



UP THE CREEK

Lower Halstow Yacht Club

Spring 2020

Commodores' Ramblings



At the time of writing, mid-April, we are still in lock-down wondering what happened and how we are going to get 'back to normal' whatever that may look like in the future. Our usual sailing plans have been put on hold and for many of us not being able to use our boats represents a real loss of freedom and enjoyment. We all know it is the right thing to do and that the bottom line is that all our club members and their families stay safe and well. It is quite likely that some of us might suffer the loss of a loved one and my thoughts are with any club members who are already coping with such terrible difficulties. Everything else in life is secondary.

Like some members, I am lucky enough to be able to walk to our Yacht club and I can count 48 boats sitting on dry land like it's mid-winter. It's a strange sight to see in spring.

My old 'Snapdragon 26' is still in the water where it has been all winter taunting me to take it up the creek. Of those of you that know me, I'm not a proper sailor like a lot of you who dart across the North Sea or go and get some wine from France just for a jolly. I take my land-lubber ('A useless long-shorer; a vagrant stroller' according to 'The Sailor's Word-Book' by Admiral W.H.Smyth 1867) hat off to you. But in my defence, I love boats heart and soul and lived on different boats for over 25 years, only sleeping on land a handful of times. There's nothing like being on the water or by the water, be it a lake, river or sea, it just feels right for those of us addicted to boating, in all its forms, in some way. So for all those members who cannot visit their boats at the moment, I can imagine how difficult that is for you.

From the look of things, sailing this year is going to be very late in the season, if at all. If your thinking of launching late in the season (if the Government lock-down is lifted) and doing some autumn/ winter sailing to compensate for lost time on the water, I would ask around those seasoned members who know about winter sailing and having your boat bashed about a bit by the winter storms.

Mine has been out for two winters now but it's a very tough boat and I have renewed and maintained the mooring chain so it is in good overall condition. On a sunny winter day it can

be really rewarding to get out with a flask of hot soup and tack up the creek for a couple of hours or even overnight if you have a heater in your boat. Maybe this season could be a winter season instead, not ideal I know, but our greatest skill as sailors is adjusting to nature's conditions and making the best of it. It's what we do when we sail and that might be the best approach to the current crisis we now find ourselves in.

Myles Stewart

Rudderless Meanderings from your Editor



We'll start with this photo of members shamelessly fighting over unallocated free nosh at last year's AGM.

Do come along to the next one because I think that guy there with the haircut had your fish and chips last time.

On a serious note, I read in a newspaper recently an opiner's opinion that a certain Captain of British industry was perhaps unsuited to a major position he was about to be offered because his financial judgment was questionable. The evidence being he was keen on sailing – inference being a "yachty" cannot be trusted to make sound business decisions -

how true I thought. Particularly me. It comes back to the old adages we like to keep to the back of our minds rather than the front, for example, BOAT standing for Bring Out Another Thousand, "if it floats or flies don't buy it" etc etc etc.

This got me thinking yet again about my dodgy character trait of getting obsessive about hobbies. Incrementally spending beyond my means from a small start then whoooooosh! If only I could have all that money back!

I have always struggled to keep things in proportion, and I am hopeful that I'm getting better at it as money supplies dwindle as the years go on. I'm trying these days to think more along the lines of looking at the pile of timber off cuts and various boaty stuff I've accumulated over the years and thinking what I can do with them rather than "let's buy a new bit!" There is satisfaction to be had in this approach I feel. The best plan of attack is to leave the thorny spendy-spendy issue on the back burner for long enough to convince yourself you never really needed to spend it anyway, After all the boat is still afloat isn't it! Then you can slap yourself on the back for being such a wise and prudent fellow.

The idea of attempting to keep things in proportion was brought into focus a year or two back when, never missing out on cadging advice from someone better at things than me, I had an

experienced type look over my ship. It was all very reassuring until between his vague grunts of approval, I casually mentioned that I was having trouble with the ancient furling gear for the flying jib.

Oh he said!, that's- easy get yourself a continuous line code 10 screamer sealed iridium/tungsten bearing Kevlar graphite dyneema furler!

Huzzah problem solved says I! Scurrying home I set to searching the internet catalogues.

Thank goodness reality crashed through the drink infused reverie of hassle free wonder sailing in boating paradise about midnight.

I was just about to take the sacrosanct credit card reserved for “emergencies” only- you know the one, the one with a 2500% interest rate and if there were any morals in bankland, they really should never have given you anyway-- out of the safe, and click the internet go button wherefore to order a whizzo set up which would cost more than I paid for my last car and holiday combined. Just to furl a sail no bigger than a queen size duvet cover, and I didn't even know if it would really work. OK it's true that I rarely go on holidays these days and have a very cheap car but you get the idea.

I have now read the book, removed the old jamming furling gear and get the sail down easily by heaving too- just like it says in the book - no excuse for not being able to do it, and if I got to the stage in life of not being able to do it I really should sell the boat and take up rambling or such like.

One comes across the evidence of this type of destructive lifestyle only too often in the classified sections of the boating press. Boaters desperately trying to reclaim at least something from their profligacy. Advertisements something along the lines of “45k spent in last year - offers in the region of 14k” - hardly something to brag about I'd say - more like a reason to shoot yourself or an immediate self referral to some specialised branch of the NHS- just across the corridor one can imagine from substance abuse and problem gambling .

I've come to the disciplined conclusion that if one thinks long and hard enough about what one wants to achieve in a hobby, an uncomplicated and cheap solution will present itself. One has to remember that Joshua Slocum really did go round the world alone with a tin wind up clock and compass. And rather than masses of electronic and other high tech equipment, that in my experience one spends half the year trying to get working and the other half squinting and fiddling with when you really should be doing old fashioned stuff like trimming the sails looking out for pot buoys, for the most of the time – virtually all of it- the Mark 1 Eyeball is the best piece of kit on board.

I've been reading a few old books on single handed sailing, and long distance solo voyages, apparently technically illegal but nice. Very inspirational. I meet an old salt in the West Country who thought the entire idea- singled handedness- was irresponsible behaviour. His opinion was not to be sniffed at , he had sailed in just about every situation across the globe. One of his adventures was setting off from Newlyn to sail to America one night with a couple of friends, all in their late teens. I forget if he said they had mentioned it to their parents, probably not. “Terrible forecast but we went anyway.....”

At one point they had actually trailed a bite of rope behind the boat and emptied tins of oil over the side to prevent a mid Atlantic storm pitch poling the boat. Just like in the books. They dropped off one chap off in the States then sailed up to Canada and the Great Lakes. Another adventure was when he was working on hydrographical survey vessels all over the world. They were coming back home, somewhere way off the coast of Cornwall and were not

going to make it back in time for his small son's birthday. Problem solved when they detailed the helicopter to drop him off in own front garden. He had quite a big front garden apparently.

Any way sailing solo is something that I do and who could put up with me visiting the heads three times plus a night anyway.

Some of the stuff in the older books however, does add power and evidence to my plan to put brakes on the more expensive boaty stuff that I find myself tempted by.

Obviously in the solo long distance setting I came quickly came to the conclusion, thank God, that I personally don't have nearly enough of the "the right stuff" to undertake such passages. However, I doubt there isn't one of us who hasn't mentally gone over the feasibility of making it "next stop pacific coral atoll" in a quiet moment, so one does like to ruminate. Apparently if one is that sort of person that is going to do it, then one is just going to damn well do it whatever. I've heard it said that cross dressing is a bit like that although naturally your editor has no actual hands on proof.

These books were written in the 70s and 80s, and for me this doesn't feel like such a long time ago. However, looking at the recommended equipment and the general outlook is still something of an eye opener.

As you would imagine the recommended hardware fit would now be considered as nothing short of scandalous for even a top of the tide race round the creek, engines and vhf being on the desirable, but not essential list as an example.

But where the recommended stores and equipment list would be seen as light on expensive gadgetry by today's standards, there are quite a few esoteric items that I'm sure most members would now consider superfluous in this enlightened age.

For example one might want to leave shoreside such things as a large and very sharp tree felling axe wrapped in waxed paper, a number of collarless cotton shirts (M and S ?) and cigars for battering with the locals. Also a couple of sticks of dynamite to toss into the wheel house of any marauder attempting to come along side. This course of action apparently produces an instant resolution to any further problem.

Lots of useful advice though, counter-intuitively, painting down below in light green guards against seasickness, and if you can catch a turtle you should lasso it round a leg with a small line and tow it alive behind the boat for a few days until needed for the pot. (please, please don't do this!!)

The level and breadth of knowledge that was assumed to be required by a sea going type in the 80s however is actually quite humbling in our over specialised world- over reliant on small black boxes, where we tend to know a great deal about not very much- everything from celestial navigation, calculating the observable distance of a kerosene dioptic anchor light, preserving eggs by dipping in wax and covering in sand , going over the side to scrape shell fish off your hull for use as fishing bait, and where exactly the poor mollusc's

abductor muscles is- this being where best to stick the hook through, or how to extract the unfortunate occupant from a conch shell (boil in sea water then when he shows himself grab him with a pair of pliers), it goes on and on – absolutely fascinating. One tip I will definitely be using is the fail safe emergency alarm clock idea, which does not rely on an external power source which could be subject to failure. Simply tie a heavyish hammer to a thin length of line and suspend it above your bunk where your feet usually are to be found. Not above your pillow. The string should be arranged next to a bulkhead or shelf in such a manner that it will eventually with time chafe through with the movement of the boat allowing the hammer to fall onto your foot. An alternative offered is to get a small dog which has been trained to bark when he smells land. Details on how to train such a useful beast are not provided, the little bugger is more likely to wake me up by relieving itself on the duvet I would have thought. but I do acknowledge the purchase of a small dog and to spend months training it to smell land it is potentially a salty use of time in the off season. Let me know how you get on.

Before anyone asks, suitable breeds are mentioned but I forget.

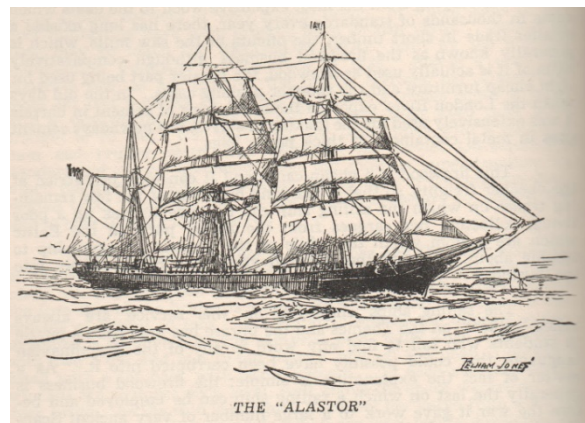
Thanks to everyone for their contributions to this edition, especially to Stephen for the poem. More poems please! I've got one somewhere, some whimsical rubbish about mud, water and sunsets probably but I will dig it out for the next time, oh and photos as well!

Finally I am in debt to Peter Ackroyd's wonderful book *Thames-Sacred River*. An excellent dip in and out of type of read that I cannot commend highly enough.

In the chapter entitled *River Boat* we find a list of all the types of boats that have been used on the Thames going back to mediaeval times.

Here we go.....

Wherries clinkers, hoys, onkers (see picture on right) houseboats, skiffs, yachts, motorboats, tilt-boats, shallops, peterboats, ell-boats, punts, flats, lighters, funnies (!), cutters, barges, steamers, coracles, canoes, scullers, colliers, barques, schooners, gigs, dinghies, whiffs, randans, rowing boats, dhows, narrowboats, cogs, galley, bawleys



Any more? I'm sure you might know a few. Please let me know to add to my list.

By the way Peter Boats are named after St Peter- patron saint of fishermen.

Pip Pip!

Your Editor John Williams

Ramblings of the Ex Commodore

Looking out onto my garden in the sunny weather and wondering when I will be able to get Marie Louise into the water and start sailing, set me thinking how this season will work out. One thing we do know is our sailing season will be much shorter this year which led me to thinking of destinations suitable for an interesting visit not too far from Lower Halstow.

With a week or so to enjoy on the boat Saint Valery Sur Somme has a lot to offer, being about 30 miles south of Boulogne not too far but certainly an interesting destination and different from Lower Halstow. You need to be at the ATSO buoy, the entry to the river Somme 2 hours before local high water and carefully follow the buoyage in to St. Valery. There is a good marina in St Valery with good showers and a very helpful Capitainerie, it may be advisable to phone them before your arrival.



With boats of less than 1.5 metres draft entry should not be a problem.

St. Valery is a lovely small town with many restaurants and a supermarket up the hill from the marina. There is a wooden decked promenade that goes westwards to the medieval quarter which is fascinating to look around the ramparts and old buildings. To the east behind the marina is



the lock to enter the Abbeville canal which connects to the French canal system. There is a paved tow path along the canal, good for cycling or walking that extends the 8 miles or so to Abbeville.

Next to the marina is a heritage steam railway which you can take a return trip to Le Crotoy on the north shore of the estuary. This trip takes



you across the salt marshes past many wild fowl shoots. Le Crotoy is a pretty village with a

few restaurants and a good fish market, there are berths here for boats but it is not as accessible as St. Valery. On some days there is train that goes from St. Valery south to Brighton (the French version) on the coast.

When I visited I intended to stay for 3 days and stayed for 7, the marina charged me the weekly rate which meant 2 nights free !. All in all a very good visit.

Graham Osborne

A ship is called "she" because;

There is always a great deal of bustle around her; There is usually a gang of men around her; She has a waist and stays; Her rigging cost's more than her hull; It takes a lot of paint to keep her looking good; It is not the initial expense that breaks you, It's the upkeep; She can be all decked out; It takes an experienced man to handle her correctly; And without a man at the helm, She is absolutely uncontrollable; She has her topsides, hides her bottom and, When coming into port, She always heads for the buoys.

Dave Metcalf

Gravelines – The last trip of 2019

With the 2019 season rapidly coming to the end and Jeddo's lift out booked for the 29th October I had been hoping to get away over the previous few weeks, but other shore-based things and the weather had got in the way.

With a reasonable forecast for the week immediately following the Autumn Work Party, I got an email from Ken to say he was hoping to get away for a few days. He had already been in touch with Mike who was up for it so we would meet late Sunday afternoon to push off on Monday's tide.

Over the weekend, Monday's forecast changed to Northerly 5-7 and more rain, but improving Tuesday, so the trip was delayed by a day, departing Tuesday morning. I was at the club Sunday for the Work Party so I decided rather than driving home and back the following day I would stay on the boat.

With the Northerly forecast, rather than swinging around on the buoy until the boat settled in the mud, I decided it may be a bit more sheltered anchored at the end of Stangate Creek.

About 05.00 I woke with the boat lurching around, my sheltered spot wasn't as sheltered as expected. With the anchor drag alarm set on the plotter before I went to bed and 35m of chain out I tried to get back to sleep. I guess the incoming tide was running across the strengthening wind and churning up a bit.

I was hoping I might get a short sail on Monday, but with the rain not easing and the wind getting stronger I stayed put for the day.

After a day sitting on the boat trying to find small jobs to do and trying to get into a book that has been on the boat for some time, the wind and rain eased a bit and as the tide was returning to the Creek, the other two boats appeared around the corner from Halstow Creek.

It was decided that as I already had my anchor and 35m of chain out and the wind was reducing they would raft up alongside.

A short discussion and a settled forecast for the rest of the week, we were heading for Gravelines, leaving at 05.00 in the morning.....

After a disturbed sleep the night before and a couple of drinks I slept like a log. The 04.30 alarm woke me with a start wondering where I was and why was my phone making such a noise.

I soon realised where and why the alarm had gone off and the kettle was on.

05.00 on the dot, Ken and Mike cast off, but I still had 35m of chain to winch in. By the time it was in the other two boats had disappeared up Stangate Creek (I probably should have said down) and their lights had merged with the lights of Thamesport.

I caught them up by the time we reached the river. Fortunately, no commercial traffic to avoid, so the shortest straight-line course out of the river past the bright lights of Sheerness. Sheerness docks, that is.

Our route took us up the outside of the Medway Channel and daylight started to appear. First thing I noticed was loads of pot markers with black flags. I wonder how many there were when we couldn't see them.

We continued out under motor as there was now no wind, along the Princess Channel heading for North Foreland, passing the large colony of seals on Pan Sands, with some surfacing near the boats to have a look at us.

As we approached the NE-SW TSS there was an almost continuous line of ships. Although we were the stand on vessels, we decided that with the number of them and the fact we were crossing at the narrowest point, it would be prudent to hold back and make a dash after the first 6 had gone past. The other lane was easy.

We arrived at the entrance to Gravelines, just as the sun was getting close to the horizon and reached the marina with just enough light to see where we were going. With the office closed we found 3 vacant berths and got tied up.

First thing Wednesday morning we were greeted by the very jolly lady from the office most concerned that we didn't have key fobs to get into the facilities.

Mike had been looking at the weather and the settled week had now changed to a forecast of 38-42kts of wind on Friday. Gravelines is tidal, so our departure was governed by the tide. We either had to make a dash for it Thursday morning or hope the wind had died down by Saturday or Sunday. The decision was made to depart Thursday morning and hope we were home before the blow arrived.

We went off to the office to discover that it was now off-peak and we were charged 9.40 Euros a night for each boat. The day was spent walking down to the harbour entrance and then back to the town via the supermarket, with a few beers on route.

As already mentioned, Gravelines is tidal and most boats “float” in mud when the tide goes out. By 07.30 Thursday morning we were all afloat and the gate was open, so off we went. Once clear of the canal, up went the sails but the engine was needed to maintain a reasonable cruising speed. About halfway across the breeze came up to about 12 knots so off went the engine and I was starting to run away from the other two who were still motor sailing, so initially one reef, then with the breeze about 18kts, two reefs to stay with them. On a broad reach the boat wanted to get up and go.

The closer we got to the English Coast the darker the sky got. Just off Ramsgate the rain arrived and the wind was up to about 25kts. Rather stupidly, I left putting on my waterproof trousers on until it started raining. The wind got stronger and peaking around 30kts. I was struggling to get my salopettes on when a gust was too much for the autopilot and the boat rounded up heeling quite violently with sea water running inside the spray dodger. I quickly regained control and with the autopilot turned off sat in the rain hand steering the boat. Staying with the other two boats wasn't really an option, I guess I could have put a third reef in, but left it with two and a tiny bit of Genoa.

We were originally planning to cross the estuary via the Princess Channel, but in the conditions, felt that the more sheltered inshore, but shallow in places route would be a bit more comfortable. Within minutes of turning the corner at North Foreland the sea calmed down and the autopilot went back on. Fairly soon the other two rounded the corner. Heading along the North Kent Coast, the SW wind went more Westerly right on the nose. Plodding along inside Margate Sands we reached the Copperas Channel, the narrowest, shallowest section, just at low water. We got across the shallowest section with just under a metre under the keel, a little concerning in the lumpy conditions.

From Copperas it's pretty much a straight line back to the Medway. The wind had eased a bit and rain had more or less stopped with the odd spot or two now and again. We even saw a bit of sun briefly over Sheppey and then a bit later quite a spectacular sunset.

Approaching the Medway, we discussed whether to spend the night at anchor, which could have been a bit dodgy with the forecast gales for Friday or wait for the tide and pick up our moorings? We arrived back in the creek just as the tide had made enough to carry on straight down to the moorings. With the dinghies having quite a lot of water in them, following the days rain and the prospect of a late arrival home, we all stayed on our boats for another night. We awoke on Friday morning to quite a pleasant day, very little wind, where were these gales? The Coastguard MSI broadcast was predicting Severe Gale 9 later. We packed up our boats bailed out the dinghies and got ashore in very calm conditions. Just as I was leaving the

club the rain started and by the time I had got home the wind was starting to blow. Sitting at home that evening listening to the wind howling outside made me glad we got back when we did.

The following Tuesday the boat came out of the water for the winter, so it was good to get a cross channel trip in, so late in the season.

With Corona Virus this year and us fully out of Europe next year, this may well turn out to be our last short trip to Gravelines. The current information coming from the RYA is that we will need to enter and leave Europe via a Port of Entry. So, a trip to Gravelines will entail initially going to Calais or Dunkirk to check in, then on to Gravelines before returning home via Calais or Dunkirk to check out. The extra 2 days added will ensure we don't exceed the maximum 90 day rule.

PS.....

- A big thanks to all of those members that have opted out of receiving a postal copy of Up the Creek. With the ever-rising cost of postage and printing, this will save the club a considerable amount of money. If you haven't opted out of a postal copy and would like to, there is a new page on the club website "My Membership Details." This page displays all the details the club stores about you and your boat. On the same page you can also opt in or out of displaying your contact details to other members on the website. Changes made on "My Membership Details" page are now updated on the Contact list immediately. Please note these details are only visible to logged in members. Please do not share any details with any 3rd Party outside of the club.
- This brings me on to thanking everyone that used the on-line membership renewal form. Details from your membership form are easily imported into the database that we are now using to manage the club membership. The on-line form is designed to collect all the relevant details from you and the necessary permissions and info to comply with GDPR and CASC. Rather disappointingly quite a large number of members are still insisting in using the paper form, some also couldn't be bothered to return a form at all, just sending the money. Some forms were returned complete, however some were returned in a far from complete state.
- You may object to filling in forms, but we are required by law to comply with GDPR to prove we are safeguarding your privacy. We also need to be able to prove we are complying with HMRC rules to maintain our Community Amateur Sports Club Status (CASC). By not fully completing the form, or not returning a form at all you could expose the club to a huge fine for non-compliance of GDPR. The big advantage of CASC registration to us means we are exempt from paying business rates on the club site. I have no idea what we would have to pay if we weren't exempt, but I would guess several thousands of pounds. This could easily equate to an extra £100 or more per member per year on our subs.
- Members of the committee spend an awful amount of time managing the club for YOU. The online form really does simplify managing membership. It automatically notifies everyone that needs to know. For every paper form returned we have to manually copy the information into our membership database and then individually notify everyone else involved. Believe it or not we would rather be doing other things.

Dave Metcalf

A Month of Stormy Sundays

The third week of “Wet Play” in a row

A challenge for someone “in his prime” who is imprisoned at a desk through the week.

The short days mostly passing by unseen, or unnoticed,

Outside the office window.

Let alone the poor postman bent on his Saturday morning round,

And returning home sodden and exhausted.

I pour all my soul into dreams of things to come,

Not minding whether they do or don't.

My mind is at sea and the wind can be altered at will.

I can conjure an ocean swell, and plot my escape,

All from the safety of land locked Penge.

My sails blew out, but luckily I was armed with a sturdy storm jib,

That pulled me gently back to safety,

The Lee is a small Hebridean island.

This morning I was rattled out of my pit,

By the loud singing of one of my neighbours,

An unseen blackbird, announcing his survival of a vile night.

And a brief interval between the assaults of this heavy depression.

We should listen to our friends, the birds.

The disadvantage of our over-engineered shelters,

Is that we fail to notice the improvement of the weather,

Or the lull of a storm.

Their singing heralds clearly,

Things are not that bad, get out and remember you are alive.

Stephen Davies