

Gravesend Reach

The magazine of the
Gravesend Sailing Club

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Magnetic Attraction: The Shivering Sands

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Editor's Ripple:

Charlotte Griffiths

The sailing club has changed over the last 125 years of its existence. So has the Reach. Initially, it didn't exist. Then it was pages of looseleaf foolscap, typed and corrected by hand (we have the originals if you're interested). Then, we had bound typed versions. We then progressed to booklets, typed, stuck to a backing material, and photocopied. These had to be manually collated. Time passed, and they were printed - but still manually collated. Now, a (excellent) printer prints, collates AND staples them!

Each method was right for the time, and each had a time to move on. The same can be said for Reach editors. But of course, to move on to a new editor, the replacement must be as cost effective as the previous (free), the same quality (well, that's dubious - but at least one reach a year is essential),but maybe with some innovation too. Interested? Get in touch.

Commodore's Codpiece

Chris Steer

It has been 125 years since the club was formed by local Gravesend people as an antidote to the Royal Yacht Clubs that dominated yachting on the Thames at the time. Right from the start it appears that there has only been one paid member of staff – the position of cleaner.

As you look around the premises you will see the improvements that have been undertaken since foundation. The extension on the front of the clubhouse built by members in the 1960s. The "new" toilet block started in the 1970s; designed and built by club members. There were cranes designed and construction arranged by members with mechanical and electrical expertise in the 80s, now superseded. The list goes on; lockers in the south yard, new starters box, repairs to the mast, replacement stairs and many others I have surely forgotten to mention.

In more recent times, due to the requirements of legislation, grant funding and loans it has been necessary to use outside contractors to construct additions like the pontoon (accessible landing stage) and the latest crane. However, a lot of member work was also involved not least in the planning, fundraising, organising and commissioning of them- often requiring specialist professional skills.

These are visible reminders of the work undertaken by members, most of which is carried out quietly in the background.

I have given up trying to work out how many hours would have been spent by members sitting on the General and sub-committees over the last 125 years. The commitment that makes sure that the monies due to the club are collected and our bills paid on time, that meetings are recorded and our legal responsibilities are carried out and that members are looked after and kept informed. The time spent by members whose role is to make sure that the committee decisions are made in the best interest of all club members.

Activities afloat and onshore, supported by a well-stocked and profitable bar, and our commitment to safety and sport development shown by an extensive training programme all need organising. These are underpinned by the members who turn up to act as race officers, safety/trot boat crew, instructors, shore party helpers, crane operators, pint pullers, tea brewers, sandwich butterers, pie makers, meal preparers, washer uppers and those who are just willing to help out. As an aside, these have been also excellent occasions for new and more established members to get to know each other and to provide crewing opportunities.

In years past all the moorings used by club boats, including those in the canal basin were maintained by club members resulting in cold, damp and extremely muddy working parties in the winter months, fortunately times have changed. However, the moorings do not run themselves and still need managing.

The clubhouse, yards and club boats don't maintain themselves, as much as we wish they did, and working parties have been organised down the years to keep them going. Outside, of these formal arrangements it is often club members who say "Oh, I noticed that so and so needs doing, I'll do it" or are approached and quietly get on with the task while no one else is around.

A lot of members have helped, but not necessarily in a formal way, preferring instead to do lots of little tasks rather than take on a major role or project. These are equally important adding the oil to the machine that is a sailing club (could this be one metaphor too far?).

Finally, to paraphrase Monty Python "what have the members ever done for the club?". Well they have kept it running and in good condition for 125 years and I think that that deserves a well-earned round of applause.

Persona Inter-alia: *Val Green, Membership Secretary*

Well, it's been a strange sailing season, sharing the Club with the Environment Agency contractors. Despite the decision not to run an Open Day this year because of access and parking problems, we have not been deterred and have very successfully recruited a group of new members who have certainly shown their enthusiasm to get on the water. So we welcome David Jeyes, Michael Smith, Beril Tutuncuogiu, Kevin Day and Nadia Correia, Lisa and Jason Blowes, Stephen D'Agostino, Kaye Bennett, Martin and Ginette Mills, Peter Moolman and Kristine Tomson, Ashley Ferguson, Stephen Dewar and Oliver Bennett, a Youth member.

Welcome back to Mike Syma who has bought a new boat, an Albin Vega *Billy Ruffin*. That's the nickname of the ship *HMS Bellerephon*, built in Frindsbury, that Napoleon boarded to finally surrender to the British.

Though the sailing season has nearly finished there will still be plenty of action at the Club over the winter – social, training and working sessions – and what better way for older members to get to know new members than over a meal or a drink or a shovel!

The Club tries hard to make sure that members know of forthcoming events via email, WhatsApp and Facebook and the Newsletters. I also send the general emails and Newsletters by post to those who have not given me email addresses. But of course, the news will not reach you if you don't read your email. It's very easy to say 'Oh, an email from the Club, I'll look at it later' and then forget. If you are not receiving the emails please let me know. The Newsletter always has a list of forthcoming events for you to stick on the cupboard door.

The intention is to produce a Club Book next year with membership details. We will only be able to include your

information if you have given us explicit permission to do so and I will be contacting those who have not done this in the near future so the Book can be as comprehensive as possible.

But inevitably with our membership profile, we have had sad news during the year. In the past year we have heard of the deaths of Trevor Simmonds, Dot Steer, Chris Bentley, Roy Palmer, Roy Plummer and Mary Berry. Roy was especially active in the 70's and 80's and was the first club member to attain a Yachtmaster Qualification.

Hope to see you all round the fire over the winter.

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A Christmas Note:

To GSC members I wish a Happy Christmas, and good sailing when the warmer weather comes. I retired from membership as I rarely come to Gravesend. Once in a while I pass through on the train. I no longer drive - my main means of transport is my bike! I passed my boat, which had served me for 50 years, on to a young man who lives in Wivenhoe, where *Capriol 2* was built in 1938.

Any GSC members who are stopping overnight in Oare, just off the Swale, do let me know and I'll stand you a drink at one of our 2 pubs.

Best wishes for Christmas and the New Year, Don Goodsell

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I've just been reading an old (1970s - not that old) sailing manual. In the signalling section it includes the 2-letter group SN. This means "You should stop immediately. Do not scuttle. Do not lower boats. Do not use the wireless. If you disobey I shall open fire on you". I'm dying to find a reason to hoist it - any suggestions?

The Ensign sits in the most senior position on a boat - as close to the stern as possible. A UK vessel should wear the national maritime flag - the red ensign unless otherwise authorised - one demand, and when entering or leaving foreign port.

Deliberation from the Vice:

Harriet Davies-Mullan, Vice Commodore Training

Since the last reach I have in fact, managed to get sailing! What's more is I've been several times! Thank you to David Rouse for loaning me *Zenith*: this has led to the emergence of the "Dream Team"! Core members are myself and Hannah Thomas, a relatively new member I dragged along from work. We've had guest appearances from another friend, Paige as well as Debbie Twyman. So far, main achievement is putting pressure on particularly *Widgeon* (they can't let their daughter beat them) and leading a race for almost a full lap. Not being used to being in that position, I'm glad I knew what the race course was, although there was some uncertainty about where exactly the club line ended for dinghies – thankfully we did pass inside the limit. I've also managed to brave some yachting events, the most recent occurring just two days ago on *Just Nimbus*...

Desperate to gain some yachting experience, and aware that this won't come to me overnight, or even in a single year, I've made my interest fairly obvious and been rewarded with invites from various yachties but mostly Richard Twyman (keen I think, to secure his anti-foul applicator for yet another year). Saturday saw an invite to borrow *Just Nimbus* with Richard and Paul Robbins running the show, desperate to attempt to beat *Gamekeeper* (who by the way, was housing the other half of the Dream Team). Also onboard was Sarah Hutchinson who, along with me, was ready to do the hard graft but, again along with me, was suffering slightly from a heavy cold. What was expected to be a hard, with potential for fun, race (I'm not excessively good on yachts if the wind strength is likely to spill my G&T) turned into a mostly exciting but mildly pressurised race that ended early, with an unexpected trip to the ED for Paul. I won't share all the gory details (I'll let Paul have that honour) but I'm not sure I will

ever forget the events straight after his little finger was shortened slightly. Thank goodness we had a crew of 4 people: one sitting down to ensure he didn't fall down, one to ensure the first remained sat down, one taking charge, and one being told what to do. I'll let you assign those roles. Needless to say, Paul was dispatched to ED with support crew, and Adam Gray jumped on board to help Richard & I put *Just Nimbus* to bed (all scrubbed clean of course). Not sure I'm going to get back on a yacht anytime soon – just as well we have some social events to look forward to!

I'm writing this article in the lead up to the 125th celebration duck dinner! The atmosphere surrounding this event is causing a brilliant frisson of excitement amongst members and guests alike! I look forward to meeting some previous GSC members on the evening and hope someone will capture the evening with an article and plenty of pictures in the next Reach. I'm sure the evening will be a fantastic celebration of our little club at the gateway to the Thames.

Thinking back since the last reach we have welcomed several new members to the club and it has been brilliant to see you all come down and get involved in one way or another. It's great to see new members starting to crew on the safety boat, or come down and help during a course or social event. A key element to the club is our community and volunteering atmosphere and it's so lovely to see this continuing and new members embracing it!

The Environment Agency works have provided some challenges this year, but as always there have been a team of hard workers trying to minimise the impact on the club, and maximise opportunities. Following EA's exit they will continue to work hard to 'make good' areas like the yard, as well as the usual club maintenance that they do, always behind the scenes. There are plans afoot to level out the south yard and have a big push for club maintenance over a couple of

all-member working weekends in November –hope to see you there to ensure many hands make light work! If you can't make it down on any of the days, please do check in with Roy Turner and see if there are any odd jobs you can help with over the winter. I have no doubt there will be plenty!

So we are drawing to the end of the club's 125th year, with its wonderful ethos, and brilliant position on the Thames. I look forward to the next 125 (I might still be around –won't be allowed to retire until I'm 134 at least!) and hope that we will still remain a members club, full of our eccentric characters!

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My Yachtmaster Course:

Peter Griffiths

With sailing experience measured in hours, compared with the years everyone else had, I was exceedingly nervous about taking on this course! Tuesday evenings, in the dark, at the end of the year taught me a great many things: the clubhouse is unbelievably cold when first in; the river is very busy in the evenings (handy for lights practice!) and they don't like it when you call them maps...

Started easily enough, then there were the acronyms, the tides, the wind, the weather and the lights, oh the lights – will be on the look out for a minesweeper for ever more! Quite the challenge after a full shift at work! Making time for homework was a bit of a flashback [*he nearly bought a dog just so he had the 'ate it' excuse...Editor*] and having to revise for exams [*binge watching Blacksails on Netflix is not revision...Editor*] was quite the shock too, but the support of the whole group was invaluable and Captain Twyman skippered his novice crew through to a successful end!

Duck Dredgings:

Chris Steer

Earlier this year I was carrying out a bit of house clearance and came across some old menus from 40 odd years ago, and they reminded me that the Duck Suppers have changed over the years.

Looking at the club history the season would start with a sail past, opening cruise and a formal dinner held at the Rosherville Hotel, all on one day. I found a menu from 1897, which has a starter of consommé printanière (vegetable soup to you and me), boiled salmon for fish course and for Relevés (yes that's what it said on the menu) roast quarter of lamb and sirloin of beef and asparagus mousseline (not sure if this was per person) followed by fancy mixed pastries and ornamented jellies. Heaven knows what they would have eaten if we had been a posh yacht club..

These formal dinners ended in 1908 and the more informal duck supper starts to come into its own. The history says that members went shooting and retired to consume wild duck at the Lobster Smack at Hole Haven, I suspect there is a little artistic licence in this story as duck should be hung for several days so there may be an element of Blue Peter with here's one we prepared earlier. However, the concept of a meal to mark the end of the sailing season took hold.

By the time I joined the club the Duck Supper had grown into something much more formal again - Think Mansion House Speech (without the penguin suits and medals); A Top table with the Flag Officers and Formal Guests with the other tables extending from this with the members below the salt. It was a far cry from the origins of the duck supper.

All the menus I have from then show a standard format for the evening and therefore I assume that 1979 followed the same. The club history is not much help here as all it says is that "those who attended were surprised to find that there was another function taking place upstairs and that the bar was crowded".

Let me say right now it wasn't my fault. I had been assured that organising the Duck Supper wasn't difficult. It had been following a standard format for years and all you had to do was follow the script (gullible or what). I had booked the masonic hall the same as it had been booked for many years (first time in 1921), invited the Mayor and let those who knew better about these things arrange the seating plan.

Come the evening I arrive to find that the bar was crowded and this delayed things as people struggled to order drinks for the table.

We finally started and then half way through dessert the hall management asked for everyone to move their cars as they were blocking the other party in, who had arrived earlier than us. Result - mayhem. Small car park, small entrance and a lot of shuffling.

None of the drivers reappeared for ages. Not having organised a duck supper before I look around for advice on the protocol—and there is no one who can help in sight (I think they were too busy shuffling cars). So I am decisive, possibly, and decide that everyone has to return and finish their meal – I mean you can't have the loyal toast with people still eating, can you?

Finally we get to the Loyal Toast followed by the Commodore proposing a toast to the Mayor and Corporation of Gravesham.

Mayor gets up – now he clearly has a set speech that he appears to give at every function he attends and it’s certainly not a short one. It has a lot of detail on what the council is doing about car parks - hardly appropriate to a Sailing Club half a mile from the nearest one.

The Mayor proposes a toast to the Sailing Club and the Commodore responds. There is a toast to the Guests and a response, a toast to the Ladies and a response. By Toast and response I mean speeches and people have gone to a lot of trouble to prepare them (and speeches can go on for quite a while as you’re about to find out).

By now we are running well over an hour late. We clear the room, put out casual tables, and have the prizegiving. With half an hour left before the draconian licencing laws bring proceedings to an end the band which had been booked at great expense starts the shortest set they are ever likely to play.

Did I mention that the club history says the bar was crowded?





However, one good thing came out of that evening and that is that we have looked at and attended a wide range of venues since then. From the Woodville Halls with a 20 piece big band (I booked them) to smaller more intimate venues as

numbers attending have fluctuated.

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Most of us remember how to coil rope, and how natural rope has a “twist”. Most synthetic braided ropes needs two twists to lie flat - have a practice!

Once coiled, how do you finish off your rope coil for stowage? There IS an RYA suggested way!

 <p>Step One If you're right handed, make the coils with your right hand and hold them with your left. If you're left handed do it the other way round.</p>	 <p>Step Two The secret of a good coil is to twist your right hand outwards as you make each coil. This stops the rope kinking up. If you're not sure, get someone to show you.</p>
 <p>Step Three To keep the coils the same length, use the width of your arms each time.</p>	 <p>Opel How not to coil a rope... If your coil ends up looking like this, then you haven't been twisting your wrist with each coil. Go back to step two and have another go.</p>



View from the baggage train

a different perspective of a trip through the Caledonian Canal



Penny and Steve Davies

(running on TST - Twyman standard time - original trip in 2011)

For some time a certain fairly talkative member of GSC has harboured ambitions to take a Dayboat through the Caledonian Canal, camping on board. It just needed another lunatic... A survey earlier that year concluded that a supporting vessel would be needed to carry the baggage (which included two or three children). A skipper was needed for this – and being the first person that hove into view, I was collared - and naturally resisted. However Hugh Taylor expressed an interest in coming, and with the prospect of an oasis of calm on board, I succumbed [*Editor's Note: Hugh is clearly keen not to get involved again, he's moved to Exeter*].

Needless to say the week was chosen for maximum inconvenience, with graduation ceremonies on the preceding Thursday and Friday. So Hugh went up via Lancaster, while we went via Swansea & only Adam (Gray) went straight there!

Hugh and ourselves arrived at Laggan boatyard roughly simultaneously, except on opposite sides of the lock. 10 miles to get to the other side, and start loading the boat.

'Lively' was something of a misnomer. A rather tired Sigma 34, which made even the lowliest GSC boat appear well found. No storage space. No depth sounder. A compass intended for fuzzy thinkers. A 'map' not much better than a tea towel. No soundings marked on it.

The lack of storage space meant that some hard decisions had to be made about gear – that the beer cooler and the stove (for tea on *Widgeon*) were left behind gives an idea of the gravity of the situation.

The *Widgeon* team headed off to Fort William to look at launching, so peace descended. After an extremely cursory handover from the boatyard, we eventually managed to leave, heading south west. Spurred on by a comment from someone at the boatyard that they'd never seen one of their yachts actually sailing, we put the sails up as soon as we were in Loch Lochy, with a gentle north easterly behind us. Unfortunately the wind didn't last, so we gave in and motored.

Into the canal at the bottom of the loch, we passed what is claimed to be the smallest lighthouse in the British Isles, and moored just by Gairloch lock.

It was about this time that we got the message that there was an extra for dinner; and ten minutes later the extra himself arrived - the Black Sheep of GSC in person. Sprouting facial hair. And bearing bottles. For which one can forgive a lot. Next shortcoming of boat discovered – no glasses! Wine just isn't the same out of teacups!

Organised sleeping arrangements - nine people simply don't fit on a 6-berth Sigma! Fortunately we had a tent, which took three people for the night - but with all the gear it was still quite cramped.

After a slow start on Sunday (bacon butties for nine, cooking four rashers at a time on a little grill) the Fort William and Sheep party eventually left, and partial peace descended. The survivors regrouped and got under way - through the lock and on down the canal to Banavie, at the top of Neptune's Staircase.

Then walk on down towards the sea, where *Widgeon* was in the basin inside the sea loch, and James was ambling about on shore.

Just as we arrived, *Widgeon* cast off and entered Corpachy lock. Saw *Widgeon* through the locks (which is marginally more exciting than watching paint dry), then walked back to Neptune's Staircase, where they were just finishing setting things up. We followed her up Neptunes Staircase for a bit, then went to rest our weary feet at the nearest table, which just happened to be in a pub garden.



By the time *Widgeon* emerged, it was fairly late, so stayed put for the evening.



Monday was the first day we could actually go anywhere, but we weren't rushing at this stage. So a gentle trip up the canal towards Loch Lochy, during which it quickly became evident that there would be no peace on board '*Lively*' – with the stove having been left behind, there were frequent requests for tea; followed later by visits to inspect the plumbing.



Through Moy bridge, which is in two parts – for larger vessels the bridgekeeper has to row across the canal to open the other half! The canal was pretty quiet, with just a few canoes and occasional other boats.

Into Loch Lochy, but still a north easterly (the prevailing wind is, of

course, south westerly) so ended up motoring all the way back to Laggan. Through the lock and moor. Got glasses (Cliff special wineglasses) off boatyard - apparently they have a short life on yachts! The *Widgeon* crew did some car and trailer shuffling. Others went shopping in Fort William while a car was available. Peace descended for an hour or two.

Tuesday we set up off 'Laggan Avenue' into Loch Oich - unusually, a shallow loch, and the highest level of the canal. It has a buoyed channel down the middle, which is quite narrow in places. Paused for breakfast at some moorings close to Invergarry Castle.

We did manage a little sailing at the far end of Loch Oich, where there was deeper water (well, we hoped so) - the wind was still north easterly, so all beating. Leaving the loch, I was surprised to be told by the Aberchalder bridge keeper "we don't usually get hire boats calling us up on the radio - so you must know what you are doing". If only he knew. Then up the canal - where we had to wait some time at Kytra lock while the lock keeper was having his lunch!

Thence into Fort Augustus, and its flight of five locks down into Loch Ness. Something of a wait to start with, and then going down takes around an hour, as a lock full of water containing boats is moved down in five stages. Boats are warped through the locks; we seemed to acquire a parasitic dinghy for the flight down.

We could see the southern end of Loch Ness from the locks - and the brisk north easterly was creating rather a lot of white horses thanks to a 20-mile fetch. It looked wet! And it was late afternoon. So once out of the locks, we looked for a vacant mooring, but those that were vacant seemed a bit exposed. So poked our nose out into the white horses on Loch

Ness to do a U-turn, giving the boats about to go up the locks time to get clear - leaving a calmer mooring for us.

Wednesday started very calm, with the mist rolling over the loch. So no great hurry, and after some shopping in Fort Augustus we set sail (or, more correctly, started motoring.)

The wind soon filled in, again from the north east, so we were tacking up the loch in a pleasant breeze. By this time, if *Widgeon's* regular crew wanted tea, they usually had to come on board to make it themselves! So there was a fair amount of swapping people between boats. Found a semi-disused quay at Foyers for lunch; a couple of other yachts there, including one from the same boatyard - as regulars, they assured us the sailing fleet hadn't changed in over 15 years! Some members of the crew actually went swimming (I'll spare you the pictures, for once)! But this was suddenly curtailed by the arrival of '*Fingal*' - a Dutch Barge or similar which offers outdoor pursuits holidays, including sailing, canoeing and walking. We'd first encountered them at Invergarry Castle, picking up some of the victims. They needed rather a lot of the quay, so we all helped shuffle up the moored craft - not sure whether the crew of one yacht realised when they arrived back that it was moored rather better than they'd left it!

Later learned that the hottest place in the British Isles this day had been ... Loch Ness. Clearly the sun had had an effect on the swimmers.

Then over to a little harbour on the north shore, overlooked by Urquhart Castle - Drumnadrochit. This had received European Community money. It was also the only mooring place we found without showers and toilets (is there a link? I don't know). And you were expected to 'pay and display' - placing the ticket on your windscreen. On a dayboat? The harbour mostly comprised stern-on moorings for motor boats,

but we managed to find a corner with alongside mooring, away from those already there. Then the harbour started to fill up. There was only one option – deploy the accordion! There was a clear absence of connoisseurs of good music, for no boats left.

Thursday was a day of procrastination; two parties went up to the village shop and tourist traps (I later learned from the newspaper that there are two competing Loch Ness Visitors Centres which spend their time suing each other). We eventually got under way about lunch time, and were able to sail up the remaining part of Loch Ness - once near the head the wind direction became very erratic, with some relatively strong gusts. Very strange to have the wind appearing to roll straight down a mountain towards you. We motored the rest of the way to the next lock, although *Widgeon* continued sailing most of the way. This was as far as Lively was to go. We were visited by the Loch Ness RNLi (who are of course all volunteers on call), who wanted to practice the latest knitting techniques for changing from astern tow to alongside tow on a friendly yacht.

Dinner was in a delightful place reminiscent of those James Gray has been blogging about in the Orkneys - the Oakwood Restaurant at Dochgarroch is also the Post Office and a gift shop! And its so popular you have to book - fortunately they could accommodate all eight of us at relatively short notice. Excellent food. No licence, so bring your own.

Friday started early – we were up before 0600 to race back down Loch Ness - just Hugh and I, leaving *Widgeon* 6-up! This was really the only day we used our waterproofs - and then for warmth rather than protection, since it was quite nippy to start with. We discovered the true meaning of 'putting your foot down' - by actually standing on the throttle to hold it at 'flat out', we got an extra knot!

It was definitely a pity that we had a schedule to meet, since initially there was quite a good breeze (from the south-west, naturally), and it would have been a very pleasant sail.

Finally got within VHF range of Fort Augustus lock at about 0915 (the usual time of the first upward flight) to be told we could take it easy because they were running a second lock full up. (They also enquired as to whether we had 'that' dinghy with us this time - what it is to have a reputation!) So foot off the throttle, and we motored in and moored while they got sorted out. Ideal - put us at least an hour ahead of our most optimistic schedule!

Once in the lock Hugh and I had to walk the boat through as each set of gates opened, which rather constrained us - I did manage to nip and get a paper, but felt the home made pie shop was a 'nip' too far.

We started to move up, and the '*Lord of the Glens*' came in behind us - needed a lock of its own, which it completely filled.

Once out we moored for a few minutes to walk back to the pie shop - enough for lunch, but none to take home, unfortunately.

So we kept ahead of *Lord of the Glens*, and motored back to Laggan for a peaceful afternoon gently sorting things out.

The *Widgeon* party didn't quite run to schedule (are you surprised?), so Hugh and I had to fend for ourselves for dinner. The floating pub at Laggan was closed, so we were forced to look further afield - fortunately having a car at the boatyard, since the area is not well provided with hostelries. Eventually we could hear *Widgeon* arrive (by road), and helped hide her in a car park for the night.

Saturday we just slipped though the last lock and into the boatyard, still with a surprising amount to transfer to the cars before handing over the boat and heading for home.

Its certainly different to "normal" GSC sailing – no tide, negligible current, no need for an echo sounder in many places, and the wind only comes from one of three directions (up or down the loch, or straight down from above). A lot of motoring is unavoidable – tacking up the canals isn't allowed.

The area is relatively uninhabited, with few moorings – but generally enough for the number of boats. The waters are relatively quiet - traffic is limited by the 'pinch point' at Fort Augustus, and to some extent by Neptune's staircase. You get the 'through' traffic as well, and this can be quite large.

The canal is operated by British Waterways, and the staff were all friendly and helpful – they warned each other about traffic, and seemed to cope with a dodgy charter yacht having a VHF. The fact that they only operate the locks from 0800 to 1800, and literally stop for an hour for lunch, can be a bit limiting.

There was also a refreshing lack of overt health and safety – few notices, no guard rails, and no one prevented from going anywhere. There were reasonable and well kept facilities available in most places, with toilets and showers, accessible to those with a BWB key. And generally free mooring.

It was an unusual week, for Scotland. It didn't rain. Well, maybe for a short time overnight. And the sun shone. It wouldn't happen again.

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Mayday or Pan Pan? A Mayday call should be used to signify life threatening distress -grave and imminent danger. A pan pan is for serious but not life threatening distress - like your vessel loosing power.

Knowledge and Nosh:

Sean Coomber

This is an extract from a book Sean is writing. Names have been altered to protect the innocent -can you guess?

How shallow are those who try to impress by offering their services against their better judgement. How foolish had I been to agree to give an instructional talk at the sailing club at one of their monthly 'knowledge and nosh' sessions.

In my defence I had assumed all details of my misguided volunteering would be quickly forgotten or discarded in preference of some weightier topic.

However several months after a casual conversation with the perpetually enthusiastic club training secretary my name had appeared on the club website with a date confirming my contribution to the training calendar. Like a prisoner on death row I understood the finality of knowing the instant of one's fate but without the luxury of comprehending that I would not recall the experience.

I had decided on the title of my presentation. The 'physics of sailing'. That ought to be intimidating enough to put most people off. With any luck the UK's unpredictable weather would conspire to prevent a few more attending. Who was I kidding? The club's church like interior would probably be more crowded than a Billy Graham sermon. Without Billy's fanaticism inducing charisma the trick would be to keep my audience sufficiently occupied to distract them from the mediocrity of the content.

"I need the help of a couple of glamorous assistants", I announced trying desperately not to sound like Bruce Forsythe. As the assembled audience consisted mainly of men over fifty it was not difficult to pick out Jet and her new best

friend, Vicky. I dare not contemplate the consequences of having selected anyone other than Jet. At best she may have sabotaged my presentation; at worst I may have never seen her again.

I set Vicky and Jet to work handing out cards to the bemused gathering while I attempted to explain the task as simply as possible. "The cards either state a scientific principle related to sailing, a description of a principle or a picture illustrating a principle". The silence in the room made me wonder if I was speaking a foreign language and certainly did not fill me with confidence that I was making myself understood. I continued. "The objective is to talk to people in the room until you have formed a group of three with cards related to the same scientific idea". I felt encouraged by some earnest nodding as everyone got to their feet and started mingling.

As I started preparing the next task I wondered whether ultrasound, upthrust and the Bernoulli principle would have everyone walking around in circles for hours. However as I contemplated whether I should have advised bringing sleeping bags and a light breakfast to the event the task appeared to have been completed. The chaotic melange of chattering bodies had transformed into neat groups of three waiting expectantly for my next instructions. I had the groups proudly read out their cards to confirm they had identified the connections as it dawned on me that a group of well read sailors would collectively have a vast general knowledge. Not surprising they had solved my little problem quite efficiently.

Your next task is to work in pairs to construct a boat. The boat which can carry the most weight will win the challenge. As everyone looked around the room for the wood, fibreglass, rope and shackles they assumed that I had concealed in the club I reached into a small bag I had brought with me. I

suspected my audience were more than a little underwhelmed when I proceeded to hand out fist size lumps of brown plasticine. Despite their immediate disappointment each team immediately began conferring as to how to transform the child's plaything they had been given into something resembling the QE2. I had succeeded in engaging my audience through the thinly disguised deception of introducing the element of competition.

As I supervised the building work like an over zealous exam invigilator I started to wonder if anyone in the room had actually noticed the shape of the boats moored only a short distance away in the river. None of the yachts I could see through the window resembled the miniature pancakes, doughnuts and bathtubs being fashioned enthusiastically before me. I resisted the growing urge to intervene.

With the fifteen minute time limit I had set having expired the teams carefully carried their strangely diverse creations over to a table where I had filled a large washing up bowl with water. As the pancake was confidently placed in the water by Jet and her partner, I just had time to place a single pound coin on top before it sank gracefully below the surface, weaving its way to a rather shallow Davy Jones' locker. The room filled with tension as everyone deliberated whether to laugh or commiserate. Jet looked resigned to losing the competition until the next pair presented their handiwork. Disturbingly the shape of the plasticine had not been altered and as the oblong mass was lowered into the water predictably it sank immediately. Tragic! Everyone looked bewildered as the evening's two youngest participants explained that they didn't like the weird, sticky feel of the modelling clay. I decided to move on swiftly.

After the doughnut had managed to support, if rather precariously, the grand total of two pound coins I sensed that everyone's expectations had risen considerably. Finally it was the turn of the bathtub lovingly shaped by Christian and Vicky, a couple who had romantically met as a result of joining the club. I can only imagine they had been listening to unchained melody in their earpieces as they sculpted this masterpiece together. There was an audible gasp of euphoria as the ninth pound coin was delicately placed in the vessel. Christian, standing proudly behind Vicky, wrapped his arms around her. Was that the Righteous Brothers I could still hear? Would their boat hold ten coins? Would we ever get to enjoy the promised nosh at the end of the evening? As I held up the tenth coin like a treasured holy grail our questions were answered. Before I could add the coin the bathtub tilted to one side, water spilling over the sides, before joining the other plasticine wrecks at the bottom of the bowl.

After some well deserved applause for our winners I concluded with a brief explanation of Archimedes's principle. I pointed out that the upward force supporting the boat could be optimised by increasing the weight of water being displaced by the plasticine. As eyes started to glaze over I finished off with a succinct "Make the boat as big as possible and it's more likely to float," before introducing the finale to my act. The quiz!

It was now approaching eight o'clock in the evening and after the exertion of the first two tasks everyone was in need of some sustenance. Thanks to the dedication of Hannah, the club secretary, and a few keen volunteers there were several dishes of home made lasagne slowly cooking in the club's galley. It was decided that the food would best be served

before anyone collapsed from malnutrition and that we could conduct the quiz while enjoying the much anticipated meal.

I proceeded to hand out quiz sheets endeavouring to avoid the stampede to get served in the kitchen. Seeing that I was consumed by my determination to make sure that no one missed out on participating in the quiz Jet kindly brought me a plate of the steaming hot lasagne to where we were sitting. Each quiz sheet contained ten questions related to the scientific concepts I had alluded to during the course of the evening. Rather like a teacher with over optimistic expectations I hoped to discover if through my efforts I had indeed succeeded in imparting any knowledge whatsoever to my class.

With everyone's appetite well on the way to being satisfied the teams started deliberating the questions I had presented them with. Unfortunately some of the quiz sheets had fallen victim to some careless use of the club's cutlery and I was asked to interpret more than a few words almost completely obliterated by stubborn tomato sauce stains.

When each team had given the quiz their best shot the sheets were exchanged and I asked each pair one of the questions. After a lengthy marking process during which each team jealously guarded their varying degrees of success, the scores were in. Like the host of numerous celebrity reality TV shows I nurtured the growing tension by announcing the top three scores in reverse order. Despite the crunching of garlic bread, scraping of forks on virtually empty plates and hissing of opening beer cans I could sense everyone on the edge of their seats by the time I announced the winner. Brian was so overwhelmed by his success that he downed his drink, insisted his wife grab her coat and left to get an early night.

I had succeeded in pulling it off despite my trepidation. As several participants thanked me and pointed out how much they had learnt from the evening I felt a growing sense of having accomplished my aim to educate and amuse a potentially critical audience. Maybe after a few drinks and a bit of intervention from Jet I could be persuaded to do a repeat performance next year.

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Rock ...a not so hard place *Charlotte & Pete Griffiths*

When we purchased a dayboat from e-Bay, we thought it would be a good idea to work towards a goal- Dayboat week!

We (well, Pete) spent the Winter scraping and painting. Then, for most of the Summer we mentally rehearsed sailing as work, other commitments and the weather conspired against us to reduce our sailing time.

We sourced a tow ball, and Pete realised that towing wasn't as hard as he thought it was. Everything was ready...

A week or two before DB week, we realised that we didn't have a race certificate as our boat had never been measured. All the modifications we had made had been completed carefully, with the rules scrutinised carefully. Was it enough? Geoff Honey, the DB measurer, squeezed in a last minute measure, and phew...we passed.

We arrived at Rock. We drifted...practised roll tacks (yes...in a dayboat)...rudderless steering (for fun), and leant out. Rock was a lovely place to sail with wide open sailing areas, and moorings you can walk to. If only the clubhouse had car parking, I think it would be perfect!

Shivering Sands:

Sarah Jane Hutchinson

The disappointment of the 125th Anniversary Race to Medway being cancelled due to high winds was closely followed by the prospect of no wind for the Shivering Sands Race. But hey-ho, being new to this sailing lark, I was given a crumb of hope of seeing the forts when I was told the race always starts and conditions can often change. But, I think we all had a fairly good idea of what the day would bring, with some being sufficiently confident in the forecast to book a night in Queenborough. Reaching the entrance to the Medway would mean a good day's sailing for *Chodo* and *Chapter II*.

I arrived at the Club at 05'30 as duly requested ready for the 07'00 start on *Just Nimbus*, and added to her plentiful provisions with a selection of filled rolls, boiled eggs and chicken wings! Although the early morning sunrise was beautiful, the talk was mainly of the likely sideways drift towards Tilbury and how long it will take for the turning tide to carry us back across the club line.

The start of the race was as predicted, with the 6 boats entered taking up a variety of positions across the river slowly drifting backwards towards London. The calm was momentarily disturbed by the excitement of seeing *Four Bells*, *Kadissa* and *Game Keeper*, seemingly drawn by magnetism to exactly the same patch of water. Shouts of 'starboard' and 'you are the overtaking boat' could be heard above the quiet, with a final 'why don't we just raft up', before moving apart on the slightest of airs.

We finally started to make progress and crossed the club line some 15 minutes later than should, with the others there or thereabouts. With the day beginning to warm, *Just Nimbus* began to move through the water, but with the predicted light

airs and lateness crossing the line we knew there was zero chance of reaching Shivering Sands. We made an early decision to enjoy the glorious sunshine whilst Skipper Robbins gave one of his tutorials; the day's topic: finding your position using a chart and a compass.... all very interesting and useful stuff!

As the day passed I found myself forgetting life and simply enjoying the boiled eggs and the company of good friends whilst eventually rounding the wreck of the SS Richard Montgomery before heading for home. With the breeze picking up in the afternoon warmth we even managed to deploy the spinnaker which is always good fun to watch and even funnier watching the boys trying to get it back in its bag.

As we travelled back up river, the sun shone on *Just Nimbus* allowing for a spot of sunbathing and even a light snooze on deck before seal spotting. The day was soon to come to an end as we approached the club's moorings I knew that we had to get ready to put *Just Nimbus* to bed and say goodbye to some wonderful friends and a fabulous day of sailing, something I have always found sad since joining the club.

It had been an amazing day and though not quite what I had expected, the wonderful company and the whole sailing experience added to a fantastic first season for me at the club and will be a day I am unlikely to forget!



Left: Sarah at the helm of *Just Nimbus* trying to maximise boat speed whilst the guys contemplate the need to reef!

Back cover pictures: Left: Most would say a beautiful morning for the Shivering Sands! Right: River Rat

My Dayskipper Theory Course:

Tony Cook

On Tuesday 18th September 2018 I was part of a small group of mostly GSC members, who had assembled for the first lesson of the RYA Dayskipper & Yachtmaster Theory course being run at the club. Some of my fellow students were unknown to me at that time but over the next 6 months we all got to know each other well during those chilly winter nights having fought our way around the contractors site and into the clubhouse.

The course would run on Tuesday evenings to the end of March 2019 and following brief introductions we each took turns to speak briefly about why we were there and what we hoped to achieve from the course. After this I was heads down and straight into a course overview followed by an introduction to charts, and a start on exercise 1.

Everybody had their own reasons for attending the course, but we seemed to bond as a group very well. Personally I was looking for an introduction into Chartwork, Passage Planning, Colregs and Meteorology to give myself a head start on the Boat Masters Licence which I am currently working towards.

Ahead of the course I must admit to being a little concerned that due to the nature of my work and my shift patterns that I would be unable to attend some evenings and it might affect my ability to keep up. But following several shift swaps and the occasional holiday day I was able to complete the course missing very few. Although the course was only one evening per week it must be said that a commitment to put in additional work at home ready for the next lesson is required.

As the course progressed, we were all surprised at how the weeks flew by and before we knew it, the Christmas break was upon us with the assessment evenings not looking far away.

Into the new year and we had covered most of the syllabus and the next couple of months was more refreshing our memories on some of the subjects we had been covering during the first few months.

Following the assessment evenings we gathered for the results and we were all pleased to receive our certificates. It was also a chance to thank course tutor Richard Twyman who was assisted by Steve and Cliff without whom we could not have achieved what we did and the course could not have run.

Personally, I felt I achieved everything I had set out to and much more and I would strongly recommend the Dayskipper course to anybody that might be considering it at some point in the future.

Well, now with the better weather and the sailing season upon us its time to put the classroom behind us and get back out on the water.



Evening Class -



(picture above): Yachtmaster: David Clausen, Peter Griffiths, Adam Gray
Tutor: Richard Twyman, Cliff Wimpory (far right)
Dayskipper: Andy Mundan, Tony Cook, Sam Miller, Darren Fuller
Left: Kadissa in the haze: Richard, it's behind you!

Two dinghy-cruising vignettes:

Jane Trowell

Sailing with James Marriott in YW Dayboat 'Isis'

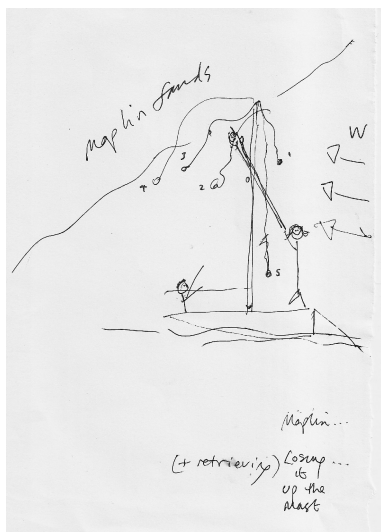
A northwesterly from Leigh on Sea to Harty Ferry

17th August 2017. NW; F3 to 4; cloudy/sunny.

Picture it. We left from the very friendly Essex Yacht Club at 14.50, 2 hours before HW. It was a broad reach all the way, surging ever faster down the estuary as the outgoing tide gathered pace, the wind behind us as we rounded Sheppey at Warden Point, hardening up as we entered the Swale.

It was a total cracker: essentially one tack for four and a half hours, virtually to Horse Sand.

Suddenly the wind dropped to zero, but the sensational evening sun, copper sandbanks, and basking seals delighted us, despite the longish pull against the last of the ebb up to a mooring buoy. Tent up. Nosh. Sleep. Bliss.



Losing the main halyard up the mast in a F4, anchored off S Shoebury buoy.

8th July 2018, E/SE, F2 increasing to 4 later; blazing sun.

Yes, we were sailing the Havengore route to the River Roach again, eventual destination the Blackwater. The previous day we'd had a lovely voyage from Gravesend, leaving in NO wind whatsoever, but true to the forecast it picked up, so we made Queenborough easily. On the 8th, we left Sheppey in a good breeze,

and just after LW slung our hook north of S Shoebury buoy on the edge of the Maplin Sands. A snack and a snooze under the

shade of the mainsail was what we wanted while we waited for the tide to cover the sands. We hadn't reckoned on losing the halyard as we doused the mainsail. The very strong breeze streamed the halyard out at a 45 degree angle astern of the mast. Despite the heat, neither of us felt like going in up to our waists in the water to tilt the heavily laden dayboat over in order to reach the dangling halyard. Luckily we had a long wooden boathook (which we had found on the shoreline somewhere out on the Dengie coast a few years before). The thing is, the boathook is very heavy, so it must have taken about 20 attempts, standing wobbling on the foredeck, one arm raised high, other arm holding on to the mast, to catch the fickle halyard and wedge the bobble to the mast, and inch it down and down until we could reach it. There was some very ripe and motivating cursing, but once the job was done we laughed a LOT. That's one way to spend time waiting for the tide to turn.

It was a glorious sail to the Havengore Bridge. We arrived a bit early, but, with a bit of touch and go we went through into the Roach. After us, the bridge mechanism jammed open, so no traffic could get from or to Foulness til the next morning! Due to misjudgement of the tide that was still whistling through the pontoon, we had a bit of a crash landing at Paglesham. By then we were very tired and no harm was done, so never mind. What a complete joy to have a pint or two in the Plough and Sail, then sleep and wake to the sound of curlews and oystercatchers. The next day at dawn, we silently sailed past dozens of seals lolling on the mudbanks in various orange and silvery-grey hues, occasionally calling to one another. The wildlife haven of the Roach stole our hearts this trip, but, the Blackwater beckoned.

The Rat Stretches Her Wings

James Gray

Where did we leave the *River Rat* story? Autumn 2018, flushed with the success of the conversion to Junk rig, ready to bore you all to death with its virtues, and gloss over any deficiencies. But in truth, she'd only had a couple of outings. Another truth that I shall whisper quietly; I cut a few corners in my desire to get her sailing in that race. One corner concerned the fixing of the foot of the mast. My plan was to sink a tube through the deck, firmly fixed, and drop in the mast. I had the tube. But I didn't have the time. So I sank the mast itself through the deck, footing it in epoxy-soaked ply, and using that tried engineering technique of hoping it would be all right. And was it all right? No, of course it wasn't. Roy phoned me during the winter to tell me that the mast was at a rakish angle. That plywood was sodden and rotten. So I took the mast out. Then later in the winter, the centreplate fell out (bad maintenance on my part). So now I had a boat with no mast and no keel. No more Mister Smug Guy.

I took her to Mariners Farm on the Medway for a month. Resealed the hull/deck join & repainted the GRP. Properly fixed the mast tube, securely fixing it top, middle and bottom. New anchor & chain locker amidships, with a new Knox anchor. Removed remaining annoyances of Bermudian rig (chainplates, genoa cars). Installed fittings and electrical connections for a Tillerpilot (readers of the *Black Sheep* blog - I permit you to shudder). New stern pole carrying all-round white light and VHF/AIS aerial. Rewired throughout and made and fitted new switch & fuse panel. New solar panel. Fixed lazarette hinges. Fitted AIS transmitter and plotter based on a Raspberry Pi. Made new mattress (using the old genoa for material). Hull scraped and antifouled. Repainted the hull a nice bright shiny red. By the end of that month, she was transformed into a much more solid and capable vessel.

Why the frenzy of activity? I'm a member of the Junk Rig Association. This year, their AGM was to be held in the UK, to coincide with the Brixham Heritage Regatta. I conceived the idea of sailing *River Rat* round for the meeting. In many ways a

reasonable thing - ten junks made it to the AGM this year. But quite a big ask for an 18 footer to sail the 600 mile round trip. Especially as my domestic commitments mean I can't be away for more than about 5 days at a time. But, somehow, an irresistible challenge!

The voyage : Leg 1, Gravesend to Ramsgate

Departure was Monday 6th May. After Sail Past, I headed downstream in a light westerly. The wind carried me gently as far as the Medway channel; I dropped anchor close to the Tripod mark at 2040.

Tuesday was an early start - up came the anchor at 0445. A lovely southerly took me to Long Nose, then the outboard took me round the Foreland into a fresh headwind; an uncomfortable motor in lumpy seas. I tied up in Ramsgate at 1155. My plan had been to continue, but the forecasts showed F6+ from the SW, so I took the train home.

Leg 2, Ramsgate to Weymouth

Back in Ramsgate, we had Easterly winds! A cracking sail down past Deal - a beam reach under 6 panels of canvas (the sail has seven panels, so effectively one reef). I love sailing that stretch of coast. At South Foreland, I dropped down to five panels (two reefs). Passing well seaward of Dover, I dropped down to four panels as the wind freshened, then three. One thing I love about junk is the ease of reefing - all from the cockpit and without having to go head to wind. Three panels is the notional minimum sail; I've put in four reefs by then. But as the wind strengthened again four miles from Dungeness, I took her down to just two panels.

Heading West from Dover there isn't much in the way of shelter. The pilot says that an "uneasy" anchorage can be found either side of Dungeness, according to the wind. The trouble is, in an Easterly, Dungeness affords little shelter. The boat rolled all night. Uneasy indeed.

Tuesday, I sailed off the anchor at 0550. Another fast downwind passage, I was tied up in Brighton Marina at 1410.

My plan was one night and leave early on Wednesday. But I was knackered after very little sleep, so stayed an extra night.

Thursday we had a fine moderate Easterly, and a more settled sea state. Very good progress saw me to Langstone Harbour where I dropped anchor in Russell's Lake.

Friday, I sailed out of Langstone, then slowly West in light winds before the tide set properly in my favour - a fantastic tidal lift by the time I'd passed Cowes. I took the inshore route close in under Hurst Castle, then on to Poole harbour where I picked up a buoy.

Saturday, I motored out of Poole harbour. I raised sail outside and sailed very slowly towards Anvil Point, but found I was making about a knot in very light airs, so motored most of the way to Weymouth. I tied up to the town pontoon, and arranged to leave the boat for five nights.

Leg 3, Weymouth to Brixham and Regatta

Thurs 23rd May, I sailed to the first corner of Portland under five panels in a brisk SW wind. I reduced to four panels, then to three as I close-tacked the inshore route under the lighthouse, rounding the Bill at about 1500. As I bore away, I raised to five, then six, then seven panels as the wind lightened and I headed NW towards West Bay.

On Friday, I made good progress for a couple of hours until the wind died. So Lyme Bay was mainly motored across, or at best motor-sailed. I tied up to the Town Pontoon in Brixham to a very warm welcome by fellow junkies. Ten junks were expected for the regatta, and River Rat was the last to arrive. I'd never met any of the others, but we knew each other through the forums and they recognised River Rat. My lines were taken, I was ushered aboard a larger boat, and food and drink were thrust into my hands. (I couldn't help but recall a similar arrival at Middleburg, also in *River Rat* under her previous rig).

The Regatta

The regatta was fantastic fun. From 72 foot sailing trawlers, down to small workboats. Gaffers, luggers, junks, bermudians in quite a fresh Northwesterly wind. I got off to my usual racing

start... about half an hour late crossing the line! I have no plausible excuse, I just lost track of the time while enjoying the pre-start sailing. The upwind legs were a struggle in the strong wind - a contrast to the upwind efficiency in light airs that I enjoyed at the Gravesham. I think I cut too much camber in the main panels; fantastic for light airs but quickly overpowering the boat in stronger winds. The downwind legs were an absolute blast - with all my canvas up, I was creaming past boats twice my size. A good thing about Junk is knowing that you can reef down quickly and easily before rounding up at the leeward mark - I was able to drop to just three panels before rounding the mark for the windward leg.

In the prizegiving that evening, the Regatta Officer awarded *River Rat* a special prize for "perseverance" - for sailing the distance to get there, and for completing the course in a small boat in rather fresh conditions. I was also awarded a special Junk Rig Association prize by Pete Hill for upholding the Junk Rig community ethos - in recognition of the effort I took to get my boat to the AGM. The final words in my log for the regatta were "A good day".

The Return: Leg 1, Brixham to Exmouth

Time to go. I needed somewhere to lay *River Rat* up for a while and had hit upon the perfect answer. I sailed across Torbay to Exmouth, then followed the winding course of the Exe for five miles. As I turned off the main channel, a pair of lock gates were starting to open for me. This is Turf, a lock basin at the southern end of the Exeter Ship Canal. A delightful pound of sheltered water with an excellent pub... and nothing else - not even road access! My lines were taken by Hugh and Miriam Taylor who very kindly put me up in their Exmouth house. I'm afraid I wasn't the perfect guest as I was upstairs and asleep by 9pm!

Leg 2, Exmouth to Weymouth

Turf's difficult by car, but easy by public transport. Train to Exeter, then on to Topsham. Walked down to the quay where I stepped on to a ferry that took me down and across the river

to Turf lock. A quick check that *River Rat* was in good order, then a pint of Yellowhammer in the sunshine.

Tue, lockout and a gentle motor down the Exe, then raised sail for a slow drift in light S or SE wind. A slow day, sailing and motor-sailing the 25 miles to West Bay, arriving at 8pm. Here the weather changed to Easterly 5-7 - not the wind for heading East round Portland Bill; I ended up staying four nights. A lovely place, but I had seen enough of it by the time I went, particularly as the outer harbour became very uncomfortable in the swell.

On Saturday the wind was still a fresh southeasterly, but ameliorated and veered (as forecast) by the time I got to the Bill. I motored the corner itself, but was soon close-tacking the southeast corner of the island. Late afternoon saw me in Weymouth. This time I went into the marina to leave the boat. On a hot Saturday night in June Weymouth was packed - the town pontoons were rafted five deep!

Leg 3, Weymouth to Brighton

On returning to Weymouth, a lovely sail close in to the Dorset coast, with a little motor sailing when the wind failed me. I looked in to Lulworth Cove as I passed, and was glad I'd decided to skip it, as I counted 12 masts - ten yachts and a number of motor boats. Instead I carried on to a nearly deserted Worbarrow Bay where I dropped the hook.

The following morning I sailed off the anchor but the wind quickly died, so more engine work until rounding Peveril Point when the wind filled in from the Southwest, giving me a gorgeous sail in sunshine right through to the Needles channel. I was becoming concerned about the outboard, which kept cutting out. I diagnosed a blocked fuel filter, so I turned up to Lymington for supplies. But motoring away from the fuel pontoon showed me that I hadn't fixed the problem. Luckily there is a Mariner agent in town, happy to collect an engine from the marina, service it (including sonic clean of the carburettor) and return it to the boat in just over 24 hours.

Leaving Lymington I had a stonking sail in a fresh Southwesterly with a strong tide - SOG was over 7 knots for long periods. I carried on as the tide slackened and made it to Langstone again. I like Langstone - less scary than next-door Portsmouth. You can sail straight in, up to Russell's Lake and drop an anchor with no other boats in the area. Even mid July.

Next morning, I sailed off the anchor and out into the Eastern Solent. Rounding Selsey Bill, the wind was fresh from the southwest, kicking up quite a strong swell. I dropped down to two panels to keep the boat from overpowering. As the wind veered to the North, I closed the coast to keep out of the swell which gradually died as the wind came off the land. Slowish going towards Brighton, but I wasn't in a hurry; it was a lovely evening. I pulled into Brighton Marina at 8pm, after nearly 10 hours sailing. Here, again I left the boat while I returned home for a week.

Leg 4, Brighton to Gravesend

Sun 21 July, I left the marina at 0730 in a light westerly. There was an hour and a half of motorsailing before the wind filled in and I had a gorgeous run of downwind sailing at 6 knots under 6, then 5, then 4 panels. Beachy Head was stunning from close in, then I stood off the coast in a straight line for Dungeness. Down to just two panels rounding the headland in a strong wind and moderate sea, then headed N to drop the hook just short Dymchurch. A bumpy night, but not as uncomfortable as on the way out.

In the morning I sailed off the anchor under three panels in a good SW. The wind and sea grew off Dover - the Rat is not easy to steer in a big quartering sea - she needs a firm and responsive hand on the tiller, more than the tillerpilot can provide. Once in the lee of South Foreland the sea smoothed providing a lovely sail up the coast past Deal to Ramsgate.

The tides aren't kind going from Ramsgate to the Thames. An 0530 start saw me use the early part of the North-going stream, but we were already well into the ebb in the Estuary. The wind was favourable and the sea was smooth, so I just

raised all seven panels and happily drifted along at about 1 knot SOG. It's still progress! And the wind increased as the current waned.

Sailing past Birchington, my handheld burst into life "Mayday! Mayday! Mayday!". I'm all ears; the signal is loud and clear, it must be close, "this is yacht *Lightning*" - as soon as I heard the name, I pushed the tiller over - I'd already noted that boat on the AIS and eyeballed her as directly abeam of me, less than a mile off. I started the engine & dropped the sail, making all speed towards the yacht. She was aground on the Margate Sand. I readied my two longest and strongest warps. But as I closed her, it became apparent that she was firmly aground, and my 4hp could do nothing useful. I stood by and discussed options with the skipper. I could tell him there was probably only another metre of tide to fall. The best decision looked to be to wait it out. The coastguard downgraded the call to a Pan Pan, and told him that a lifeboat was on its way. We agreed there was nothing I could usefully do, so I raised sail and departed, seeing the lifeboat come into view behind me after 20 minutes.

Thereafter, a lovely sail in a good wind and smooth sea took me all the way to Holehaven. An early night, then a 3am start for the final push, arriving back at Gravesend at 0510 - an hour before the top of the tide.

So - a good test of the new rig. My considered opinion - I still think it's a fantastic rig. The ability to reef / unreef quickly and easily from the cockpit is the killer. I've lost count of the incremental sail changes I made. The ease of raising and lowering sail makes it particularly useful when dropping or raising anchor without the motor. I can see the error in my calculations that led to over-cambered main panels. Despite the overpowering in fresh winds, I'm very happy with the sail. I may get around to recutting the top three panels flatter, but am inclined to keep the deep camber in the lower panels as it's particularly handy in light winds.





You've all noticed the immense amount of work going on at the sailing club. Here, the removal of the flood gate is chronicled by John Green (pictured under the broilley)

The astute amongst you will also have noticed we've lost part of our skyline as Tilbury power station was blown up (deliberately).

