

FAITH ON THE THAMES 2019

by Alasdair Mackenzie

'FAITH' is an 18' traditional inshore East Coast working boat, or winkle-brig. My sister Elspeth and I had thought of joining the festivities in Morbihan this year but trailing 'FAITH' to Bristol to visit my son and then coming home by the Kennet and Avon canal and the Thames was worth looking at. We hadn't realised how far it was and neither of us could manage that much time. Exploring Canal Plan A further I realised that what we could do was to tow FAITH to Oxford and sail her home. Surely with our combined sailing experience of 140 years we could try doing that. This is the Ship's Log of The Adventure:

SUNDAY 16th

Out of the yard at Brightlingsea with the trailer easily enough in the early Sunday morning traffic, no parked cars on the far side of the road. Out by water-taxi by 1000, covers off and onto jetty under outboard. The new mast sprit and tackle work well. Heights measured: Sprit is 8' above the water when mast crutch on floor boards, mast 12' with crutch upright on c/b case. Higher when crutch perpendicular to mast but not measured.

New guide post frame set up on trailer. That worked nicely as well and despite the flooding tide and blustery wind both trying to push her sideways FAITH slipped on to the trailer better than ever. With the upper half of the hard sloping more the water was reaching the car as she went on so I didn't hang about and pulled the trailer well up before adding straps etc.

Found a nice space in the Yacht Club boat yard, chocked the trailer and put covers on. Realised, sheepishly, that the guide posts won't come off without dropping the aftermost keel roller down, so did that and leant frame against back wall of the yard, ready for collection on Tuesday.

THURSDAY 20th

Tuesday was a beastly day with heavy rain forecast for the afternoon in Oxford so I postponed the journey. Back to Brightlingsea by 0900, trailer on, covers off, additional ratchet straps at both bow and forward of the axle. Belt and braces. Away before 0930.

A rather slow journey to Oxford with heavy congestion at intervals and nasty accident on the other carriageway at A10 junction.

Bossoms Boatyard is 'round the other side' of Oxford and I got rather lost getting there, only finding the track down to it after a couple of false starts, map reading and

turning the whole rig around. Track is a smooth word compared to the rough farm track itself and I drove very slowly, being overtaken by anybody going faster than a slow stroll.

Jeremy and staff very welcoming when I got there: sitting in the sun eating their various lunch packs. Apparently it didn't rain a drop on Bossoms Boatyard on Tuesday.

The slip runs quite steeply downwards along the river bank with a quay outside it, no belaying points. To get car and trailer lined up with it one has to completely block the Thames side footpath. Walkers, and there were many, were able to find a way over the tow bar, though I had to help one or two less agile folk. Bicycles were a different matter. I was most determined not to rush so spent some time causing an obstruction, breaking off my own machinations to help/apologise etc. Getting lined up wasn't straightforward with large tree roots, gate posts and the quay all adding to the fun but eventually I was satisfied and ran back as far as I dared. I wasn't going to let the trailer take charge and tow the car down the slipway.

With the heavy warp on the trailer and round the tow bar I eased the tow ball up and off, and off went the boat, almost free after such a trying time attached to the car. The wooden beam behind the wheels wasn't enough to hold her and I couldn't control her and she rolled until the side of the quay came to my aid. With that restraining her I took another turn on the tow bar and regained command, albeit at the cost of shredding some of the warp on the hex nuts on the bar.

'FAITH' gently eased down, straight and as intended, into a new element, fresh water. All was well. Then, just as her stern began to lift to the water, she suddenly lurched sideways as the outer edge of the slip ceased to exist. Or did exist but not where I had expected it to be.

No harm done and 'FAITH' was soon alongside the quay. The trailer came out easily enough with the car. By now time was pressing a bit: the yard is closed and locked up at 4pm and I still had to get the mast up, unload the very full car into her and get the covers on. The new 6:1 tackle and spar worked very well and then it was just keep moving and stowing all the gear. 'Heaping' is a new way of stowing as I began to rush faster and faster. At quarter to four she was moving out beyond a desolate narrow-boat to hide from passers-by and the covers on by five to four.

Almost to the minute of four I towed out through the gate before pausing to re-check the trailer, light board and so on before setting off. Towing down had been slow and thirsty, only managing 26 miles to the gallon, but the return journey was surprisingly easy, only taking three and a half hours. I was pleased to be home!

Phase 1: Fresh water Thames

FRIDAY 21st

Having heaped so much gear into 'FAITH' yesterday I had a light pack when Linda dropped me at the station for the 12:15 train and it was an event tree journey to Oxford. For some reason text message between Elspeth and me weren't getting through and I was beginning to prickle with anxiety when I spotted her across the station concourse. She looked focussed on finding her little brother and he, I, wore a frightened boy face until I spotted her.

The walk to the Co-Op in Walton Street felt longer than it had on Google Maps, but the landmarks were all recognisable from that handy website. Carrier bags and my rucksack filled with the bare necessities we walked on through Jericho, previously only known from Morse novels. I'm not convinced of the 'dreaming spires' but walking through the outskirts of academia did reveal architectural quirks. The very modern glassy curves of the Balvatnik School of Government side by side with the Doric portico of a building that kept its nature closely hidden, the sign on the wrought iron fence just saying "FREVD (sic) Aperitiva". Then came the Department of Experimental Psychology next door to the Jericho Health Centre, conjuring paradoxical connections.

Turning off Walton Road onto Walton Well Road (did everyone in Walton have to use the same well?) we left the town behind, crossing quiet bridges and finding the ancient Port Meadow. I knew nothing of the Port Meadow, but Elspeth became increasingly excited as we walked across the meadow to the river, passing disparate groups of people: family outings, youngsters with shirts off so they could feel their boom boxes better, serious looking students in deep debate and couples, as couples are.

My ignorance of Port Meadow was symptomatic of my blinkered lack of preparation for this Adventure. To me all the planning, and what a lot there had been, had been about navigation, provision, equipment, a journey from A to B, or more accurately from Brightlingsea to Brightlingsea. I had left all 'guide book' research to Elspeth, not expecting to have any spare time to explore the hinterland anyway. It turned out that she had been too busy with other things to get her teeth into the background of where we were going and we had no guide books beyond simple navigation. Happily Elspeth's internal library is full of unexpected knowledge and as ever, other than passage planning, she knew much more about where we were than I did.

Crossing the river by way of Fiddlers Island, a 200 yard long narrow footpath right down the middle of the river, we reached Bossoms, finding 'FAITH' just as I had left her, heaps under a tidy looking cover. We added our luggage to the heaps and pondered it being a Friday afternoon Bossoms was all locked up. Deciding that 'facilities' might be more accessible closer to the town we slipped our mooring and dropped down through the lowest bridge of our journey at Osney. So low that I had to

knock the mast raising spar down before it struck. There are visitors' moorings just below the bridge and we stopped there, raised the mast and put the tent ready.

*Tent in use for the first time, Osney
Bridge in the background*

A long day's trip of 0.6 statute miles (being inland, all distance are in 'land' miles). Mind you, between us we had travelled 400 miles before we ever boarded the boat.

Like moths to light folk are drawn to 'FAITH' ("There's a sermon in there somewhere" as my pastor friend Paul would say). Wherever we went people came to talk with us. Here, before we had fairly moored up, a pleasant chap approached us. His story was a lot more Adventure than ours. As a non-sailor he had decided to apply to be crew on the next Clipper Round the World Race. Not only had he got a place but had been put in charge of provisioning the vessel. So far he had been on selection and training trips and had enjoyed them immensely. One hopes that his enthusiasm stays at the same level when far out on the wide ocean. Masfield has a lot to answer for.



As soon as we could we walked along the river side, but not before a narrow boat crewed by young men tied up astern of us. Not the most graceful of berthings but they made it. They were one third of a Stag Party. One boat was already in, further along the quay side, and one had, for the moment, gone missing. Elspeth lives in our parents' old village in the north Lake District and we were intrigued to see that they were wearing Carlisle United shirts. Only one of the was a CU fan but he had equipped his team. We walked past The Punter as far as the lock, which I inspected with some trepidation, then back to the pub. There, there were such facilities as Osney had to offer and we sat out on their busy terrace surrounded by lively youth while we sampled the pub's ale.

As we waited a horn blared from beyond the bridge and to our surprise there was a 10 foot high yellow bath duck floating down to the (7 foot 9 inch) bridge.



I went over to chat with them: a lady on the bridge with RNLI collection pot and the man on the raft holding the duck. They take the duck all over the place, targeting events where they can gather maximum donations: Royal Henley next stop. The hut on the motorised raft was built to fit under the Osney Bridge. The duck would get stuck under several of the bridges if it weren't deflatable.



MARTHA KATHLEEN's old mainsail worked well as a tent. First set in 1977 it was still in use in 2005 and never saw a sail cover. Scotland's sunshine had not rotted it too badly. Draped over the boom we had good sitting height (if sitting on the floor boards. The 'Festiloo' was another matter!). My real worry about it was that the marine silicone plugs I had used to fill the reef points began unplugging almost at once.

Back on board we were both entertained and a little concerned by the arrival of Stag Party #3. Their arrival was much more interesting than the first boat but they too made it alongside their friends. Some of them were scantily clad and rather damp. They had been aground and went over the side to push off. It had taken a long time. But they made it. I hope their weekend was a success. They weren't planning on travelling much now that they had reached Oxford. Meanwhile, our cooker worked adequately although for some reason I couldn't get the water in the pasta pan to boil.

Even wholemeal pasta will cook eventually. A second wee half of Bowmore helped to pass the time.

My self-inflating mattress had proved itself last year and Elspeth/Linda's slightly thicker one kept Elspeth comfortably padded through the night. In the unaccustomed space we were both wakeful at times. Perhaps this was also partly due to the Stag Party. Never riotous or absurd, but conversations in the bow of a narrow boat only 5 feet away can be heard very clearly...

SATURDAY 22nd

Our first proper day. Good weather and a leisurely breakfast,, mast back down again, keeping it low with the prop on the floorboards, fretting to be away but held back by having read that the lock doesn't open until 0900. When we see another boat going into the lock we join them but, not knowing the process for Thames locks, we wait for the lock minder to arrive and press the buttons. In the end not out of the lock until 0950.

Under the first railway bridge. A typical slab sided British Railway bridge. Unexciting, but at least the spars went underneath easily enough. Past 'Boathouse Island', with very smart College boathouses. They take rowing seriously here... but Cambridge won the Boat Race comprehensively this year! On and on, the rowing clubs everywhere.

1020 Iffley Lock. A very smart stone built lock keepers cottage but, despite the book saying there are toilet facilities, none to be seen. Out again very quickly, at 1035. Cornflower mix along the towpath. Kennington rail bridge at 1040, the river narrower again with trees hanging over the water both sides, then wider before a sharp hairpin bend. Not possible to see anything round it and we can't work out how a 60' narrow boat could get round it. Sharing this stretch with kayaks, rowers and a wild swimmer. I didn't bring trunks, thinking there would be a high risk of Weil's disease in the river. Must be wrong. The swimmer wasn't obvious at first, so we'll need to keep an eye open for them.

Sandford lock – just after seeing our first red kite. Out of the lock at 1108. The locks are all bigger than I had expected. This one is a hive of activity with walkers crossing the lock gates. Now feels very hot and the pub promises both 'facilities' and cool drinks so we tie up to a visitors' pontoon and stretch our legs. Only 4 miles so far and a target of 21 so some way to go.

1205 Under way again. Past Radley College boat house, hats off to Uncle Kenneth, oarsman and Head Boy of Eastbourne College when they were evacuated during the War.

Why are we heading due West? I thought that the Thames ran West to East?!

1300 Abingdon lock, out by 1315. Tied up again at 1330 to see a bit more of the town.

Abingdon, with the mast in 'low bridge' mode, 8' clearance

Not off again until 1450 and I'm getting anxious that we still have 12 miles to go. Not even half way yet. Using the GPS to keep our speed at close to the limit of 5mph, outboard at not much more than half throttle and a tank (1lt) lasting an hour and twenty minutes or more. Using the 2-stroke to keep moving while I stop the 4-stroke and re-fill it. The river is still narrow with trees overhanging the water. Even with the mast down we snag a branch or two but don't keep any, unlike Martha Kathleen's Amsterdam trophy twig.

Abrupt arrival at a rowing regatta, schools. A narrow, north side, navigation channel for normal traffic up and down

river and the rest set out for racing three abreast up river. Consequently the lengthy and inexperienced queue of sculls, fours and eights all trying to get into the navigation channel for the journey down to the start. Eights find it difficult to go slow enough to avoid boats, that includes us, ahead. Pity the narrow boat trying to get upstream. Once past the starting line the melee thins out, fewer and fewer shells to avoid. Quite acute bends in the river and eights coming upstream on the southern side... we simply try to avoid everything. Then woods and wildlife again.

1530 Out of Culham lock.

1615 Out of Clifton lock. Good view of a kingfisher. Q – Why are such bright birds so hard to spot? Q – When so many British birds are camouflage brown, why is the kingfisher so iridescent? Not the only fisherman – there's a grey heron.

1720 on out of Days Lock, Dorchester

1800 Arrived at Benson Waterside. Very helpful eastern European finds us a berth on a finger pontoon between coping with kayakers etc.



Benson Waterside mooring.

We are both rather weary and have yet to acclimatise to the air and voyage so decide not to walk to the recommended Spice House but to cook for ourselves. Mast and tent up. No trouble frying up vegetables etc but the water in the pasta pan never comes to the boil. Given long enough wholemeal macaroni cooks! Clean and luxurious showers.

Day's run 21.4 statute miles

SUNDAY 23rd

Another bright day, but temperatures mercifully nearly as oppressive as much of the country. Quiet, little wind, some high overcast with sunny patches. Typically, what wind there is, is against us. Of course, if we are moving at 5mph then any wind less than that will always be on the nose. All my plans to get the mast up between bridges so we can sail are failing.



0840 off jetty at Benson Waterside. Into lock but, it being Sunday and lock keepers thin on the ground, we work the lock ourselves. No winding and heaving on long beams here; idiot proof electronic controls.

Wealthy Wallingford, then a rowing club of enormous scale – turns out to be Oxford University Rowing Club. Rowers – 8s, pairs including very slick, if slightly more experienced, 'Ken and Ross.'

Breakfast under way as leisurely as the day. Weed on the prop chokes the engine as we go shallow to give a narrow boat space to line up for Wallingford bridge. Heron with short neck... oh, it's in flight...

1010 Moultsford Railway bridge. Staggeringly beautiful bridge. Built 1838 by Brunel, crossing the river diagonally. The arches are so sweet look at, their curves defined by engineering expertise, each of the four arches artistically satisfying. As we get closer we see that the red bricks in the underside of the arches are lined diagonally across the curves, Exquisite. Then back into wooded river banks.

Almost smart on one side: Clutter in the other!



1110 out of Cleeve lock with one of a pair of 61 foot narrow boats travelling in convoy. Thank heavens the Stags were only in 40 footers – 2 kites circling.

Boathouses appear round corners as we approach Goring

Sun shining. Beautifully looked after gardens at the lock, as at most others. A hay field with small, traditional bales then residential river banks with all sorts of different boat houses with private gardens between. A 'sought after' area we decide. The river is ever wider, now, perhaps, wide enough for sailing boats as we pass the Goring Sailing Club.



Into Goring Lock. Lock keeper, "That's an interesting approach." Hmm. Deeply embarrassed as I disgraced myself. Indecision as to where to go/moor then near disaster as I turned the o/b 'astern' it tried to jump off its bracket. I hadn't checked the fixing bolts after yesterday's long hours of motoring. Desperately I held onto as I pulled the 'dead man's cord' to stop the engine. Somehow got alongside. Had barely recovered control and tightened (+++) the bracket when even more red-faced as I re-started the motor with it still in gear.

Coming into Goring with hills rising nearer, green heaps of trees, trees overhanging the river which is now narrower again. Very, very beautiful and almost Tolkeinesque. Living in North Oxford, he would have visited Goring.

Through Goring Lock and tied up below it by 1110. Goring is too important to rush through so we explore up and down the High Street. We look in a few touristy shops but are not tempted.

1345 Off and away from Goring, after refilling tanks again. With the Gap ever closer the railway crosses over on another fine Brunel red brick bridge, this time straight across the river and the bricks following the same line as the arches.

1440 Into Whitchurch Lock, very full up, some calmly competent and others learning by trial and error. Quickly through and out by 1445, swinging across the river to inspect the Anna Crane, a concrete bawley thaht looks like a sistership to Blackbird in Brightlingsea. The hills are drifting apart with low flat fields beside the river. On the North bank Hardwick and Mapledurham Houses have the Chilterns close to their backs. Purley to the South.

1540 out of Caversham Lock and past the Kennet and Avon Canal junction.

1725 Out of Sonning lock and under another beautiful Brunel bridge. Refuel 1740, through Shiplake lock in the rain and into John Bushnell Marina, all looking rather shut down for the evening in the greyness. Find a berth and get the mast and tent up ASAP. Talk with a chap coming ashore from his boat and get access to the toilets etc. Consider walking into Wargrave. My plan has a garage marked not far away but we are using less fuel than expected so don't need that and, as the rain eases off, both feel more like a Bowmore and food aboard. I don't know about Elspeth, but I am quite weary.

Mirror calm in John Bushnell Marina with food preparation going on.

We developed a pattern where Elspeth chopped and I cooked. I don't think she trusted me with a sharp knife and limited first aid kit



MONDAY 24th



Peaceful light at 0645

0830 Mast up and under way in flat calm and warm sun.

0900 Marsh lock

0920 Tied up in Henley on Thames.



Henley on Thames. Note mast in 'high bridge' mode, just under 12' clearance

Away again by 1000 after visiting Sainsburys.

A good day to pass through Henley as Royal Henley Ladies Day was yesterday and the main regatta begins tomorrow. Many marquees and grandstands already up, more being erected and the river dominated by what look like permanent lane marks

for the rowers. Eights out on the course, paddling firm but not overexerting themselves. Pa raced there for Eastbourne but my university regattas were much lower in the pecking order. Nonetheless I have some nostalgia and a touch of envy.

1045 Out of Hambledon lock. Caravan/mobile homes and chalet sites on right hand bank, wooded patches and many geese, mainly Canada but some Greylags.

1130 Tied up before Hurley lock., out again by 1140. Freebodies boatbuilders just below the lock. They have some skills with the varnish brush! Very fine!

1150 Spotting rain as we wait for Temple lock. Out at 1200.

Just past Bisham Abbey we hear a scrabble of parakeets and watch them mobbing a buzzard. How often does one have a chance to see that? Again into money, money, money area, so different from the caravans and chalets. Private moorings only, acres of manicured grass and an exorbitance of boathouses, varying from old and traditional to modern state of the art. Their similarity is in their extravagance. A few make me just slightly jealous...

Marlow bridge and church 1217 and into Marlow lock at 1220 with wedding party on shore.

1230 out of lock and under motorway bridge. Beautiful old wooded hillsides southeast of us. Past the Upper Thames Sailing Club, round a long right hand curve and into Bourne End at 1300, refuel. The first fully rigged vessel, a big schuyt. Mansions replaced by large riverside villas, with some ingenious in-filling. Left hand bank lined with river cruiser hire craft. Two minutes later the railway bridge. On past flat flood-plain fields on the right and large houses, also apparently on the flood-plain, to the left.



Waiting for Cookham Lock

1325 Cookham lock, all very wooded and Cliveden House hidden by the trees. A long run south, the National Trust side having a riverside walk backed by rising woodland while the more dishevelled right side tow path hosts a variety of mainly rather run down live-aboards.

1410 Out of Boulter's lock, Maidenhead. I guess the relationship with Boulter's lane near home is distant... The river splits and has several islands, but the channel is well marked.

1445 Refuel at Bray's lock. Anxiety is beginning to turn to desperation but then it turns out that asking the lock keeper for a key reveals unmarked brick built toilet facilities. "Ask and it will be given..." Maidenhead to Windsor pleasure boats pass up and down stream, not very busy. The margins on running such a service must be thin at best.

The planned overnight stopping place is Windsor marina. Not the most inviting motorboat parking lot and we are, for the first time, ahead of schedule. Push on!

Past the entrance to the Racecourse Marina, and piers for water borne visitors to the Windsor Racecourse and on, skirting round the course on the south bank. Lovely and interesting looking tiny flint and clapboard church on the north side is Boveney Church, or the redundant St Mary Magdalene's Church. It is as old as it looks, 12th century, and is now maintained by the quaintly named "Friends of Friendless Churches". Soon after we are in Boveney lock. at 1535, on round the rest of the race course and a tight hairpin bend before the Windsor bypass and railway bridges.

Windsor to starboard and Eton to port and Windsor castle, absolutely enormous, crouches on guard on its hill. Onwards, past it and under Windsor bridge.

1620 Out of Romney lock. As far from Romney marshes and Boulter's lock was from Boulter's Lane. Parakeets shouting. 1645 refuel. Old Windsor lock, Magna Carta Island, Runnymede. So much History. At last Bell Weir lock and the Runnymede motorway bridge. Just below Old Windsor lock we pass Friday Island – but it's Sunday so perhaps should be renamed Sunday Island.

1830 Tied up, at last, on Holm Island. We've been looking for somewhere to stop for a while with weariness creeping on as we go. Holm Island has a marked public mooring stone quay and opens onto a municipal park on the edge of Staines, the Lammas Recreation Ground. Apart from a man fast asleep on a bench there are few people around but children are playing on the swings in the evening sunlight not far away



Remarkably, it has a toilet block. Later we find that the block is lit and open all night! I'm a little surprised not to find the man from the bench in there as it gets dark.

Mast up, tent spread. Rather grey weather but delighted that after stealing a nine mile march on tomorrow's plan we have found such a seemingly improbable and unexpected mooring. The only fly in the ointment was the couple reclining on the not far away enough far bank playing their radio rather loud. The new 4 stroke has now done its first 20 hours so time for an oil change. The engine oil change and replacement of tiny gasket goes smoothly but I cannot change the gear oil at all. Never mind. We celebrate our day's run, just over 31 miles, (and managing to change the oil) with Bowmore as aperitif and a glass of red wine with food. A quiet night.

TUESDAY 25th

Heavy rain overnight and ALL DRY 'below'. River a little steamy in early morning humidity but clears quickly as the day reveals itself.



Twenty past eight, tent still up!

0915 Mast down and under way, breakfast yet to come. Another warm and dry day, but not as hot as some parts of the country because of thin high cloud much of the time.

0945 Waiting for Penton Hook lock. With a large sign advertising 'Petrol and Diesel' we tie up to what turns out to be a very mobile pontoon in extremely shallow water and go and inquire of the lock keeper. He re-directs us to Penton Hook Marina, round to the right. A considerable detour finds us in the marina. The marina is vast but we find the office where they were most helpful, arranging for someone to meet us on the fuel jetty. This is as far into the heart of the pontoons as one can go. 10lt (well,

9.8 to be accurate) of petrol. Since we were visitors we had to pay the visitors rate - £1.80 per litre!!! £1.32 for berth holders... It would have been a lot cheaper to moor up elsewhere and walk to a petrol station, but it was good to have ample spare fuel.

There was a bonus to the diversion: as we neared the main Thames again I spotted a sparrowhawk flight across the river but lost it behind willows before Elspeth could confirm my guess, or was it a hope? Happily it had sat on the chimney of a house on the corner of the hook and we were able to see it clearly once we were round the bend. (an apt description?)

1045 We are back on track again.

1105 M3 bridge, Chertsey lock 5 minutes later, out again by 1115.

1135 Refuel just before Pharaoh's Island.

1150 Out of Shepperton lock. Hats off to Weybridge to the right, and under bridge. Doyly Carte Island on the left, complete with large house suitable for a Shepperton haunted house set.

1205 Walton bridge. Walton on Thames, not Walton on the Naze, where we anchored to wait for the tide on a quiet night last year.

1225 Waiting for Sunbury lock



Looking towards Hampton Court Palace from under Hampton Court Bridge

1325 Molesley lock. Quite exciting to be passing Hampton Court but views from the river very poor because of high banks, giving the great palace seclusion. We tie up briefly but then move on.

1400 There is a breath of wind, from astern. Engine off, we drift on the wide river, getting the mast up, the sails up, and wait for enough wind to have steerage way. A kind kyaker, Sergio, took my phone and took photos of us, almost a painted boat on a painted sea.



Not even steerage way

Seeing the rake of the mast I can't wait to be back on the sea and able to get rid of the 6:1 forestay tackle.

1430 Hopeless! No wind at all. Sail down, engine on slow and mast down and then faster again.

1500 Onto public moorings on south bank of Kingston. Mast and tent up. Day's run 17 miles. Total run so far 91 miles, 32 locks.

Phase one, the non-tidal Thames, effectively done and we are in close range of Teddington lock.

There is time to explore Kingston. There are several tourist boards with maps, all showing where public conveniences are but none of them are there when we search, so we have to ask in a coffee shop. Apart from the fine architecture we also find several eateries, as seen on the pre-trip planning. One that I hadn't found was the Vegetaria. Close to our berth and an interesting menu.



As evening comes in Elspeth treats me to a meal there. Perhaps it is the contrast with our on board cuisine though I think not, but the food is exquisite. The subtle layers of flavour wonderful, the service friendly and bill very reasonable indeed.

Phase 2: The City of London.

WEDNESDAY 26th

There has been a great deal of research and planning for today, and not a little anxiety. Up at 0700. I'd been awake for some time, thinking AKA worrying, over the day's work. Slowly worked through sorting the boat, preparing her for potential large waves, checking both engines over. Mast down low, as the Hammersmith bridge is low. Mast firmly lashed across athwartships in case of heavy rolling. Anchor brought aft of mast thwart ready for urgent deployment should we need. For'ard spray cover tightened.

A grey day, heavy overcast with the predicted... Easterly... breeze, but only light so hopefully not too much wind over tide in the main river. Aim is to clear Teddington lock no later than half an hour before high water. HW Teddington = HW London Bridge + 1 hour, so leave half an hour after HWLB, 0828. So through the lock before 0900.

0755 Away at about 5.3mph, 2/3 throttle.

0820 Waiting at Teddington.

Called into the large lock (it IS large), leaving it just on 0900. Tried London VHS but too busy to answer so rang 02032607711. Very helpful.

0935 Richmond Bridge and then the railway bridge. From here on there are sketches of each bridge in the planning file and I'm very pleased to see that the sketch does indeed show what the bridge looks like.

0940 Twickenham Bridge, hats off to the home of English rugby. World Cup in the autumn. It would be good to see Scotland go through into the knockout phase.

0941 Richmond lock, the half tide weir open, high water. Although it's high water and there should be plenty over the wide shallows on the north side we keep starboard arch. Well, the side we should be on anyway.

0945 Refuel.

1010 Kew Bridge, River boat coming through upstream and rowers out on the water.

1013 Kew Railway Bridge, then past the University Boat Club: more nostalgia for hot, sweaty sessions on the river, pints of ginger-beer and lime to rehydrate... and, part of my anxieties, memories of the fierce wash and scend off the river walls when tugs go past sinking one of the eights out rowing with us. Scary then even more scary now as I have full responsibility.

1020 Chiswick Bridge. Tide is really getting going now and we are making well over 6mph over the ground. River banks still largely tree lined.

1025 Barnes Bridge. Mainly known by watching many Boat Races... Wind still firmly easterly and getting stronger so a bit more wave on east going stretches. Not a warm wind so fleeces on. St Pauls School hiding behind the trees.

1045 Hammersmith Bridge. The lowest Bridge in this section. Refuel again straight after that, bridges coming thick and fast from here on.

1058 Putney Bridge with red double decker driving right over the top of us.

1100 Fulham Railway Bridge.

1107 Wandsworth Bridge.

1113 Battersea Railway Bridge Really moving now: Wandsworth and Battersea bridges are 0.92 miles apart. then delightful St Marys Church with sharp pointed spire (Grade 1 listed, 1777) sitting in place of honour between aging blocks of flats and new built high rise apartments. Straight on past Chelsea Harbour, our last 'safe' stopping place. No thought of needing to stop: some rolling but nothing of account. Enough to loosen the mast, needing the lashing tightened.

1118 Battersea Bridge.

1120 Albert Bridge (again!), though this time a very fine suspension Bridge. Well kept house boats moored above and below the bridge with some river pleasure boats close to it. Suddenly the south bank is a park, largely tree hidden. Then the London Peace Pagoda. I know nothing about this – it turns out that it appeared long after I had moved out of London, in 1985. A gift from Venerable Nichidatsu Fuji, founder of the Japanese Buddhist movement, and one of many placed around the world. It certainly looks interesting.

1126 Chelsea bridge, 1127 Grosvenor Bridge. Cranes and apartment blocks, apartment blocks and cranes, especially the south bank.



Battersea power station with cranes everywhere

1135 Vauxhall Bridge and MI5, keeping a closer guard for us than Windsor Castle does nowadays!



Then, too fast to enjoy or record, Lambeth Bridge (very fine gentle arching bridge, each arch painted red as they rise and fall across the river), the Houses of Parliament, St Stephen's tower clothed in scaffolding and Westminster bridge, green to match the seats in the House of Commons just as Lambeth is painted to honour the House of Lords.



Easterly wind, ebb running and water easy as we pass Westminster



We really are here!



Snatch some video footage. Most of my attention is focussed on the bridges, the pleasure boats and the piers and moorings. Rolling more here but still not bad. Retighten mast lashing when time allows.



1142 Hungerford Bridge and its twin footbridges celebrating the Queen's Golden Jubilee. Blackfriars Road bridge, the old railway bridge piers and the current railway bridge, St Pauls facing the Tate Modern, under the Millennium Bridge and past the Globe Theatre.



Southwark Bridge, Canon Street Railway Bridge and then glimpse the Golden Hinde before London Bridge. Happily it's not falling down today. The Tower, so beautiful and full of so much grim history.

HMS Belfast with dignitaries being shown aboard, City Hall. Shoot through the south, fixed, arch of Tower Bridge. St Katherine's. So many recent blocks of all sorts of shapes but slotting in between them a few salvaged and converted warehouses.

1210 Time to speak to Limehouse Basin, get through on ch 82 after several attempts. They say they can't let us in until 1415!!! By my reckoning the tide will be dead low by then so I repeat it back to him and he confirms.

1215 Tied up inshore of a derelict looking lighter half way down the Upper Pool. A bit bouncy but much less so than out on the river.

Then he calls back to ask where we are. I tell him and he says come straight in.

1300 On uneasy pontoon waiting for the swing bridge

1313 Swing bridge opening, into lock.

1315 Smiles rising with the water level. 112 statute miles covered, 21 today.

Very warm and friendly welcome from the harbour crew, ushered to a quiet mooring tucked in between live-aboard boats. inshore of us is a truly historic vessel – a Humber Keel, in very good condition. We enjoy talking with her owner as we sort the mast (now up to its proper rake with the tackle removed at last) and tent. Up to Harbour Office and sign in, given helpful advice about shops and restaurants. Facilities including good and clean showers explored. A covey of boats from WMYC are moored the other side of the basin so we go to say hello. They plan to stop in Queenborough tomorrow but are anxious about the forecast, some boats already having decided not to risk it.

Rest and relaxation, revelling in the showers! The fuel pontoon is the other side of the main pontoon we are on and we watch a couple of narrow boats fuel up. The first is at best cack handed, the second calmly and superbly proficient. We all learn as we go along. I hope. Later, with a fair amount of noise, another narrow boat moors up. Skipper's skill level somewhere between the former pair but little helped by his enthusiastic crew. This young man has clearly 'enjoyed' his afternoon and is noisily enthusiastic in his welcome and insistence that we go aboard to see what a wonderful conversion she is. Narrow boats can be, usually are, cleverly and attractively functional. This one has a different function – the whole thing seems to have been modelled on the idealised interior of a 'Fools and Horse' pub, from the beaten copper drinking shelves to the black painted sleeping cabin. I'm not entirely surprised when I get a wet foot stepping into a hole between two cabins. We make our excuses and escape...

We eat out for the second evening in a row, this time Italian. A good enough meal, but a let down after Kingston's Vegetaria and rather dearer.

Phase 3: Out to sea

THURSDAY 27th

Managing to get Met office and BBC weather data on my phone. North-Easterly, 4 or 5. Up at 0700. We discuss the options and decide to 'have a look'. This is a classic way to get caught out. We stow carefully, using the groundsheet as a second layer of defence under the for'rard spray cover that stretches from the stem to the mast and shrouds.

0900 Into the lock. We are told that the lock is having maintenance work and will not reopen until 1300. But we've decided to go, so go we do. Onto the waiting pontoon to finish breakfast and preparing for the sea. Our gear is dry stowed as far as we can manage and our mattresses folded and wrapped in the white tarpaulin.

0946 Away under o/b and double reefed main up ASAP but Canary Wharf stealing our wind and we motor on, 5+knots on the GPS. A police RIB comes racing past, 'blues and twos'. The fast Clippers shoot from pier to pier, first one side of the river, then the other. Never an indicator between them (as if...), but there is less traffic on the river than we feared and no frights.

1050 Refuel.

1105 Through the Thames Barrier with sail down as required. Wind right on the nose. Not NE but due East. Short wind versus tide chop and rather wet.

1125 Under sail at last! Two reefs and small jib, beating along with tide pushing us sideways down the river.



1405 Under the QE II Bridge. Very, not rather, bouncy and wet in the narrow confines of Dartford. Tacking in the flatter shallows and trying not to take too much aboard. Fierce beat and spilling wind to avoid water coming over aft of the shrouds as we fall off steep seas. Able to keep her upright enough to pump several times with a lot of water coming over the bow. The spray cover works well, water being channelled over the side by the upstands running from mast to shrouds but it's obvious that a lot is coming up the bow and over the rail underneath it. It's all a bit too near Faith's limits for beating. Reaching would be fine and running terrifying!

Past Greenhithe the wind frees slightly as we turn north. Without discussion we luff onto an empty buoy close inshore off the Thurrock Sailing Club. I think we both feel a little battered. I certainly do. We had intended to get further down river but neither of us have any thought of going on.

Almost as soon as the sails come down a dinghy comes off the hard and out to us, David asking whether we are alright. Yes, we are fine thank you, and thank you for coming to ask. He welcomes us to the club and invited us to join them for their Thursday Club Night. Three other people pass by and come close to check whether we need any help. The wind feels quite strong and the although safe the boat is uneasy in the turbulence. We talk about options with one of the Club's leading lights and aim to go onto the shore for the night. We motor as people move boats around on the hard. Wider discussion suggests the silted up dock alongside the club and as the tide rises enough we creep in there so that when the tide ebbs we will sit at peace on soft mud. I have a look to the spot before the tide makes and there are no visible dangers. We explore Grays and find a shop before moving Faith into the dock as soon as we can, then get the tent up. My mattress, being under Elspeth's, is very wet but is non-absorbent so should dry OK. Otherwise things are not as bad as they might have been. We join the club members for a drink but don't sit up long.

FRIDAY 28th

A quiet night, although we heard vessels going past. One we even felt, the vibrations from its engine making the boat shiver. The forecast is more of the same. NE 4-5 then veering overnight. HW 0932. Yesterday was OK and the river wider from here on so what's the problem? Lets go, but with easterly winds aim for shelter in Queenborough instead of bringing up off Leigh.

1030 Away under double reefed mains'l

1045 Sail down and engine on. Very bumpy. Creep along, hugging the shore both getting a little shelter from the wind and reducing the tide -v- wind seas. Use the lee of moored lighters wherever we can.

1145 Tied third reef into main on a buoy off Gravesend Yacht Club. Quiet' here but has been very bouncy in the river. Refuel. On under three reefs and o/b.

1225 Refuel off Shornemead. Keep close in under the lee of Shorne Marshes. The wind is strong, driving hard off the low and desolate shore, and the day grey, but it's

not raining. Shallow water tight in flat enough to stop “tacking” in steep and trying seas. Cliffe Creek opens to starboard and is accessible, contrary to my understanding from the chart. Anxious about really catching it after we turn east into the lower river at Lower Hope Point at about 1250 but Elspeth finding an excellent line close in over Blyth Sands, sun comes out. Feels better in the shallows. Top of force 5. Hand held anemometer reads over 20knotts in a gust.

1225 Refuel. Then Blyth Sands start to grip us, first the centreboard then the rudder. Turn towards the river but it stays too shallow and the tide is ebbing fast. Frightened that we will stick on the sands and take a battering as the tide comes back in. Blyth Sands stay flat for ages but then the water deepens and we are back in the tide. “A bit bumpy” as we hold a long tack over to Canvey Island, engine throttled back and sail feathering to slow us down so we take less water over the bow. And yes, it is a battering out here. Wind seems to free a bit as we close Canvey and we get a good lift along the shore where it’s not too rough. I surreptitiously slip my mobile into my oilskin pocket so that, should we founder, I would have some chance of calling for help. Then it’s back into the tide where seas are steep and unforgiving. I nurse her through every wave. This is not a sensible place for a small open boat. Concentration such that there is very little conversation: unusual for us! I hadn’t anticipated this size of sea, thinking the river wide whereas in fact the deep water, strong tide, channel is rather narrow. Waves steep, irregular, breaking and probably 2m high. On the Kentish side the band of easier water between tide and sand is narrow but we milk every yard of it each time we come in. Tacking the other way is a case of grabbing a relative flat and relying on the engine to push us round.

1655 At last we can fetch into the Medway. Engine off. Jib up at 1705 in bright sunshine and suddenly comfortable shelter off Sheerness. After all the battling outside the Medway is most pleasant, bright sunshine and easy close hauled fetch along the shore and into the West Swale.

1750 Tied up on Queenborough ATL (All Tide Landing). Welcomed by Dawn, Harbour Master, and shown to a berth further along the pontoons, where they are lower so we can get ashore more easily.



!65.82 miles on the GPS, so we've sailed 32 statute miles today in almost exactly 7 hours, a very reasonable speed to have managed.

Almost everything is wet and we hang up what we can in hope of airing it a bit. My sleeping bag is wet through but Elsp's has come through OK.

The ATL is v-e-r-y long as we walk ashore to the promised 'facilities'. These turn out to be municipal public toilets; adequate at best. Back aboard after a brief exploration and enjoy some more Bowmore while we relax and cook. Back to the toilet block we find that they are locked overnight so ask the pub, the Old House at Home, if we can use their toilets and received a curt and unwelcoming 'no.' Thank you, madam! Only a step away was the Queenborough Yacht Club. This felt like a public bar than a club and was very welcoming, just as their clean toilets were very welcome!

Back aboard we are sorting ourselves for the night when a group of yachtsmen were about to embark on the water taxi to their boat. We talked and almost straight away one of the men worked out that he and Elspeth had met before up North, both being friends of Clive. Small world!

That night I asked God, "What was *that* all about?" I heard no voice but the response was unusually clear, and was not, "You're a rank fool," but "I have given you a seaworthy boat and the skills to sail her. If you don't use your gifts you will perish. This is a lesson in living, not sailing." Perhaps I should add that on my cruise last year I was being taught patience... and had I learned that lesson we would not have been out on such a rough day.

SATURDAY 29th

Another quiet night. Although I went to bed in a wet bag, sleeping in a Goretex bivvy bag has dried it out completely. The miracles of modern fabrics.

Forecast, wouldn't you guess, is Easterly, 4-5, veering 3 later. However this is now the wind for us, heading almost due north and with the tide flooding should be an good passage.

Up at 0615, tidying slowly so not away until 0740. Already hot sunshine (and we cannot find the sunscreen cream). Outboard again in mirror calm. No doubt we'll find the wind out past Sheerness.

0815 West Cant buoy. Tide firmly against us, not a bit of wind.

0835 10A. Refuel. SS Montgomery abeam.

0905 No 4. On to 015⁰ to cross the shipping channel. Mirror calm still.

0930 Outboard stuttering a bit, may have a bit of water in it from yesterday? Large ship coming into the river, passing well ahead of us, alter a little to be sure of going astern of it. Wrong call as the ship slowly turns to keep in the deep water channel so back onto 015⁰ and hurriedly clamp bracket for No 2 o/b onto port transom. Not a

place to have no wind and no engine! Again, I haven't foreseen the problem and taken proper, seamanlike precautions. Both o/bs running by 0945.

0950 4 stroke runs dry, refuelled. Navigation a worry as all we can see is a distant, flat and featureless shoreline and mirror flat water. Not even a tidal slick to help us.

1005 2 stroke refuelled. With 5hp we are pushing along at over 6knotts, keeping the pressure on to make Havengore by 1030

1020 Cross the Broomway. The right place at the right time!

1025 Into Havengore creek and call the Bridge Master by mobile phone.



He says, "Just keep on coming and I'll wind it up for you in time." So we do, the saltings coming closer on each side and the bridge resolutely down as we roar along...

The Bridge Master knows exactly what he's doing, of course, and the bridge opens for us, already dropping again as we go through at 1035...

...and at once we are in the peace and quiet of the creek, inside the sea wall, welcomed by a VERY handsome – or is it beautiful? – MARSH HARRIER that continues to quarter the sea wall beside us as we get the full main up and stop engines. Blessed quiet!

Sadly with the wind light and mainly ahead of us we can't make the speed we need to reach the Rays'n so have to motor-sail much of the way down the Roach and into the Crouch. What a tedious river the lower Crouch is! After the wild beauty of the Roach it's just boring.

1230 Rays'n Buoy. Jib up, engine off and making 5.8-6 mph on 0000° true.

1242 Rays'n Middle, reaching happily along in warm sunshine. A wonderful way to round off a Glorious Adventure! Both of us relax with the flat water alive in the sunlight, revelling in the sailing, free of the wind, free of worries, reaching home with Elspeth finding the right line yet again.

Feel our way into the mouth of the Blackwater, coming in across the Knoll to the Bench Head. As we near the buoy we overtake CYGNET looking very well.

Inner Bench Head, Bateman's and into Brightlingsea Creek picking up the mooring just on 1500.

A brief tidy round to collect Elspeth's kit and ashore, leaving most of the gear for me to sort and bring ashore tomorrow, Sunday.

Today's run 35.5 statute miles (30.8nm).

Total voyage 201.5 statute miles (175nm) in 8 days, an average of 25 miles (21.75nm) a day. (mind you, there were times when I would look down at the GPS and find that at some stage it had turned itself off so some miles are probably 'missing')

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