south, bound for Anglesea 60 miles away. It was a beautiful day with a light northerly breeze and soon John insisted on raising the spinnaker. This is a big sail and quite complex to rig if you haven't done it before. It is hoisted using a halyard, then controlled by two sheets (lines) and to stop the foot rising and falling, an up haul and a down haul.

I have heard raising a spinnaker is like flying, the take off and landing can be tricky but when you are up its great!

We even hauled John up the mast to take photographs and soon Anglesea was in sight and we anchored off Moelfre, a small village on the eastern side of the island. A humorous moment occurred here. All through the cruise we had decided no matter what happened we were NOT going to get our feet wet and some of the antics employed were farcical, like jumping on someone's back when stepping out of the dinghy when going ashore. It was the last trip ashore to the pub and on returning a little tipsy, Fred climbed aboard the dinghy and John put his foot down and managed to find a large submerged rock pool and was soon up to his crotch in the briny. It was hilarious and to this day he has never lived it down.

All too soon it was time to return home and it was with a heavy heart we weighed anchor and headed home past the Great Orme, the impressive headland protecting the town of Llandudno and along the north Wales coast, to enter Liverpool Bay and eventually our little river to pick up the mooring once more. Our small cruise had come to an end but I was keener than ever for more.

Summer cruises in subsequent years followed but with one major difference – my wife Anne was on the crew list. The children were at an age when they wanted to do different things so Grandad and Grandma stepped in and we were free to sail. Anne was a good addition, she was a great crew member – never complaining even if we were sailing overnight; and she would keep John and I well fed and watered even if the boat was leaping about at a 45 degree angle.

We were fortunate to have some of the best cruising grounds in Britain on

## My First Cruise

our doorstep with Northern Ireland and its magnificent coastline and western Scotland with its myriad of islands and lochs.

A typical cruise would be River Alt to Isle of Man, on to Portpatrick on the Mull of Galloway, up to Lamlash on the Isle of Arran, up to East Loch Tarbert, Kintyre then returning with a stop at Peel on the IOM, down to Anglesea, then home. This would be our two weeks annual leave from work and from memory we were only once delayed by bad weather; and that was only by one day. The weather was a lot more settled then and over the following 30 years it has gradually become more unsettled; and recently Anne and I made a similar trip but it took us five weeks due to being stormbound at intervals, rather than the two it took back then.

I remember once sailing from Portpatrick to Troon and it was so hot John and I made makeshift Arab head dresses using tea and hand towels tied on with small lashings. Ah, those were the days!



## FRANCE 1981

WE were becoming more adventurous and we discussed going further afield, “What about France?” I said, “If we took all our annual holiday entitlement together we would have a month to do it, sail south for two weeks then return.” John was a little reticent, after all, it was his boat, he was the Skipper and navigator and although Anne and I were competent crew he had all of the responsibility . . . but he reluctantly agreed.

We had to get all the necessary paperwork organised: Customs, boat papers etc, as well as all the detailed charts for the various areas we would be sailing through.

So in May 1981 we drove down to the boat and we loaded our gear aboard. We were waved off by Jane and Susan who had driven down with us. Steve had returned home from Africa on leave and had turned up to see us off – a good job too, for as we motored out into the Mersey I found the car keys in my pocket and he had to hot wire the car so Jane could drive home!

The first leg was to the Menai Strait, the channel of water between Anglesea and the mainland and after rounding Puffin Island at the north east entrance we moved upstream picking our way past the small channel marker buoys, past the spectacular scenery with the Snowdon mountain range in the distance to pick up a mooring at the town of Beaumaris.

One of the classic UK passages lay ahead, the transit under the road and rail bridges connecting the island, past the notorious Swellie rocks, through the narrow channel leading down to Caernarvon.

This is one of the most dangerous stretches of waters in the country and needs great care to undertake. As with most things, the first time through the



Swellies can be heart stopping, so careful pilotage was required. The tides can reach dizzying speeds up to 8/9 knots with a spring tide boiling through the narrow gap. The recommended time to attempt the passage is to be at the entrance off the town of Menai Bridge two hours before high water Liverpool, which is high water slack through the half mile channel we needed to navigate.

There are various marks to aid safe navigation, lights, painted stones on the shore and the odd perch. So with trepidation we picked our way through and were soon safely on the other side and breathing normally again.

Over the following 30 odd years I have made many trips through the Swellies and have become at ease with the passage through, but it still needs careful pilotage.

It is possible to make the full passage from Beaumaris past Caernarvon and on over the ever shifting Caernarvon Bar sands and into the Irish Sea on one tide, so once clear we raised all sail and turned south.

This for us was a long hit. Some 150 miles across Cardigan Bay to the South Wales anchorage of Dale; so an overnight sail was needed. Anne is not keen

on sailing at night. I on the other side love it.

On a cloudless night the sky is like a large umbrella above the boat studded with stars and various pinpricks of light and if you are lucky you may see phosphorescence, which if you have never seen before, is magical, Small organisms in the water absorb sunlight and as the boat moves through the sea at night a bright green light explodes from the bow and lights up the surrounding sea, and from the stern the wake leaves a trail of green light . . . its just like a rocket ship trail streaming astern.

Taking turns on watch some three hours each soon brought the new dawn and there is nothing like a sunrise at sea as the stars fade and the sky starts to lighten in the east and the first rays of the sun peep over the horizon. Breathtaking!

Eventually Saint Davids Head and the islands of Skomer and Skokholm became visible off the port bow and in the distance ahead of us was a yacht heading towards us, and to our surprise it was a friend of ours who was also a club member, on his way home after a cruise to the Channel Isles. Quite a coincidence to meet at sea, so after speaking to them we continued on our separate courses.

Once we had cleared the islands and the off lying reefs we rounded the headland and picked up a mooring off the village of Dale which is part of the large natural harbour of Milford Haven.

This was a time before marinas became common and anchorages where the only places to visit, so we blew up the dinghy and it was a long row to the shore. Dale back then was small place but we managed to buy all our stores for the next leg.

After a two day rest we set sail for Penzance, another long leg with the rounding of Lands End waiting for us. A subtle change of sea state set in as we moved further south, the short choppy Irish Sea waves slowly started to become a much longer swell as to the west, after we cleared the shelter of the Southern Irish land mass, was America, 3000 miles away.

Another overnight sail and at low water we arrived at the Longship light guarding the Lands End shoals and we turned to port and entered the English Channel with the incoming tide hurrying us along and we were pleased to enter Penzance harbour.

Before us lay the big channel crossing and for that we and the weather had to be right. A nice diversion was the delightful Admiral Benbow pub on the

high street where we could get a lovely Tiggy Oggy or in layman's terms a Cornish pasty for 50 pence and there was a salad bar where we filled our plates. It wasn't until we were leaving on the last night we found out there was an added charge for the salad, no wonder it was so cheap!

Two days later there was a northerly  $\frac{3}{4}$  forecast and we exited the harbour bound for our first foreign land. Ahead of us lay 130 miles of sea and to our surprise many ships, – we hadn't seen so many ships in a confined space before. To avoid confusion there are two east bound lanes, inshore and offshore, two west bound lanes inshore and offshore and also various ferries travelling north and south, so a very careful watch was needed, and at night we had to adjust our course constantly to avoid these leviathans just in case they hadn't seen us. A 25 foot wooden boat would hardly be picked up on a radar screen so the old adage of 'steam gives way to sail' went out of the window.

As dawn broke and I came on watch, the sky was just lightening and I became aware of quite a large swell running – fortunately it was with us, and we surfed along at  $\frac{5}{6}$  knots toward the infamous Chanel du For, off the Brittany coast. John's navigation was spot on and we swept through the



narrow channel with its large lighthouse guarding the Ushant rocks and the mainland.

Another 10 miles or so we turned to port towards Brest and just another 10 miles on our starboard side was the small town of Cameret, our landfall. We entered the small marina and tied up to a pontoon, it was quite a moment for us. WE HAD MADE IT!

The yellow 'I require customs clearance' flag was flown. Unfortunately it was Sunday and the harbour office was closed. The following morning a gendarme arrived, checked the ship's papers and our passports and said: "Welcome to France".

After breakfast John went to the shower block and came back with a silly grin on his face and his eyes on stalks. As in a lot of continental countries it was a mixed shower block and he had the delight of mixing with some unclad lady sailors!

After recovering from our trip we went ashore and had a pleasant time wandering around the town. Anne was shopping for our next leg and we all had a lovely lunch in a small cafe on the quayside and I remember ordering oysters as an introduction to French cuisine, but John crinkled his nose in disgust as he could not bring himself to try some of these lovely local delicacies.

The weather was still being kind to us and in front of us lay the next tricky passage through the Raz de Seine, a notorious channel between the mainland and the off lying islands of the Ile de Seine.

Because of the settled weather the passage through the Raz was straightforward and later on in the day we anchored off the small town of Audierne. The following day was glorious and we explored the town. There was a large shellfish processing plant nearby where the catch was kept in large tanks before being moved to market, John who has an aversion to all shellfish says he still has nightmares thinking back about those unfortunate lobsters, crabs and various other crustaceans!.

The following day we sailed the 70 miles to Belle Isle and the harbour at Le Palais. This was an excellent downwind sail and we set and carried the spinnaker most of the day and our speed was a steady 6 knots.

We arrived at 1830 and as we entered the harbour an elderly man in a dinghy rowed across our path. I was on the bow and I shouted back to John in the cockpit: "Watch out for the old fool in the dinghy," and as we passed him 'the old fool' shouted across in perfect English "Welcome, pass me your



stern line and when you're settled come and have a drink!"

Douglas Shepherd was a delightful man, a retired airline pilot, who was a regular contributor to various yachting magazines. He sailed single handed a Folksong which was a modern version of the classic Folkboat, but built of fibreglass and he sailed the French and Spanish coasts during the summer months and when it was time to return to England, a friend would sail over on the ferry and they would sail home.

Unfortunately a few years later, while on passage from France to England they were lost, both boat and crew were never found and it can only be assumed that they were run down by some unsuspecting ship. A sad loss.

Belle Isle is the largest island off South Brittany and it was taken back from the English in 1572 and fortified to include a Citadel. However, in 1761 the

English recaptured it after a long blockade. It was later exchanged for Minorca. Two days in harbour gave us the chance to effect running repairs on the rudder as the cheeks had worked loose and needed tightening. The next port would be our turning point as the two weeks we had allowed to run south was approaching.

The run was good and we had a following wind as we left the harbour so we poled out the big genoa and soon were romping along at 6 knots. Later that day the village of Pornichet came into view. It is situated on the edge of the bay which houses the large resort of La Baule with its seven miles of glorious sandy beaches and there is a large modern marina there. We were guided to the visitor's area and I remember jumping onto the pontoon to slow us down, AND we had reached our destination. John later told me he wasn't sure we would reach France never mind our goal.

The following day we took the local bus into La Baule which is a lovely town to do some shopping, John, a young buck then, elected to have a drink or two in a beach side café while Anne and I were at the shops and when we returned he remarked he had noticed that a lot of the girls on the beach were either absent minded or poor, as quite a lot only had half a bikini on!

0900 and time to head north. We left the marina in miserable conditions, rain, poor visibility and little wind. After motoring most of the day we arrived once again at Le Palais at 2030 and tied up alongside an enormous yacht about 55 foot long with a narrow beam and masts that disappeared into the clouds. John was green with envy and annoyed because they wouldn't swap boats with him.

27th July dawned hot and sunny and we had to force John away from girl-watching to get fuel while Anne and I shopped for stores and we departed at 1000 bound for Port Tudy on the Isle de Croix some 30 miles away. There was not much wind so we motored most of the way and entered the outer harbour at 1700.

The mooring arrangement there was two large steel mooring buoys where you moored fore and aft and you needed long lines as the buoys are some distance apart. There didn't appear to be any room for us but I noticed a small gap between two yachts and shouted to John 'try there', so tentatively we made our approach to squeeze in trying to slow down as we went between the boats – Anne fending off one side and me the other. Not having reverse, a helpful Frenchman on the next boat tried to help by grabbing the guardrail

and as he bent down I inadvertently caught the toggles of his coat hood in my mooring line and dragged him along his deck, gasping as he was slowly strangled. At least it stopped us and I was apologetic but I could tell he was not best pleased with the attempt on his life!

The next day we set off to the anchorage at St Evette to wait for a suitable tide to once again tackle the Raz de Seine and its swirling tides. During the passage I had to strip down the dynamo as we only had a trickle charge going into the battery but everything looked OK. Then the engine stopped and refused to start. A couple of hours later it relented and ran sickly but it enabled us to get to the anchorage albeit at 0030,



29th July, this day was a big one. The day of the Royal Wedding of Charles and Diane, but first I checked the engine again but everything looked normal.

It was an early start and Anne stayed glued to the radio all day relaying events of the wedding to the cockpit. The passage through the Raz was lumpy but again the day was hot and sunny and the engine at times was temperamental. I began to suspect the poor quality of the fuel and indeed once back in the UK it ran normally, however, when we arrived at Cameret, to our delight all the English yachts were dressed overall with flags and bunting making a fine sight.

Anne had brought a large Union flag from home, it must have been 10 foot by 5 and we soon had it flying from the masthead, and later we had a most enjoyable night ashore in a noisy café/bar.

Two days later the time had come to leave France so we topped our tanks with water and fuel, took on our allowance of duty free, John's beer and tobacco, and our six bottles of whiskey and soon we were heading off through the Channel Du For bound for England.

The wind was in the northwest, just where we wanted to go, so we were close reaching (sailing as close to the wind as we could). To help us along we had the engine on, but it was not happy – that poor fuel again. We were not looking forward to an overnight passage through the shipping lanes and as the night wore on our fears were realised. We had been watching a ship heading west slowly coming closer and in the dark it was difficult to determine the speed and course it was travelling.

What an experienced skipper of a small boat should be aware of is that if you make sudden course changes the Captain on the bridge of a ship doesn't know your intentions, so we stayed on a steady course, and at times shining a torch on the sails. But as the ship got closer we were forced to initiate a 90 degree course change, and to our horror we were so close to it we could see people through the portholes and see the rivets in the hull! After that we steered away from other ships and subsequently our navigation was all over the place.

As dawn broke we were a sorry sight, Anne was in her bunk, I awoke on the cockpit floor and John on the helm was asleep, but the boat was still heading north, it must have known! We sorted ourselves out, its amazing what a cup of tea and a bacon butty can do, and we were ready for the day. All the shipping lanes had been crossed and in the distance land could be sighted, but where on the coast were we?

As we sailed on, trying to get a fix from the shore, there was an almighty bang in the distance, it was so loud the air around us seemed to compress, we thought at the time it could be naval gunfire on a firing range. We found out later it was Concorde, leaving London bound for New York, breaking the sound barrier mid channel.

Lady Luck (and John's navigational skills) found us once more off Penzance and we gratefully tied up to the harbour wall. We flew our yellow customs flag and before long a customs official arrived in his minivan. He shouted dow: "Where have you come from?" and "have you anything to declare?" When we told him we had six bottles of whiskey, he scratched his head and said: "I think you are over the limit, when are you sailing?" We told him we were sailing on the next suitable tide, and after more scratching: "If I come back we will have to fill in all the necessary forms, but if I don't, then sail." He never came back and we sailed.

Before then we visited the homely Admiral Benbow and their lovely Tiggie

Oggies but with one difference, we paid the proper price!

I started to have a bad nagging toothache and put off visiting a local dentist because we had a lovely dentist back home, and if anyone could save my tooth it was him, so I started taking painkillers, which made me feel drowsy. I was not a happy bunny, and when we eventually reached home I had an emergency appointment with our lovely dentist, who, after an examination, said: "You have an abscess, the tooth will have to come out". After all that I could have had it out in Cornwall and saved myself 10 days of agony! I have heard you learn sense as you grow older, I hope so.

Once more slipping our lines we motored out into the English Channel to arrive at low water at the Longships light off Lands End to catch the incoming tide to help us on our way north.

Another long overnight sail, but the weather was kind and we sailed most of the way. It was with relief we once again dropped the anchor at Dale.

The clock now was against us, time was running short for our planned



return date so we sailed on a poor forecast. When we left, the wind although in the north was light, but began to increase as we left the shelter of the islands of Skomer and Grassholm, and the seas started to pick up, and it was heavy going with the boat leaping off the tops of waves and crashing down into the troughs. The only course we could lay would take us to Ireland which was no good at all, so after being battered for four hours and then after a seam in the headsail ripped, we turned around and ran back to Dale to lick our wounds and wait for better weather.

Today was D Day, if we didn't sail today we would have to leave the boat and get the bus home. The forecast was slightly better and we lifted the anchor and once again headed north. The wind was still in the north but lighter, and consequently the seas were down, and with the engine on we motor sailed and as the day progressed the wind shifted to the NE and we got sail on and finally sighted the Bardsey island light ahead at 2am and then the wind died and was replaced by fog.

Slow progress was made but we arrived at Caernarvon bar right on time to catch the tide into the Menai. We had a few hours to kill before the tide would be right to pass the Swellies, so we picked up a mooring off Port Dinorwic before once again moving under the bridges and dropping the anchor off the Gazelle public house and then it was ashore for a much needed pint.

Our last day, the wind was still in the north and as we reached the narrow gap between Anglesea and Puffin Island the fast outgoing tide was pushed up by a wind over tide situation (the wind in the opposite direction of the running tide). A very choppy sea had built up and it was hard going to reach open water. A rough ride followed to the Liverpool Bar Light and I got a soaking as a large wave crashed aboard, but John escaped and thought it was very funny.

In our impatient rush to enter the Alt we touched the bottom in the big rollers but on the rising tide we were soon safe and sound on the mooring and our odyssey was at an end.

John, as Skipper, wrote a log about the trip and entered it into the Liverpool Bay Sailing Association annual competition for the best log submitted that year and he won first prize. As an aside, our trip for the furthest point to have been reached, and returned, has not been bettered to this day in our sailing club.

## ARROW 1985

IN 1984 Anne and I decided the time had come to buy a bigger boat more suitable for our plans. The Audacity was sold to a friend in Scotland and we began to look around for a suitable replacement. We already knew we wanted a long keeler as we liked the motion of the Stella at sea and we were planning some longer trips; so I liked the idea of a big keel which couldn't fall off!

There were a few contenders – the Contessa 26 was one and although she sailed well, it was quite cramped down below, The Albin Vega which we liked, the Halycon 27 which ticked all the boxes and we looked at a couple, however, they were not quite right. During our enquiries someone said: “Why don't you look at a Bowman 26?”

We hadn't seen one before but the write up was excellent and Yachting Monthly had done a review and it was allegedly the Rolls Royce cruiser of its day so we started to look around. Not many had been built, around 12 or so, consequently they were hard to find and the ones for sale were quite expensive.

We tracked down a possibility, a 1968 Mk 1. It had been lying in a factory yard after the owner had died and we made contact with the friend of the widow, who was acting as her agent, and we drove down to Hertfordshire to have a look at her. The boat had been lying on a steel cradle for a number of years and she was in a very sorry state. The large transom hung rudder had a split in it about 4 feet long, the cabin doors were rotten and the engine, a Volvo MD1 had seized, All the teak work was bleached where the varnish had come off. All in all she looked very sad but after completing an extensive survey, I decided that the hull was sound and at the right price it was a viable proposition.

We arrived back to Liverpool and after a long discussion among ourselves we offered £6,000. The widow said the boat was insured for £11,000 so our bid was rejected. The search for a boat continued to no avail that summer, so when the winter was over, early in 1985 I rang the friend of the widow who told me the boat had not been sold, so I said the offer still stood – but not for long – as with the oncoming season approaching we needed a boat.

After a day or so they said they were willing to settle for £6,500 and then we counter offered £6,250 which was accepted and we had a boat! We drove down to arrange the sale and a survey. While there I had a look at the engine. I removed the injector and in the boat stores I found a bottle of something with instructions written in Swedish.

I poured some of the liquid into the cylinder and putting a spanner on the crankshaft nut, I rocked it back and forth. I felt a slight movement, then more, and after a few minutes the piston was free and the engine turned over quite



smoothly. It was a few months later I found out the liquid in the bottle turned out to be not lubricant but anti-freeze! Eventually when the boat was home in the boatyard of our club, I changed the engine oil and filter and turned it over and it fired up immediately and ran perfectly when required for the following 15 years. Before we left I took a photograph of Anne standing by the boat, She looked lovely but I needed her as a measurement to build a trailer!

The boat was transported by road using a local contractor. It was lifted by crane in the factory and lowered gently onto the road trailer and it was a long careful trip back up the M6. We had a crane standing by at the boatyard in Hightown to lift it off the road trailer and on to its new launching trolley I had built. It was heart stopping to see the boat 20 feet up in the air swinging on the lifting strops.

Unfortunately, as the boat was lowered onto her new trailer, it soon became apparent it was not man enough, as the timber I had used began to break up and emergency props had to be used to keep the boat upright. In subsequent weeks I acquired some steel to make a more substantial trolley and finally the boat was safe and sound on it.

The boat's official name was Sussex Bowman, hardly fitting for its new home so we decided to change it. As Anne and I had the same initial, our surname was Roe, and there was a bow and arrow on the sail – Arrow became the obvious choice.

The plan was to just do what work was necessary to get us safely to sea, so I cleaned the hull back to the original gelcoat and because anti-foul paint was so expensive at that time, we elected to leave the hull as it was and scrub off any growth as necessary.

I repaired the crack in the rudder by grinding out the crack and fibreglassing a new section over it, so it was really stronger than before. All the teak woodwork was sanded down and revarnished and slowly she started to look like she was supposed to. When I was carrying out the initial survey, I had discovered down below in a locker, two brand new replacement teak cabin doors which was great news and our friend Bob who was an exceptional carpenter fitted them and they are still perfect to this day.

So early May we launched her and she looked very pretty on her mooring. The mooring was not ideal, as when the tide dropped the boat lay on her port side at an angle of 45 degrees, but righted herself as the tide rose.

A few days later, one evening we received a phone call from a friend with

the awful news, 'Your boat has sunk'. We immediately drove the 17 miles to the river and it was heartbreaking to see all the other boats swinging on their moorings while all we could see of our beautiful Arrow was the top of the mast sticking out of the water.

Our friend Joe who had his boat on the next mooring to us, was excellent. "Stay on my boat until the tide drops when you can start bailing" he said. So a long night ensued. We had to wait for the tide to drop which seemed to take forever, but it was about four hours before we rowed across and as soon as we could, we started bailing out the water with buckets. We had to get the water out as quickly as possible as the weight of the water inside the boat could damage the hull.

At first the water level didn't appear to be moving but slowly we started to win and with arms like knotted string we finally got the water level down to a few gallons in the bilges. As we stopped for a break I could hear running water, and after an examination, I found a small crack between the hull and the deck under the teak rubbing strake and as the boat was over at an angle all day between tides the deck was just under the water and it was trickling in, so the boat never sank, she just didn't float with the amount of water inside.

Everything was covered in a film of diesel oil and mud and it took many days to get the boat shipshape. I remember putting the foam berth cushions, there are 11 of them, on our sloping garage roof at home to dry and squeezing out any excess water as I passed.

Temporarily, to stop the boat leaking, I made sure she would lie down on her other (starboard side) by flaking anchor chain along the deck and filled water containers on a swung out boom. This worked and the next time we had the boat out of the water the crack was fibreglassed and the problem was solved.

The engine oil was changed, the fuel tank emptied, cleaned and refilled, the alternator was stripped and rebuilt and undeterred we had our plan to sail back on track. Enthusiasm is a great mover.

## OUR FIRST CRUISE – 1985

THE 24th July, 1985 started off badly. We appeared to have moved the contents of the house the 17 miles to the dinghy park ready for embarkation. So after three trips back and forth from the slipway to the boat with all the necessary gear required, and ensconcing Anne on board, I drove the short distance to a friend's house where the car would be parked until our return.

I strolled back to the waiting dinghy and rowed back to the boat. The dinghy was taken aboard, deflated and lashed down on the foredeck. Then Anne casually asked: "Have you seen my bag?" The earth stood still, I had an icy tingle down my spine, IT WAS AT HOME.

A quick calculation was made 'Can it be done?' yes, just, if I hurried. So all hell let loose! The dinghy was unlashed and partly inflated and I leapt into it and frantically rowed ashore, and carried it to the dinghy park. I then ran to the car and drove the 17 miles home.

The bag was lying on the bed. It seemed later like an old Keystone Cops movie, all speeded up. The return trip seemed to take forever but once again the car was parked and I ran back to the dinghy park and launched the dinghy – the fast ebbing tide rushing me along. Anne had everything ready, we tied the dinghy astern, I started the engine, dropped the mooring and moved downstream, but halfway down our marked channel we ran aground.

Frantic engine juggling followed – forward, then reverse and I think the 'oh dear' and 'how frightfully unfortunate' remarks helped and we were free. When we were in deeper water we anchored and tried to regain some composure. The dinghy was once again brought aboard and lashed, the anchor weighed and we were off.

It had been wonderful day weather wise, hot and sunny, and when we reached Liverpool Bar light vessel at 1830, I took a fix and set course for Douglas. The evening was clear with little wind so it was motor on and then sit back and enjoy the starlit sky and the wonderful phosphorescence as we tramped along at 5 knots.

Thick fog arrived at 0330 and it was difficult listening for ships and their sound signals with our engine running so I stood on the foredeck and strained my ears for any alarming sounds. Travelling in fog is weird, the visibility governs your bubble. I say bubble, because that is just what it is like, we could see about 100 feet all round as we moved along and we had our fingers crossed no one would enter our particular sphere. The fog was so thick the moisture was soon dripping off everything including our noses and ears. Miserable.

Careful pilotage was now required, I checked the log and by my calculation we had run the distance but because of the visibility we had no idea how far off the island we were. I slowed the boat down to a crawl. I could hear seagulls crying not far away and then 100 yards ahead high cliffs loomed out of the mist and I shouted back to Anne in the cockpit "Turn us around quick!" I thought we were south of Douglas so keeping the shore in sight we moved north and after three miles or so I recognised Laxey. So in actual fact, we were too far north. We retraced our steps, and soon after, the welcoming arms of Douglas harbour appeared and we tied up alongside a 32 footer which was moored to the latest improvement, a large floating wooden pontoon which was a great addition and did away with the palaver of the black buoys.

Although it was hot and sunny on shore the thick fog abounded off shore, so our planned trip to Scotland had to be abandoned as the days clicked along and the return to work day was looming closer.

One day the wind shifted to the north east, which blew straight into the harbour, setting up a most uncomfortable swell and the various boats on the pontoon began to roll into one another, so time was spent adjusting lines and fenders and a restless night followed.

0300 one morning found me rowing across the harbour to retrieve a loose (and expensive) fender. I had had enough, the wind had started to strengthen so the next morning I elected to move the boat onto the black buoy, so at least if it was roly – we wouldn't have to worry about crunching into the other boats.

This move turned out to be very prudent as during that night the motion

became so violent two boats collided heavily and one had about 4 foot of teak toe rail ripped off.

The owner grumpily shouted across to me the following morning “You had the right idea, I wish I had joined you!” Oh well, hindsight is wonderful. The wind swung into the north so we motored out of the harbour and set course for Port St. Mary, passing the impressive cliffs just south of Douglas, which in places are crumbling into the sea.

Passing Langness point, and its swirling and choppy overfalls, brought us to the large bay with the Calf of Man and the Chicken Rock lighthouse in the distance. Some five miles to the west, the Harbour of Port St. Mary beckoned us and we tied up to a private mooring in the outer harbour. I rowed ashore and asked in the sailing club ‘Was it OK to use the mooring? I was told the owner of the mooring was sailing in the Med so go ahead. I then asked if the tackle was heavy enough for our boat as there are no guarantees about the condition of moorings. They assured me the boat that used the mooring was called Morning All, which was a sister ship of Ted Heaths racing yacht Morning Cloud, so it should be OK!

Up to now the weather had been quiet, pleasantly warm and mainly sunny but we started to receive the bad news that the air pressure had started to drop and gales were forecast. The conditions deteriorated quickly and over the next few days the harbour was filled to capacity with fishing boats and yachts sheltering.

The sailing club ashore was a godsend keeping their doors open 24 hours for all the stranded sailors to use the showers, toilets, phone and members lounge. The wind was so strong I put an extra line on the mooring buoy and as the wind increased I used a short length of chain off our spare anchor to make sure we stayed attached.

Getting ashore was a trial, with the high winds and waves splashing over the dinghy and when we arrived at the quay we were dripping wet. I was so concerned about the dinghy being flipped over I put some gallon containers filled with diesel fuel in the bottom to act as ballast!.

It became obvious we would not be back for work on Monday but we were like the others, all in the same boat, stranded.

The forecasts where depressing N/W 7,8,9! After six or seven days it began to improve, a Westerly 5/6 was forecast and we decided to make a run for it. All day the wind was a steady 6 and we started to have doubts but as the day

wore on it dropped to a Westerly 4 so we decided to go. Under normal circumstances we wouldn't have left but both Anne and I were both under pressure to return to work and being stormbound was starting to create problems as our money was running out – and so were our supplies.

We calculated we would need to leave at 2230 to catch the tide into the Alt the following day. I put a double reef in the mainsail and hanked on the working jib ready to hoist as we left the harbour. I rang the coastguard on our VHF radio and informed them of our plans and motored out. The sea state was OK close inshore, but I knew once we left the shelter of the island things would be different and so it was.

I set the main and poled out the jib and soon we were goose winging along at 5/6 knots (goose winging means the main sail is on one side of the boat and the jib is on the other side and it looks like birds' wings), As it was dark it was difficult to see the waves and judge the sea state but as dawn broke a few hours later we could see the massive sea. The rollers were about 15 to 20 foot high and at first it was exhilarating surfing down the waves coming to a halt in a shower of foam at the bottom of the trough then being lifted by the next roller and accelerating as the wind caught the sails and we were off again.

A few hours later we received a strong wind warning from the Coast Guard over the VHF issued by the Met Office. W6 going SW 6/7. Before things deteriorated I dropped the jib and bundled it into its bag and stowed it below. Anne was uneasy by the height of the waves and refused to look astern as the large seas towered over us.

It became quite difficult to maintain a steady course and I began to worry about our position as I couldn't leave the tiller to check my navigation. Then I remembered someone telling me that Holyhead Coastguard had a radar device that could give you a fix, so leaving Anne at the helm I rang them on the VHF and unfortunately that was not the case, however, they were concerned about us and said we should stay in touch.

The wind had started to pick up again and with the crashing seas and the wind shrieking through the rigging it became quite noisy. At one point I was down below and Anne was steering when a following sea rose, came over the transom and filled the cockpit leaving her soaked to the knees. We were going too fast and we had been pooped! The water quickly drained away through the cockpit drainers but if it happened again I would have to slow us down. We were starting to feel tired, the constant bracing and violent motion began

to tell, It had been impossible to use the cooker, so no tea or any other hot drink was available, in fact very little handy food. We settled for a tin of peaches which helped a lot (in fact ever since it has been our poor weather standby) .

I heard Holyhead Coastguard calling ships in the area to keep a lookout for us as they had not heard anything from us and they were becoming concerned. I called them immediately to assure them we were OK but getting tired. They asked me what could we see and after peering through the binoculars I could just make out land in the distance off our starboard bow. They then said could we close the coast and they would try and get a visual sighting of us. When we about two miles off the shore I swung the boat around and put her head to wind which meant we were facing the wind and waves.

While I was searching the shore through the binoculars, Anne who was steering, had difficulty keeping the boat on course because of the conditions and then BANG the boom flew across and cracked me on the back of my head and I slumped onto the cockpit floor, I soon came around to Anne shouting 'Alan are you alright?' and as I put my glasses back on, everything, sails, halliards and running blocks were rattling and banging and I roared at Anne to 'Steer the bloody boat'. To which she replied 'I would if I bloody could'.

There we were in the middle of a roaring gale having a row! I put the boat back on course and relayed what I could see to the Coastguard and they confirmed we were off Rhyl and they could see us from the shore.

Now we knew where we were they asked what did we want to do? and suggested as we were so fatigued could we enter the harbour at Rhyl? I replied I didn't fancy that as it was quite shallow off shore, and I had never been there before and also I would require a wall or something similar to lean the boat on when we arrived.

After a short while they came back on the VHF and said: "Would you like the lifeboat to come out and lead you in?" This made good sense, so I agreed and they said: "Stand by and the boat will come out to you". As we watched and waited I was surprised to see on shore the big lifeboat being driven down the beach by its tractor, I didn't expect that! I thought it would be an inflatable coming to us. We could see they appeared to be having problems launching and it was a good 30 to 40 minutes before they headed out.

Once alongside they told us by radio that the plan was they would put two crew members on board to help us. So I started the engine and steered a steady

course into the wind and the lifeboat closed in. It was frightening seeing the large boat coming closer and as the sea was very rough one moment we were looking up at them and second later looking down, eventually they were close enough for the two lifeboatmen hanging on the side to attempt the jump.

The two boats banged together and the lifeboat sheered away, then came back for another attempt. This time with another two crew members, and as we touched the two jumped and landed safely on our foredeck.

They came into the cockpit and said that because of the conditions it was impossible to attempt Rhyl and we should head for the port of Mostyn some 10 miles away. One lifeboatman was very experienced and the other younger guy said this was his first shout. The older guy had brought sandwiches in his pocket and they were accepted gratefully. He then asked if he could do anything and I asked him to rig the storm jib which was a very small headsail and he soon had it on and we started sailing.

We soon started to leave the lifeboat behind and the crew member told us what had happened. The launch of the lifeboat had been a disaster, one of the main lines holding the boat onto the trailer had wrapped around one of the propellers and a crew member had broken an arm! He said it was a good job we weren't in immediate danger as it could have been very embarrassing.

Rounding the harbour wall at Mostyn and tying up to the harbour wall was a great relief; the waves had gone and the wind, although still strong, was above our heads. The lifeboat eventually arrived and the crew immediately set to work to disentangle the rope wrapped around the propeller with big knives attached to long poles as we were told it was impossible for the boat to return to Rhyl in the rough conditions with only one engine.

But first we had to settle the boat down, so with many lines ashore and the boat leaning in at the correct angle we finally, after 17 hours at sea managed to drag our weary bodies up the harbour wall ladder and set off to the local pub for a meal.

We entered the Mostyn Arms and the manager greeted us with the words "Are you the shipwrecked sailors? Hardly shipwrecked but yes that was us. Before we eat I said: "Is it possible for us to have a shower?" "I'm afraid not," she said, "but we have enough hot water for one bath. Is that alright? So there we were, Anne at one end, me at the other luxuriating in this lovely bath, but not for long as the hot water ran out . . . but a much needed and appreciated gesture.

We returned to the bar, ordered our meals and when the waitress arrived with them we were fast asleep!

After sleeping aboard we left Mostyn harbour the following morning for our last leg to our mooring some 10 miles away, The wind had dropped slightly but a rough sea was still running. The homeward trip was uneventful. It was very choppy, but we entered the River Alt and finally we picked up our mooring and we were home.

In conclusion, had we learnt anything? First and foremost the boat was a star, it handled beautifully and never gave us a moments doubt, We were the weak link. Subsequently if we have to sail overnight we always fill flasks with hot water and make a large pack of sandwiches just in case and we always have an ample supply of peaches!

One footnote: when Anne returned to work the following day she was hauled up before the personnel manager to explain why she was not at work on Monday!

# PASSAGES

WE were on a six hour passage from Portpatrick to Peel on Lodestar and as we left the harbour, the engine started playing up, so while we were underway I lifted the cockpit floor and after examining the engine I stripped the timing gear, re-timed it, checked the points gap and after assembly it refused to start.

We were on a starboard tack, the wind was a south westerly 4/5 with a lumpy sea running and as I wrestled with the engine John would shout Lee Ho and as the boat was tacked, I had to move all the engine parts, spanners etc to the lee side as the heel of the boat changed. It still refused to start, and because of the conditions I was forced to retreat from the little devil.

There are visitors' mooring buoys in Peel outer harbour and as the engine was out of order we tacked to the buoy to pick up the ring, but after a couple of failed attempts we anchored and I rowed a line to it and we settled ourselves down. Now we were in quiet water I decided to try the engine, I switched on the petrol, tickled the carb, swung the handle and it immediately sprang to life and ran beautifully! It was a good job we had a lady on board!

## THE SQUALL

IT was a lovely day when we left East Loch Tarbet for Lamlash on Arran and as we reached the top of the island, we could see the sky to the west over the Mull of Kintyre darkening. The wind was westerly 4 and a slight sea was running. I said to John: "I don't like the look of that", so we quickly lowered the genoa and lashed it to the guardrail and as the dark low cloud swiftly approached, it started to rain and the wind picked up, the rain got heavier and soon the full force of our first squall hit.

The boat heeled so far over with the pressure of the wind on the full mainsail, it pushed the boat onto its beam ends, the masthead was over at some 80 degrees and the rain was so heavy it flattened the sea. I pushed Anne down on to the cockpit floor and put my foot on her back as I tried to steer the boat into the wind as John valiantly tried to pull the big mainsail down.

Another worry was close by there was a naval guard boat circling. We needed to keep an eye out for him. As quick as the squall arrived it passed over and within 10 minutes the skies had cleared the rain had stopped and it was as before – sunny, and the wind back to a westerly 4. We stood there and looked at one another dripping wet, Wow, that was something and through the departing gloom not far away with its attendant guard vessel was a very large nuclear submarine which had just surfaced, which you don't see every day.

Thinking back about the conditions the only way to describe it was just like standing in a pan of boiling water under a waterfall.!

# STRANGFORD LOUGH – 1991

ARROW, Anne and I were in Port St. Mary in the Isle of Man, rafted alongside a lovely wooden boat called Pelagrina which was based in the Mersey at Tranmere SC and the owner Alec asked us where we were going next. After some discussion about places to visit, he said: “Why don’t you go to Strangford in Northern Ireland its lovely there?” We had never been there, and apart from the scary tales we had heard about the frightening tides, I said: “We don’t have a chart or a pilot book”. “No problem” was the answer. “You can borrow mine and return them to me when you get home”.

Eavesdropping on this conversation was another yacht from Liverpool with a group of experienced sailors aboard, and they started to make comments like, ‘Oh I wouldn’t go there, you will be sucked under’ and ‘Watch out for the whirlpool’. It was all said in good fun but it didn’t do much for our confidence.

The following morning, we cast off and slowly motored out of the harbour with the crowd on the Liverpool yacht shouting: “Don’t go, we will never see you again” and other nonsensical remarks, or were they?

We arrived at the entrance to the lough which is the biggest sea loch in the UK and gets its name from the Viking meaning ‘Strong tide’. We were a bit early so we jilled about with the engine ticking over waiting for the correct time to start our approach. Then, when the timing was right we headed in. Fortunately it was a quiet day with little wind, but the calm water started to develop little swirls and at times it felt like something was holding on to the rudder. It was disconcerting, not quite feeling in control. Our approach speed was  $3/4$  knots and as we proceeded further into the lough it was alarming to

## Strangford Lough – 1991

be rushed along by the steadily increasing tidal flow, and as we approached the narrowest point between Portaferry and Strangford we hit the dizzy speed of 9 knots and I started to worry about stopping!

We noticed a mooring buoy just off Portaferry and headed towards it and once out of the main stream the force dropped dramatically and we were able to pick up the mooring without any trouble and let our frazzled nerves return to normal.

Strangford Lough is indeed a magnificent area to explore and we visited the small town of Killyleigh where we were invited to the local sailing club to participate in their quiz night and we won!

We picked up a mooring in Audleys Roads off the Strangford Sailing club a few days later and as we prepared to row ashore the club president Oliver was passing in his dinghy and after we enquired about the use of the mooring, he gave us the keys for the clubhouse and instructions how to use the showers and galley. He then said: "We are having a barbecue on Saturday, if you're still here you are most welcome to come." We were most certainly there and after being introduced as 'The International Visitors!' Anne and I started the dancing off and it was a memorable evening.

We ventured further into the Lough and were kept busy looking out for the many pladdies which are small rocky mounds scattered throughout the whole area, and we ended up at the Down Sailing Club. Their clubhouse is a most impressive floating redundant 107 foot light vessel and we were made most welcome.

Since then we have visited Strangford many times and it never fails to impress and it remains one of our favourite places.



# THE SHOWER

WE had arrived in the Menai Strait in a most unusual summer period. It was very hot and sunny and we couldn't believe our luck to be in this lovely location on such a breathtaking day. We picked up mooring which was roughly 500 metres from the shore, which was quite steep to the water and beyond was the main Menai Bridge to Beaumaris road with its constant traffic but far enough away for any sound to become a nuisance

The following morning we awoke to another hot and sticky day but a thick mist had rolled in during the night and the visibility was down to about 25 metres, blotting out the visibility all around the boat. After breakfast we decided have one of our showers. This consists of a solar shower which is basically a polythene bag with a black coating which absorbs the sun's rays and can get quite hot if left in the sun for a few hours. But if the sun is not available, as in this instance, we topped it up with hot water from the kettle. The normal procedure was for Anne to stand down below and I would direct the nozzle over her, and when she was dry it was my turn.

As it could get quite wet down below, I suggested as it was warm outside, and the visibility was down, it was an ideal opportunity to shower outside in the cockpit. I had already rigged the shower over the boom and when Anne reluctantly stripped off I diligently directed the flow over her and when she was dry the operation was reversed and as I was drying myself I happened to look around and was horrified to see the mist had cleared and the passing traffic was in plain sight enjoying the view, The shrieks from Anne were deafening as she rushed to cover herself and dive down below. On reflection I thought it was very funny but Anne had other ideas.!

# DISASTER!

WE had arrived off the River Alt after one of our cruises, We were too early to make our approach so we stood off head to wind with the engine ticking over. We couldn't anchor as the conditions were a bit lively with the wind gusting to a force 6 from the west, which in turn whipped up the sea, and we could see the rollers pounding on the beach in the distance.

After about two hours the tide had made enough for us to make our approach, so with the wind and rollers behind us we slowly edged in to our marked channel having two perches to sail between before the route swung through 90 degrees to run parallel to the rocky shore which at certain points was very close, only 50 metres or so. As we turned to port to follow the channel, the seas rolling in were quite heavy on our port side, and it was tricky keeping to the centre as the rollers kept pushing us towards the nearby shore, about 500 yards in.

Horror of horrors – the engine suddenly faltered then stopped. I immediately ran to the bow and dropped the anchor but it failed to hold and within minutes we were driven ashore. All along the beach were rocks and bricks but fortunately we were lucky enough to land on a small sandy patch free of rubble.

I could see in the distance one of our friends on his boat and I rang him on the VHF radio to come to our assistance, but he did not answer. I then unlashd the inflatable dinghy off the foredeck and attempted to inflate it . . . all at a 45 degree angle with the big rollers washing over the boat. We managed to drag the dinghy to the cockpit and as I attempted to climb in it a big wave crashed over the boat and I was washed out.

## Disaster!

I started to swim, but found the water was only waist deep and I shouted to Anne to throw me some long lines out of the cockpit locker which she did. We were close to a land drain outfall made of concrete and to mark the end of it was a large metal framework with a top mark. I waded along the top with the surfing sea trying to wash me off with the long line which I lashed to the metalwork on the end.

Back on the boat using the cockpit winch we started to winch, this did two things: it stopped us going any further up the beach BUT it also pulled us towards the outfall and its concrete side! While this mayhem was going on we received a call on the VHF radio from Liverpool Coastguard who had their station not half a mile away asking did we require assistance, but in my panic I could only reply abruptly that I couldn't speak to them as we were heavily aground.

Once again I waded to the end of the outfall to try and rig another line when suddenly the RNLI inshore lifeboat, which we found out later had been scrambled by Liverpool Coastguard appeared and one crew member jumped in the water and swam to me and shouted 'Give me the line and get back on the boat'. I did as he said and with an almighty roar from its two huge outboard engines we were dragged unbelievably off the beach and back into deep water.

I would have thought in those conditions, to pull a three and a half ton boat with an inshore lifeboat off the beach was impossible. However, it happened! The RNLI crew were very professional and soon had us tied up safe and sound on our mooring and then they left to return to their base in New Brighton. After we had dried off and had a change of clothes the magnitude of what had just happened sunk in and never was a cup of tea more appreciated than the one Anne handed me as we calmed down.

Why had our new engine stopped? I removed the supply line from the fuel tank and turned on the tap and . . . nothing! Had we run out of fuel? Anne passed me a small screwdriver and I pushed it up into the tank and whoosh, diesel fuel poured out. It had been blocked by sediment sloshing around in the tank probably stirred up by the rough conditions. So ANOTHER valuable lesson learned, clean out the tank regularly, and since then I have always filtered the fuel going in and fortunately we have had no further problems.

Our Guardian Angel was definitely with us that day albeit in the guise of Liverpool Coastguard and the marvellous RNLI.

## **ANNE AND THE SEACAT – 1996**

WE arrived off Douglas Harbour one sunny afternoon and I rang the harbour control on the VHF radio to obtain information on any traffic movements, and they advised us to stand off for 15 minutes or so as the Seacat, a large fast catamaran, was due after its passage from Liverpool, and as I scanned the horizon, sure enough there she was approaching very fast. As we had time to kill we decided to rig our mooring lines ready to tie up to the mooring pontoon.

Anne was standing on the foredeck tying a bowline when the Seacat passed ahead of us some 1000 yards away, and soon after the harbour control rang and advised us to make our approach. We headed in, then I noticed the wake of the Seacat heading towards us and I shouted to Anne to hold on to the forestay as the wave was approaching at speed.

I then noticed that there was a second wave some 50 feet behind and as they approached they were larger than they looked and I shouted to Anne a warning 'Sit down, Sit down and hang on!' As soon as she sat down we were climbing up the first wave and then heading down into the trough and as we reached the bottom the bow buried its head into the following wave and swept the boat submerging Anne practically to her chest. The screams were deafening as she clung to the inner forestay and as she made her way back to the cockpit the Harbour control came on the radio and urged us to hurry up as another ferry was about to depart.

Anne was in no mood to hurry anywhere and I was told quite categorically as she headed down below to dry off and change her clothes to 'Don't you dare go anywhere until I am ready.'

## Anne and the Seacat – 1996

So I made a slow entrance into the harbour and when Anne appeared, we tied up to the pontoon as if nothing had happened.

A FOOTNOTE HERE: in 1999 a Seacat ferry swamped and sank a yacht moored at New Brighton. Fortunately no one was on board and the boat was recovered albeit badly damaged. Subsequently the ferry has been ordered to reduce her speed entering and leaving harbours.



## RED, WHITE OR PINK?

*LODESTAR* was anchored off the small hamlet of Lamblash on the Isle of Arran. It was a lovely summer day and after lunch, Anne, John and I decided to row across to explore Holy Island, a small mostly uninhabited island, just 3 kilometres x 1km in size across the bay. It looked very interesting, with a Buddhist settlement on the north of the island and a retreat for Nuns in the south. The census in 2011 recorded a population of just 31!

As we passed a beautiful wooden boat some 50 foot long, admiring her lovely lines, the owner appeared on deck and I called across to him what a lovely boat he had and he replied: "On your way back come and have a look around". "Ok", we replied, "See you later".

We had an enjoyable afternoon on the island and we started the row back to the boat and as we passed the big boat, the owner beckoned us over and we climbed aboard this impressive vessel. Once aboard and after introductions, John, the owner said: "would you like a glass of wine? We have red, white or pink!" What a host! So with drinks in hand, we had a tour of this lovely boat. Two of these boats were built in Scandinavia and John had bought on. He had a business in Glasgow which required him to visit many of the Scottish islands and instead of using the many ferries he sensibly used his boat.

John and I were impressed with the walk-in engine room while Anne was similarly smitten with the walk-in wardrobes! Eventually we made our wobbly way back to our humble craft, a lovely end to a lovely day.

# THE ARTISTE

WE were ensconced in the Albert Dock (now the Royal Albert Dock) on one of our annual visits to celebrate the Mersey River Festival and we had settled down to a nice quiet evening, now that the large crowds had dissipated. We had just started on our evening snifter when there was a knock on the coachroof. Standing on the pontoon was Bill the dock Harbour Master and Judith, head of outside events for Liverpool Council.

“Alan”, Bill said, “We have a problem, can you give us a hand?”

Evidently an Artiste who had been contracted to perform his act was due to hold his dress rehearsal that evening which consisted of him being transported across the dock on a high wire inside a large 10 foot diameter spherical ball which was made of transparent plastic whilst playing his flute. The music was to be wirelessly relayed to large speakers around the dock and if it worked would be quite spectacular.

However it transpired that the safety boat crew, who were to be on standby and control the sphere, had consumed a lot of the free hospitality drinks that were on offer and consequently were unable to fulfil their duties!

A plan was worked out. I borrowed an outboard engine from one of our club members and a dinghy from another and we were good to go.

The Artiste climbed into his sphere and settled down on his seat, flute in hand. He was then hauled up some 20 feet in the air to the cable transversing the dock. There was a line which was attached to the bottom of the sphere and my task was to keep the sphere stable as it travelled across by attaching the line to the dinghy and using the engine to stabilise it. This was easier said than

## The Artiste

done as there was quite a breeze blowing and the high surrounding buildings funnelled it from all directions so I was kept busy dashing in all directions for 20 minutes or so until finally the performance was over!

The Artiste and all the equipment was retrieved and eventually calm reigned once more over the dock, The things they have you doing, BUT the show must go on!



# THE CREAM OF THE BARLEY

WE were in the marina at Malahide, Southern Ireland and we decided to have a day out to Dublin on the famous Dart railway. Dublin was its usual self, bustling with everyday life and its many tourists. After spending our day sightseeing we ended up in one of the numerous hostelrys wetting our whistles before returning to the boat. The people around us started discussing the differences between the various stouts and whiskeys available in Ireland. We threw in our two pennorth worth and as we were leaving someone shouted after us 'try The Cream of the Barley' but the remark was soon forgotten as we made our way back to the train, and finally the boat, and it was a relief to climb aboard our craft and into our bunks.

We left the following day and headed north for Ardglass, Northern Ireland, passing on our port side, among many other places, Carlingford Loch, which is the dividing line between the north and the south. Ardglass is a small town and in its heyday was a major fishing harbour but like so many places now, it is a shadow of its former self, A small marina had been developed at the back of the harbour and is run by the community and has been a quiet success.

After our evening meal, Anne and I had a pleasant stroll around the town and decided to visit a small pub called The Commercial Inn. It comprised of a public bar and a small snug. We entered the snug and it was very quiet, just one other couple and us. I stood at the bar and an elderly lady came through from the bar and said in her lovely Irish brogue "What will you be having?" I said I would have a pint of Guinness and would she happen to have any Cream of the Barley? "Certainly" she replied, and proceeded to pour a measure of whiskey into a glass. I paid her and returned with the drinks to Anne who

## The Cream of the Barley

after one sip declared “Thats lovely”. After they slipped down I returned to the bar and the lady once again came through from the bar and I ordered the same again: “a pint of Guinness and a Cream of the Barley please,.” Then it was time to return to the boat as it had been a long day, We said our goodnights to the barmaid, who I found out later, her name was Maureen and she was the Licensee.

The following day we sailed and we cruised to various ports around the Irish Sea eventually after 10 days or so returning to Ardglass before the crossing to the Isle of Man then home.

The boat was settled down, we had our evening meal and we strolled to the Commercial Inn, we again entered the snug and as I stood at the bar Maureen came through from the bar, looked at me and said: “Will you be having the usual?” I was gobsmacked, so i just smiled and said “Yes please”. I have never forgot that moment and i never will.

A few years later we again visited the pub but unfortunately Maureen had sadly passed away, but they still had the remains of “Our” Cream of the Barley.

### *Malabiðe, Southern Ireland*



## ELIZABETH – 1989

WE sailed north from Liverpool. Our destination was Strachur, which is a small village at the Head of Loch Fyne, Scotland, where our friend Lester lived with his wife May. All went to plan and when we finally reached East Loch Tarbert which is situated at Lower Loch Fyne. I rang Lester to finalise our arrival plan. He told us to anchor in Newton Bay, which is a small anchorage off the hamlet of Newton.

Our instructions were: anchor the boat, row ashore and ring me (Lester) and he would drive down and pick us up. So on arrival we dropped the anchor, blew up the inflatable dinghy and rowed ashore.

Newton comprises of a row of fishermen cottages and various houses dotted about and in the garden of one was an elderly lady hoeing the flower beds. I approached her and asked where the phone box was. (This was 1989 a time before mobile phones). "Oh" she said, "there is no phone box here". I explained to her I had to ring Lester in Strachur to come and pick us up. She said "hold on a minute" and went into the house, after a moment she came out and said "come in you can use the phone in the lounge". We said thank you and she left us to use the phone while she returned to her hoeing. After calling Lester we came out and said "thank you very much, we would like to pay you for the call". "No, No", she said, "Elizabeth is out for the day, she won't mind!" It wasn't her house, she was just doing a bit of gardening for her friend!!

Priceless.

## THE LADY IN THE BIG HOUSE

A FEW miles south of Douglas in the Isle of Man lies the village of Port Soderick. In its heyday it was a thriving little resort but sadly it has suffered badly from the waning tourist industry and the usual lack of investment and is now a shadow of its former self.

On one of our cruises we were berthed in Douglas Marina and one sunny day Anne and I decided to walk there to see for ourselves what it is like now. The coastal road which runs from Douglas Head to Port Soderick has been closed to traffic because of coastal erosion and parts of the road had indeed collapsed into the sea, However it is accessible by foot and we had a lovely stroll along the impressive coastline.

When we arrived there was not a lot to see, and we decided to find a local bus stop to return to Douglas. We climbed up the steep hillside keeping a sharp lookout for a bus stop but none appeared. We arrived outside a large house with quite a long gravel driveway to the entrance where two elderly ladies were talking. I said to Anne “stay here and I will go and ask where the bus stop is”. So I crunched up the driveway leaving Anne sitting on the kerb. As I was halfway there, one lady left and walked passed me, and the other lady stood at the front door waiting for me to approach. “Excuse me” I said, “Could you tell me where the bus stop is please?” She replied in quite a brusque manner “there is no bus service here”. “Oh” I said, “We have just walked from Douglas and we need to return to our boat in the Marina”. “Come in” she said, and I explained to her that I had left Anne by the gate. “Go and get her”, she said . . . it seemed that this Lady was used to giving orders.

I crunch crunched down the driveway back to Anne and explained that

## The Lady in the Big House

we were invited into the house, so we returned and the lady led us into this magnificent house. The hallway was very impressive with corridors going off in various directions and we were led into a large lounge overlooking beautiful lawns which seemed to go on forever, and in the far distance we could see the misty outline of the Lake District. "Would you like a cup of tea?" our host asked and we were grateful to accept. As we were drinking our tea I remarked to the lady that she kept the gardens lovely. "I don't keep the gardens at all" she said. Obviously she had a gardener, Silly me!

As we chatted about our travels the lady said: "Would you like to stay for dinner? I think cook is preparing chicken". We politely refused, she then said: "My son will be here soon and he will drive you back to the marina". Despite our protestations she insisted, so we sat back and enjoyed the ambience of this lovely setting. Not long after, we heard a car approaching and we were introduced to the lady's son, who was then instructed to 'Get the car out'. A few minutes later a brand new BMW saloon stopped at the front door and after saying our 'thank you's' and 'goodbyes' we were chauffeured in style back to Douglas and our humble craft.

We are constantly meeting total strangers on our travels and the kindness we are afforded at times is breathtaking.

# ROY

WE were moored at Menai Bridge and we decided to go ashore and walk to Beaumaris some 4/5 miles away. As we were preparing to leave, Peter who is a friend of ours, and has a permanent mooring close to us, shouted across: “Where are you going?” We told him, but we voiced our concerns about the lack of a pavement on certain parts of the road, especially on the section where there is lots of curves and bends, where it is difficult to see oncoming traffic. “There is a another way” he said, “its called the Top Way and has lovely views across the Menai Strait”. This sounded just what we wanted, so Peter explained the route: “Go over the bridge on the main road and take the first



left and it will take you up the hill, then follow the road”.

We left the dinghy tied to the pier and set off. Down the main road, through the town, over the bridge and then the first left. So far, so good; but as we walked down the road it began to peter out and became more like a grassy track and after about 500 yards we were suddenly faced with a lovely old building with a man in the garden. “Can I help you?” he asked.

We explained to him our plan to walk to Beaumaris and the directions we were given. “You have turned left too soon” he said. “This is my house and the path ends here”. I said “its a lovely house, how old is it” “About 200 years” was the reply. “It used to be a mill but we removed the waterwheel” and indeed, the big wheel was lying against a wall at the end of the house. I noticed he had some raised beds made of brick with potatoes growing in them and commented on them. “Come in and have a look around” he said, “my name is Roy”. So in we went! What a place, evidently the building was used in the past as some part of the dyeing industry, and Roy said if he dug down deep into the raised beds, which in the past were the tanks for the dyes he could still see some of the colours! Running through the garden was a small stream which Roy told us you could find trout. This was one gem of a place.’

“Come in and have a cup of tea” our host said and we entered a large conservatory, so large in fact that in one corner was a full size Rayburn cooker! The house inside was huge. Roy said “while I make tea go and have a look around”. The living quarters were extensive and in the lounge was what looked like the original fireplace, and it was so big Anne and I could stand in it. We also noticed some beautiful and different wood carvings scattered about.

When the tea arrived Roy explained that his son was a tree surgeon and kept him supplied with interesting pieces of timber and the occasional tree root, which using his skill and amazing foresight, he could turn these innocuous items into works of art. For example, in the hall was a whale’s tail about two feet high made from an old tree root which had been carved and polished to effect the finished article. He really was a consummate artist and woodcarver.

Roy retired from the Rhodesian Police Force and he and his wife decided to settle down in Wales. His wife, he told us, worked in the Procurator Fiscals office in Glasgow and came home at weekends.

While we were chatting, Roy’s son arrived. We were introduced and then after promising to pay a future visit we left to continue our walk.

## Roy

This time we found the right road and indeed the views were impressive, but we cut down too early to the main road and found ourselves half a mile or so to battle the traffic, It wasn't pleasant clinging to the stone walls as cars roared by and Anne was anxious to reach the pavement we could see ahead, but as we reached it, in her haste she stumbled, and fell heavily down the wall cutting her head, hand and face. So with blood everywhere we arrived at a local garage where the staff ushered Anne to the staff room to attend to her wounds, which although only superficial were bleeding heavily.

Although very shaken Anne said she was OK to return to the boat and we decided to take a taxi; but once outside, filling up his Land Rover was Roy's son who asked "what happened to you?" He then insisted on driving us back to the boat and we were grateful to accept.

Once again our lucky star was watching over us, long may it continue!

The following year we visited Roy and unfortunately he had developed early stage dementia and the house was up for sale, as he and his wife were moving down south to their birthplace on the banks of the River Dart. As we were leaving Roy presented Anne with a small creation he had carved, when you look at it one way its a bird in a nest, from another direction its a lizard, amazing! A truly talented individual.

# THE IDIOT

WE were moored in Conway Marina and after breakfast I decided to visit the shower block for my morning ablutions. So after collecting all the necessary stuff, soap, towel, deodorant, flannel etc. and placing them in a plastic bag, I stepped on to the pontoon and set off only to be called back by Anne who handed me a bag of rubbish to throw in the skip.

I entered the boatyard and threw the bag of rubbish into the skip which was huge, one of those industrial jobs with the rim some 7/8 feet above the ground. I then proceeded to the shower block. Once inside the cubicle I stripped off, put my token in the meter and opened the bag for my soap and flannel and you guessed it, it was full of rubbish!

The idiot had thrown away his gear and now had to get dressed and return to the boatyard, once there he scoured the yard and was lucky to find a ladder which enabled him to climb into the skip and retrieve the bag which fortunately was still there!

So always check the bag!

## **SURVEYOR NO 5 (COINCIDENCE No 1) – 1997**

WE were leaving the River Alt on one of our summer cruises and as we negotiated the many twists and turns in the river, a friend of ours, Cedric, who was a fellow club member, was walking his dogs on the beach. He shouted across: “Where are you going?” We replied: “Wherever the wind takes us”. “Have a good trip” was the reply, and off we went, eventually ending up entering Troon Marina in Scotland.

After contacting the marina office by radio, we were directed to an alleged vacant berth, but when we got there it was already occupied, so I once more rang the office and while we were waiting for a reply a man appeared on the pontoon and shouted across: “There is an empty berth next to me, come around and I will take your lines”.

We motored around to the next pontoon and the man was waiting and in no time at all we were tied up safe and sound next to an old Liverpool harbour tug called Surveyor No 5. The man said: “Where are you from?” We replied “Liverpool, the River Alt”. “Ah” he said, “Do you know Cedric?” He was surprised when we told him that we did indeed know Cedric, and he was the last person we spoke to before leaving.

If you were to write that in a book no one would believe you. “In all the bars in all the world, you have to pick mine!” Those famous words from the film Casablanca never seemed so apt.

# **THE NURSE**

## **(COINCIDENCE No 2)**

ANNE had been in hospital to have a small ganglion removed from her foot and six months later we were in Port Dinorwic on the Menai.

As we lounged in the cockpit one afternoon, a young man arrived on the quayside and said: "Hi, I'm moored just over there and I need some advice". "Come aboard" we replied, and he then explained he was unsure about the passage from Dinorwic to Conway and could we help him?

While all the charts and timings were being perused, a young woman stopped by us and the chap said "Hi", then to us "This is my wife". We invited her aboard, but she declined and was happy to listen in from the dockside. After a few minutes the wife said to Anne: "You have just had a foot operation haven't you?"

What sort of wizardry was this? She then explained she was a theatre nurse in Liverpool and had been in the theatre when Anne's foot had been operated on! You couldn't make it up if you tried could you? In another twist of fate it turned out they lived within a quarter of a mile of us!

## THE AUSSIE

WE were on a sailing holiday with friends of ours, Geoff and Lou. They had a Moody 36 which was berthed in a marina near Dubrovnik. After a lovely day's sail we anchored off a taverna on one of the many islands and rowed ashore for an evening meal, It was a delightful setting with the last of the days sun slowly sinking in the west and the heat of the day slowly dissipating. While we were on our post dinner drinks enjoying the ambience, a big charter yacht dropped its anchor and its large crew, all men came ashore.

It turned out they were all Australians on holiday and eventually one of them came over to us. "Where you from?" he asked. We told him the UK, and then he said: "Do you sail there?" I replied "Yes, but its nothing like this". "How do you mean?" he replied. "Well, you need to be geared up, wellies, chest high trousers, a good waterproof jacket and a warm hat". He looked at me quizzically and said in his broad Aussie twang, "Why would you want to do that then?"

I have often thought about that Aussie in subsequent years as we punched into a head sea at some ungodly hour in driving drizzle and mused to myself 'Maybe he had a point'!

# THE FAREWELL PARTY

WE motored slowly into Port Dinorwic which is an old Slate dock north of Caernarvon on the Menai Strait, which had been converted to a small yacht haven with a tidal gate. As we passed one of the moored boats, we could hear the engine being turned over with puffs of blue smoke coming from the exhaust but not starting, and adjacent to the wall ladder was a large party of people drinking and chatting.

The Harbour Master had directed me to moor behind this boat and as I was sorting out my lines a chap came up from down below on this craft and asked breathlessly: "Do you know anything about engines?" "Give me a minute", I said, "then I will come and have a look."

After securing Arrow I climbed up the ladder and moved through the happy throng on the quayside and down the ladder, to be met by a very hot and bothered individual who immediately explained that he was about to depart for an extended cruise to Portugal and all the people on the quayside had come to see him off, but unfortunately the engine wouldn't start.

He was quite agitated and I made him sit down and take a breather while I established some facts. "Did you motor in here?" "Yes." "Was the engine running normally?" "Yes". "How long have you been here?" "Three days." "Have you been connected to shore power, ie, a battery charger?" "No". "It seems," I said, "your batteries are very low and don't have enough power to crank the engine at enough speed to start the engine. We need to give the batteries a rest and maybe bring the voltage up a notch."

I then said: "Have you got any Easy Start?" "What's that?" he said. I explained it was a spray can which is ether based and is very successful in



starting recalcitrant engines. He dived into his stores and came back waving a can. "Is this it?" Yes it was and I then proceeded to explain to him. "When I tell you, spray into the engine intake as I turn the engine over." Two seconds later the engine roared into life with a large cloud of blue smoke from the exhaust and a loud cheer went up from the crowd on the quay, I was a God!

I could do no wrong, and I was back patted and congratulated as I wove among the merrymakers to return to our boat.

Shortly after he moved off to many goodbyes and once the crowd had left, the harbour reverted to its usual calm and peaceful state.

# THE IRATE MANXMAN

WE had Arrow leaning on the north wall in Ramsey, Isle of Man and after tea Anne and I went for an evening stroll. After exchanging pleasantries with an elderly gentleman on the quayside, our conversation turned to that old English subject, the weather. I commented that it seemed that the folk down south had much better weather than us.

That seemed to ignite some spark of derision in this gent who immediately launched a tirade of how those people down south had all the good weather while how the folk in the north had somewhat different conditions. After listening to his grumbles, it became clear that his 'Down south' was Port St. Mary, and the southern part of the island some 15 miles away.

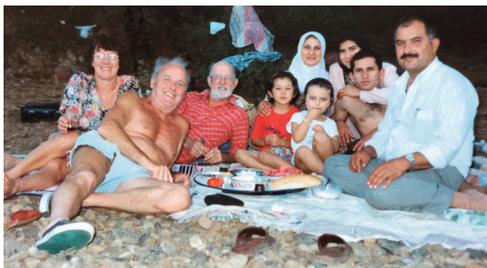
Talk about local affairs!

## THE TURKISH PICNIC

ON our charter boat in Turkey, we entered a small secluded bay with a lovely sandy beach and we moored in the usual way. First we dropped the anchor, then we motored astern to our chosen spot, then the dinghy was used to run two lines ashore to tie to any suitable tree or rock. While the operation was ongoing a family arrived on the beach and proceeded to set up their picnic. The family consisted of Mum, Dad, a couple in their twenties and two young girls about 8 years old. As I was about to return to the boat the Turkish man came down the beach to me and with gesticulations asked if I would give the young girls a ride in the dinghy. "OK" was the answer and soon after with the girls sitting in the dinghy, I dutifully rowed them out to the boat and out into the bay before returning them to their family.

I was halfway back to the boat when the Turkish man shouted to me "Mister, Mister, you come". I was about to row back when he shouted "All, All come", so I rowed to the boat and explained to Anne and our friends Fred and Val that we were required on shore.

Once there we were invited to join in their picnic with all the different local foods, and despite the language barrier we learnt through many hand signals that the man worked for the Turkish Water Board, or their equivalent of United Utilities, and the young couple were newly weds. They made us most welcome and once again we found normal people wherever we went quite wonderful.



## KAY AND TAM

WE were in Douglas alongside a Halcyon 27 and the owner remarked that he had the same Decca navigating system as me but his was not working. "Would you like me to have a look at it?" I said. "Yes please" was the reply and after running the self diagnosis check on the unit I found it had an aerial problem. I quickly found the wire to the aerial was twisted and broken so I stripped it down and after going ashore and buying the necessary components and soldering them together we had success and it was a happy skipper and his wife who left the following morning bound for Anglesea.

We kept meeting in different harbours and a friendship developed between us. Tam had left the Royal Air Force and was now employed in civvy street teaching helicopter navigation, and Kay a native New Zealander was a retiree from the housing market. Tam had sailing experience with the RAF but Kay was a keen beginner, and before long they had sold the Halcyon 27 and bought a beautiful Rival 34. I remember sailing her in the Menai Strait and once back alongside in Port Dinorwic. I was hauled up the mast to find the cause of an annoying whistling sound which turned out to be a small hole previously drilled for some redundant electronics which had been removed.

A year later Tam rang me and asked Anne and I to motor down to Gosport with them to cast our eyes over an Oyster 39 they were thinking of buying. The boat was lying in a marina in Gosport and in comparison to Arrow she was enormous, with an owner's stern cabin complete with a double bunk, two heads, (toilets) one fore, one aft, a shower and a walk in galley with a fridge among its many delights, it was sheer luxury.

The deal was done and the plan was to sail her back to Holyhead over an

## Kay and Tam

Easter weekend, so at the allotted time Anne and I drove to Shrewsbury with all our sailing gear to where Kay and Tam lived.

Tam had hired a car to drive to Gosport where it would be left for the hire company to collect and it was a very early start for the drive down south.

Tam was concerned about the long range weather which gave northerly gales about a week ahead when we would be arriving in Holyhead and he was anxious to sail.

The following morning was a rush to shop for supplies and after a last stop at the fuel pontoon to top up the tanks with 100 litres of diesel we were on our way. The weather was kind and we managed to sail past the Isle of Wight and then the Needles came into view and we pushed on to our first stop, Falmouth.

Our first problem arrived, The boat had recently returned from the Caribbean and there were fans everywhere, in the galley, over the bunks, in the heads, but unfortunately NO heater. As it was Easter, it was freezing at sea and I resorted to the old trick of filling a hot water bottle to cuddle on watch.

Early the next morning we sighted the Eddystone light and were surprised



to see a robin sitting on the guardrail which stayed for about an hour before flying off.

We entered Falmouth and tied up to one of the many pontoons available and after refuelling and replenishing our stores we were ready for the next leg to Milford Haven the following day. The wind was brisk as we left the harbour and it was forecast to increase to force 6/7, but it was from the south so we were not unduly worried. We had a good sail to Lands End and as we turned north with the increasing wind behind us we were soon tramping along at a steady 7/8 knots. The seas started to build and I remember a ship coming towards us heading into the big swells and the spray coming over her bow and reaching as high as the bridge.

Its amazing how much confidence a large yacht can give you in trying conditions and it was nice to have 11 tons of boat under us as we surfed along.

The following morning the wind had almost died and it was a long motor to finally enter the huge Milford Haven inlet and find our way to the Neyland Marina for a well earned rest.

Tam was starting to worry about a large low pressure system starting to develop in the north and strong north easterlies were forecast. So the following day, as the fuel tank was being replenished, I dashed ashore for some last minute supplies and I returned clutching some fresh baked mini pizzas, which made a pleasant meal as we motored out, past the island of Skomer around St Davids Head and northwards to cross Cardigan Bay and on to Holyhead. It was a quiet night, but as morning arrived and we passed Bardsey Island on our starboard side, the wind started to pick up and by the time we passed the South Stack light it was really starting to build and it was with relief we rounded the mile long harbour wall at Holyhead to make our approach to the marina where we tied up, thankful to be at our destination.



The wind was from the forecasted North East which meant it was blowing straight into the harbour and a choppy sea started to build. We had the boat head to wind and not long after settling down for the night, listening to the wind whistling through the masts and rigging on all the boats and thanking our lucky stars to be alongside, there was an almighty bang and we leapt on deck to find the bow line had parted due to the pressure of the wind and the rough sea which had now picked up dramatically.

We rigged a much heavier line and to be sure we also led a length of chain to the heavy cleat on the pontoon.

Just ahead of us was a Royal Navy patrol boat and the officers and young crew members were on the pontoon trying to keep the hull away from it as the pounding waves had burst the large fenders they had deployed and already holes were being punched through the fibre glass hull, fortunately above the waterline. I suggested to a harassed young officer they would be better off moving and motoring head to wind in the harbour confines, but he said the crew were not experienced enough and he had orders to remain. I remember saying to him that the Queen would not be pleased when she found out there was holes in one of her boats!

The wind and waves were now getting out of hand, the seas were surfing over the pontoon up to our knees and we had to get geared up with wet gear and life jackets. We noticed a Sadler 25 which had torn itself loose drifting across the marina and we had to climb aboard other boats to fend it off before we could get it tied to the pontoon once more. Then another boat broke free and we had to sort that one too. Then out of the darkness came a large catamaran which had arrived and the crew were desperate for us to take their lines which fortunately for them we did.

What a night, We found out later the wind had gusted to force 11 which is about 60 knots!

A FOOTNOTE HERE: in 2018 similar conditions were experienced but on that occasion the whole marina dragged its mooring chains and was washed ashore. It and many yachts were smashed to pieces. It was a complete scene of devastation as the wreckage washed up on the shore and was smashed to matchwood by the surging tide.

# IMRAN'S

ANNE and I along with two friends, Fred and Val had arrived in Marmaris in Turkey to take possession of our charter yacht which we had booked for the following two weeks.

As this was our first trip to Turkey we were uncertain of local customs and eating out so I asked an ex-pat from UK who lived on his boat in the marina where was the best place to eat.

'Imran's' is the place' we were told 'All the locals eat there, Go along the front to the bazaar, turn right, go past the post office and its the next road'

That evening the four of us arrived at Imran's, not a spectacular establishment, but homely looking with its wooden chairs and tables and busy waiters serving the clientele.

We had just sat down when a gentleman came rushing out and gestured for us to come inside, we followed him and he proudly gave us a tour of the establishment including the kitchen and even the store where the ingredients were kept.

I asked his name and he replied, Imran, and this was his restaurant.

This was our first contact with Turkish service and although you could call it protecting your commercial interest, us as customers thought it was great, The service was excellent, nothing was too much trouble and Imran even arranged for a family member to come into town from his village to play his balalaika for us one evening . . . now that's the way to keep your customers happy. Did we go back? Yes, every chance we had!

We ate there when we were back in the marina and always had a good time.

## Imran's

Some 10 years later after we had arrived from in Marmaris after our trip from Croatia we decided once again to visit Imran's.

We arrived to a different establishment we had left, the old wooden tables and chairs had been replaced with new shiny (and more practical) aluminium ones and likewise the shopfront had been modernised.

I charged into the restaurant shouting "Imran, where are you?" A passing waiter pointed to a youngish man behind the counter and said: "Thats Imran!" "No, I said", "he is old like me". The young Imran then informed us that Imran, his father, had died and he had taken over the business.

That put a bit of a damper on the evening but the staff made a fuss of us with many free 'with the compliments of the chef' delights and as we were leaving, I remonstrated with Imran over our very reasonable bill. He said: "No Sir, we make a point of looking after our regular customers!"

So a visit every 10 years has its benefits!

### *Marmaris, Turkey*



## DUBROVNIC TO MARMARIS – 2006

IN 2006 our friends Geoff and Lou had a Moody 35 berthed in a marina just outside Dubrovnic in Croatia and after a number of years cruising the area they decided on a change of scenery. After looking around online, they decided on Marmaris which is in Turkey. Anne and I were asked would we like to accompany them? Would we? ‘not arf’, so we flew to the small airport just outside Dubrovnic with all our gear and after a taxi ride into town and a bus



ride to the marina we finally arrived and we were ready for our next adventure.

On Thursday 24th May we awoke to heavy rain pounding on the deck above our heads but by 1100 as we left the marina it was a hot and sunny 25c. It was pleasant motor to Cavtat where we squared away for the overnight trip to Corfu. As a farewell to Croatia a terrific thunderstorm with many lightning flashes and heavy rumbles accompanied by heavy rain arrived an hour after we left, which fortunately only lasted for about an hour. After that things settled down with a slight breeze on the nose and at one point a visit from a small pod of dolphins.

We had been warned about over enthusiastic Albanian naval patrol boats forcing yachts into harbour for no reason, apart from some petty attempt to extort money for various reasons so we stayed well offshore nearer the Italian coast and had a quiet night apart from keeping a sharp lookout for the many ships crossing from Italy to Greece and back.

A beautiful morning arrived, the breeze was still ahead but with a flat sea. The temperature was climbing steadily to 23c. Our dolphins were still around the boat as at 0630 we sighted our landfall, the small island of Othonoi which lies off the north coast of Corfu. After motoring along the eastern side of the island we passed Corfu town and entered the Govia marina which is a couple of miles south of the town at 1800.

The following day we had to clear customs as we were now in Greek waters and we had to visit the harbour authorities and fill in the necessary paperwork. This was soon completed and an enjoyable day ensued sightseeing.

After refuelling we set off south bound for Mourtas and its islands, arriving at 1930 where we motored around until we found a perfect spot to anchor. But after running lines ashore, the wind quickly picked up to an uncomfortable 5/6 and then the rough sea began to make the anchorage untenable, I rowed ashore to release the shore lines and got a wet bum for my trouble! We moved to a more sheltered spot and re-anchored, but Geoff was concerned about the brisk conditions and he spent most of the night on anchor watch.

The wind blew hard for 24 hours touching a force 7 at times but by the following morning the conditions had improved and we retrieved our anchors and set sail for Preveza in a brisk westerly. We arrived at 1800 and rowed ashore to meet up with two friends, Alban and Vera, who lived the summer there on their boat and a lively evening ensued with a wobbly row back to our boat.

The following day started poor with dark clouds, which brought heavy rain and thunder, but by lunchtime it had passed over so we set sail for Levkas and its canal.

The Levkas canal is only 3.5 kilometres long and cuts out going all the way around the island to enter the Ionian Sea and the passage is very interesting. We arrived at Spartakhorí with a spectacular view of the town with its many white houses clinging to the steep terrain which from a distance makes the island look like a large wedding cake!

Once ashore we walked to the top of the town on the hill and had the breathtaking view of the harbour and the surrounding coastline.

The next leg took us to Mesologion with its tricky entrance which we had difficulty finding but once in the channel we had a straightforward approach to a pontoon which had seen better days but welcome nevertheless.

The following day took us under the large impressive bridge at Patras which connects the towns of Rio and Antirrio and at 1.8 miles or 2,380 metres long is one of the biggest of its type in the world. We were now in the Gulf of Corinth and our destination was a small island with the magical name of



Trizonia which had a small stone harbour and we tied up at 1815. The harbour had seen better days and even had a sunken boat alongside the quay but we found a clean stretch of wall where we were grateful to tie up.

The next leg took us to Kiato, the last stop before the Corinth Canal. As we were tying up the boat to the quayside I noticed in the distance a Lidl supermarket sign which was a surprise, so Anne and I strolled there, and unfortunately, because it was Sunday it was closed, but we were there first thing the following morning and we stocked up with some of our favourite things.

The next day was exciting as we were going to transit the world famous Corinth Canal (*below*) which had its roots back in AD49 when the Romans attempted on a few occasions to dig through the four mile length, but all attempts failed. It wasn't until 1893 that a French company finally finished it. We arrived at the entrance and tied up to the small holding quay to await the bridge to open. When I say to open, this bridge is unique as it is submerged when the canal is open and raised when all shipping has passed so once the bridge was down we were free to start our transit.

What an experience with the sides appearing to get higher the further we travelled and the four miles passed in a flash and we were at the other end and



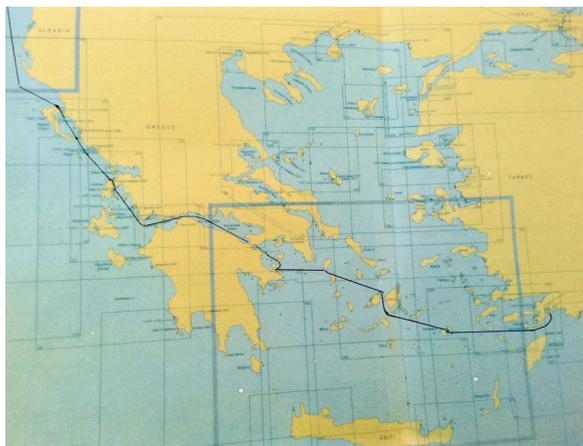
the office where payment was to be paid. For one transit in 2006 it was 122 euros.

Our next anchorage was Korfus, then on to Poros to pick up supplies. The next stop was the town of Livahdi on the island of Serifos where we became stormbound with high winds which blew at a steady 6/7 and gale 8 at times. Sitting in the cockpit relaxing waiting for the wind to drop a man strode along the quay, stopped, pointed at me and said: “You mechanic?” I gave him the universal thumbs up and he beckoned Geoff and I to follow him. His boat was some 100 yards away and once on board he proceeded to show me his problem by spinning his big steering wheel and gesticulating that it wasn’t working. It was quite a big boat, a Bavaria 38 I think, and after a quick look down below, I told the man he would have to dismantle the back of the aft cabin to give me access to the steering gear.

Once this was done I climbed into the small space and quickly found that a chain wheel had come off its shaft, so after many hand signals and quick sketches on a piece of paper, he acquired the necessary tools and I soon had it back to full working order. The man, a Monte Negran wanted to pay but I refused and the following morning he presented us with a bottle of Champagne which was gratefully accepted.

The following day the wind had dropped and although we received two forecasts, one predicting gales, the other very little wind, we decided to sail. First to Paros, then over the next few days Amorgos and on to Astipalia before reaching our last stop in Greece, the island of Simi. After a rest day in port we left Simi the following morning, with a heavy mist on the hills which was starting to lift.

The temperature was climbing and when we reached our destination, the marina in Marmaris, after a 32 mile passage it was a hot 31c, climbing to 40c and one of the only cool places we could find was the lovely air conditioned marble shower block where we went to have a read and cool off !



## THE END (OR IS IT?)

AS I write this in 2020, we are in the grip of a Global Pandemic caused by the Coronavirus Covid 19 virus and we are all in lockdown in our homes waiting for a vaccine to be developed. I think it will take a generation or more for life as we knew it to return to normal, if it ever will. Consequently for the first time since 1985 Arrow will not be launched . . . as this is our 80th year with time running out this is just *Not Fair*.

We had planned to visit Northern Ireland this year but that is now impossible so will we be going next year? There are too many imponderables at this point so its just a matter of waiting and seeing.

Most of our hundreds of passages from A to B were straightforward and no two were the same, I have deliberately omitted a lot of passages as most of the time there is not a lot to report, However just to add flavour and to give some insight I have highlighted two not quite normal trips, and one delayed start.



# DIESEL

IT was a beautiful July morning in 2017 when we waited for the marina gate to open at Peel on the Isle of Man . . . there wasn't a breath of wind, the sky was a brilliant blue and the temperature was starting to climb.

Finally the gate was opened and we motored out, rounded the harbour wall and headed south towards our destination, the anchorage at Moelfre which is on the eastern side of Anglesey.

We settled into our routine. Hal our faithful auto pilot was connected and we settled down on our course. The mooring fenders were brought aboard and stowed and likewise the mooring lines were coiled and put into the lockers and the kettle was put on. There was no sail required as there was very little wind so we settled down to a long motor unless the wind arrived.

We were enjoying the scenery and sipping tea some half an hour later when Anne said: "I can smell diesel". I casually went down below and lifted the front off the engine cover and was confronted by a fog of diesel and fuel dripping down from every corner of the engine bay. I immediately switched off the engine and appraised the situation. We were not in any immediate danger, the shore was about a mile away and if needs be I could ring the Coastguard for assistance.

In retrospect it was quite funny because the first thing I did was strip down to my underwear because I knew from previous dealings with diesel fuel that it would go everywhere and the smell on my clothes would linger for many months. So not having the theme music from 'The Stripper' to hand it was time to start work. First thing was to retrieve my tool bag from its locker and then lift up the grating on the cockpit floor to give me access to the hatch above

the engine. This would do two things: first, allow the fumes to disperse and secondly allow light into the bay.

As I started the search to find the leak, my previous misgivings came to fruition as I soon had diesel fuel dripping off my nose and ears as I searched around the engine, but I quickly found the problem. A supply pipe from the fuel filter to the fuel pump had fractured and was spraying out a fine spray of diesel.

My first pathetic attempt was to wrap electrical self amalgamating tape around the pipe which was a disaster because as it came into contact with the diesel fuel it immediately melted and became a black soggy mess. A more practical solution had to be found, so standing in the now cramped cockpit, Anne passed me the various tools to remove the pipe. It was like an operation, 17mm spanner, mole grips, small file, pliers etc. With the pipe removed and now in my hand, I could see through the wire mesh covering the rubber core the small split which was the problem. It would have been an easy fix with a 6 inch length of plastic tubing with a 8mm bore but after a search of the bosuns stores and indeed the whole boat none could be found.

An hour or more had passed by now and fortunately we were not drifting too close to the shore but I kept checking.

What I eventually found was a small length of stainless steel tube with a diameter of about 8mm. If I cut the rubber pipe would it fit inside? So after a discussion, the decision was made to go ahead and if it failed we would have to radio for help. The cut was made and to our joy it fitted perfectly inside the damaged tube and with a Jubilee clip on either end the fuel system was bled to remove any air trapped inside and Eureka, it worked, no sign of a leak, and we proceeded on course. The repair was so good it remained in place all season and was only replaced when the boat was ashore. All that remained was to mop up the spilt fuel and we used many lengths of kitchen roll and various cloths to finally get back to some normality.

The whole process took two hours or so and we arrived at Moelfre at 1100 in the dark but glad to be at anchor.

So a straightforward passage became something else and fortunately the problem was solved.

# THE TILLER

2018. We had everything planned to start our summer cruise. Everything we needed was on board. Our daughter Sue had driven us from home with the last of our gear and after the dinghy was inflated we said our goodbyes and we rowed out to the boat.

It was a lovely very peaceful evening and we watched the sun setting in the west while sipping our sundowners. We slept aboard as we had planned an early start. This was our first trip down the Alt this season and we had received reports about perches marking the river had not been repositioned after the winter and some were missing altogether so after dropping the mooring we slowly headed downstream.

About halfway, when we reached a tricky part we ran aground. Not a huge problem as the tide was still rising but not by much. We tried to extricate ourselves by going forward then astern and rocking the boat from side to side to find deeper water.

Then on one reverse the rudder which is some 5 foot long hit something hard with such force that the tiller was torn from my hand and as it hit the cockpit coaming it snapped off with an almighty bang and the engine stopped. I quickly restarted the engine and at that moment we slipped into deep water and I found I could just about steer with my foot on the head of the rudder stock so we headed back up river.

Fortunately it was a very quiet morning so being driven ashore was somewhat diminished as we threaded our way up river and with huge sighs of relief we managed to once again to pick up our mooring.

It looked like our holiday and indeed our sailing season was at an end as

## The Tiller

we surveyed the wreckage. The tiller was fitted inside a bronze shoe which was then screwed into the rudder head and it had sheared off flush with the shoe. Then as we calmed down over a cup of tea, Anne said 'Don't you have a spare tiller at home?' She was right! we DID have a spare, it was in my workshop hanging from the roof beams.

I rang Sue and explained the problem to her and she drove down and I rowed ashore with the tiller and shoe and arrived home, where I immediately set to work chiselling out the remains of the old tiller and fitting the replacement.

A couple of hours later we returned to the boat and once back aboard, the tiller was refitted and we were ready to go once again! But before we set off and because it was now low water, Anne and I drifted down in the dinghy and made a chart of the river so we knew where all the obstructions were. When we arrived at the point where we ran aground we were horrified to see large pieces of rotten timber embedded in the bank which we had obviously hit.

So the following morning on the next tide, and using our homemade chart, we successfully negotiated the river and entered the River Mersey and set sail for the Isle of Man. Little did we know but this lovely day was the start of a lengthy spell of good weather which lasted until our return seven weeks later. So the moral is . . . Never Give Up!

So a straightforward passage became something else and fortunately the problem was solved.

## PORTAVOGIE . . .

IN 2018 we left Bangor Northern Ireland bound for Ardglass some 35 miles due south. The forecast was good, W4 going SW4 and with the sails filled and the blue sky above we negotiated the channel between the Irish mainland and the Copeland Islands which is well buoyed. We passed the small harbour of Donaghadee and sailed steadily south. As time progressed the wind very slowly started to head us, that means the wind gradually started to move until it was dead ahead and first the headsail was furled and we had to start the engine to maintain speed through the ever increasing choppy sea.

As we were approaching the halfway point with some 17 miles to go the wind had increased and large whitecap rollers were punching into our bow and was slowing us down so at times we were down to 1/2 knots so at that rate it would take us 10 to 12 hours to reach Ardglass which was not acceptable.

I said to Anne: "It looks like we are going to have to turn around and run back to either Donaghadee or Bangor". No sailor likes to give up ground but you have to be sensible and it was uncomfortable being thrown around with the boat punching into a rough head sea. At this point Belfast Coastguard came on the VHF radio asking all shipping to keep a lookout for a small powerboat which had broken down somewhere in our locality and had radioed a Mayday. After scanning the area around us with the binoculars I soon found the casualty and informed the Coastguard who asked us to standby until the Donaghadee lifeboat which had been launched reached the scene.

Some 20 minutes later the lifeboat arrived in a shower of spray and proceeded to take the casualty in tow. We were now relieved of our duties and

## Portavogie

it was time to make a decision. As I thought I suddenly remembered the port of Portavogie which was approximately 2/3 miles ahead on the mainland.

Portavogie is one of Northern Ireland's main fishing ports and for many years yachtsmen have been discouraged from entering as they could interfere with the fishing industry and rightly so, but any port in a storm as they say so I called the harbour control on the VHF radio but didn't receive a reply. I tried a couple of times, then a passing yacht called and informed us that because it was Sunday the harbour office was closed and would not reopen until the following morning. We decided to head in and have a look around, so after a little bit of difficulty locating the fairway buoy which is about half a mile offshore we made our approach.

The rollers were starting to build as we moved further in and with the wind and waves on our beam I kept checking our transit, that is making sure by looking astern to the buoy and ahead to the harbour that we kept to the channel. We rounded the end of the high harbour wall and what a change, the wind was still screeching above but the sea was like a millpond. There was a large trawler laying along the wall with its engine running and a man gutting fish on deck and I shouted to him but he couldn't hear me with the engine noise and screaming seagulls fighting for the scraps. Eventually he heard us and we said: "Where do we go?" He replied: "Through there, turn left then right, go straight on and then turn right!"

We slowly moved into the harbour passing large



## Portavogie

numbers of fishing boats tied up and all too big for us to tie up to. As we proceeded deeper into the harbour we started to doubt if we were going the right way but eventually we reached the inner harbour and the fishing boats were starting to get smaller. We were looking for something small to tie up to then I noticed a small miracle. Right at the furthest point was a small length of pontoon just perfect for Arrow so we gladly tied up to it. I asked a local man on the pontoon if we were OK to stay there and yes we were, and we settled down. The wind was still blowing hard from the south, screeching through the rigging and above us the flags on the quayside were stiff on their jackstuffs.

3.00am the next morning at first light we were awakened by big engines starting up as the fishing fleet started to leave and at 7.00am as we were having breakfast the whole harbour, apart from one boat having work done was deserted. The wind had died down and once again blew from the west so we moved out passing the now empty quays and once clear of the harbour it was all sail on and a course for Peel on the Isle of Man was set.

So not every passage is straightforward and one must expect the unexpected in small boat sailing.

*I took this photograph as we arrived at the Isle of Man after a passage from the River Alt.*

*What a beautiful sunset!*



*We have now reached the end of this narrative  
but maybe not the end of our sailing.*

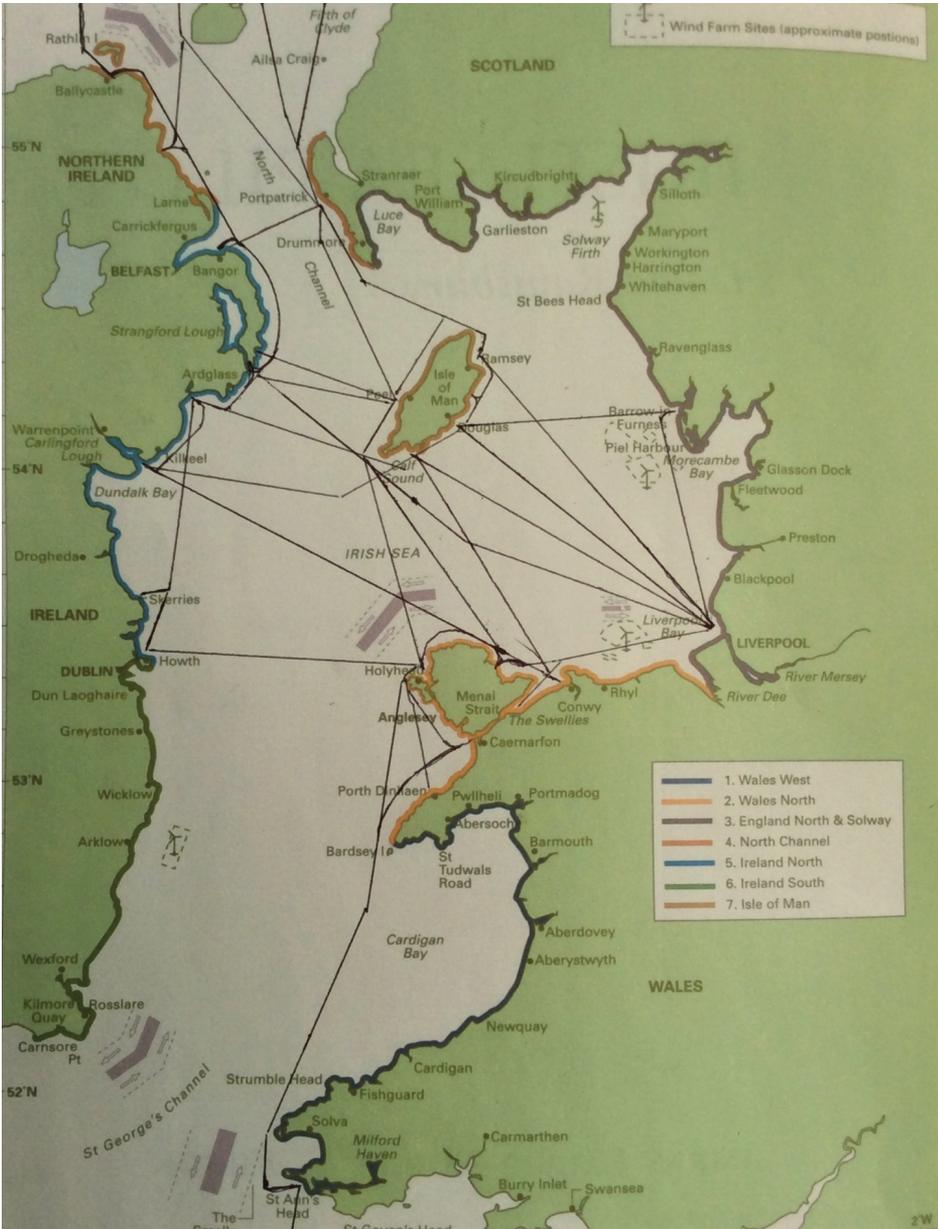
*We are nearing the sunset now,  
but there **MUST** be time for one more adventure!*

**ALAN AND ANNE ROE 2020**





*A very early photograph of Blundellsands Sailing Club.  
Anne and I have spent many a happy hour in this place!*



INSIDE BACK COVER

BACK COVER  
BLANK