

# Blue Flag



The journal of DBA – The Barge Association  
BF167 October 2024

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# October



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Cover photo - Andy & Debbie Kerswill - Millford Haven UK

### Contributions always wanted

Blue Flag is always in search of good informative articles. If you have something which you think fellow members would like to read about, please send your article, letter or news item (or perhaps just the outline of an idea which we can develop) to the editor at editor@barges.org - we look forward to hearing from you.

**Latest date for copy and adverts for the December edition will be 15th November 2024.**

**Layout, artwork and print coordination - Chris Grant.**

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# From the Chair **Mike Gibbons**



**W**elcome to the October edition of Blue Flag. As the 'season of mists and mellow fruitfulness' turns into full-blown autumn, you can see the vital signs of the summer boating season likewise pivoting towards either a Southern Hemisphere summer or a Northern Hemisphere winter. And the impact of more severe weather at any time of year is very sadly evident with floods and storms wherever we are in the world.

So, as Board members join the throng planning winter maintenance and flights home, I'm trying again to get the boat out of the water this month for the blacking which should have happened in June. You'd think that June was a pretty safe month to book the slip and paint - we've never had any interruption in June in 23 years, June is a lovely summery, sunny month, perfect temperature for painting, isn't it? Since we have to arrange it between various different owners coming and going on our shared boat, it's even more complicated but, hey, we've done it and we have a slot, a whole fortnight before we turn up so even if it's not finished it's not an issue. Well, not in June 2024 when there's so much rain and so much water that you can't even move a boat 50 yards. So hello October and we'll see! That's delayed the upper deck painting, though we had a lot of very good advice from other barge owners this summer which we are going to try out. I look enviously at fellow Board member Sharon and husband Stan who have managed to do their topsides so well! That'll be us next year.....

I imagine many of us, especially those who have cruised to and through Paris, watched the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games with interest. There's little doubt that the focus on the Parisian city centre made the best of what is one of the most stunning capital cities in



the world, better than any Games in recent memory and the River Seine certainly featured in one way or another. The water competitions were a bit touch and go to say the least, given the water quality issues, and rain didn't really allow the Opening Ceremony to make the best of the boat procession but full marks to them for doing something different and raising awareness of the city & its cultural history. Personally, I thought the Champs-Élysées and the Arc de Triomphe for the Paralympic opening was better but that's another story! Will Brisbane do something on the rather excellent river that runs through their city when they have the Games in 2032?

Meanwhile, back in DBA land, your Board members are turning their attention to next year and future-proofing the organisation. You'll know that the Association has been working hard to plan how it can operate and improve in an increasingly demanding technical world where online services develop and change at a fast rate, alongside the face-to-face member services & contacts, plus the crucial work done by DBA alongside a myriad of other representative boating organisations in the United Kingdom and Mainland Europe. This work is never more important than now with the pressures on the navigation authorities particularly in France and the UK. That transmits down into pressure on local authorities, funders and boaters with reduced services and increased charges.

So, with known changes to Board members at the Annual General Meeting on 15th March 2025 (*please put that in your diary now and join us online for it*) the planning is about both services, costs and people. That's why your Board and officers are spending a lot of time in discussion about how to pilot DBA through the choppy waters all groups have to navigate at present. We are confident that we are on course though we have had to invest a lot of time and money in the programme of work. Thanks to all for their input, their time, volunteer effort and resources.

Ultimately, DBA interacts with members in several ways - online, in print, and in person. As we go into the autumn season, we will return to the monthly Member Zooms starting on Monday 4th November at 19.00 GMT and continuing on Mondays so then 2nd December. Do join in and we can catch up on the 2024 season!


And for 2025, plans for rallies seem to be advancing well with potentially the Mainland Europe rally in Belgium and the UK rally on the Thames. Let's hope we have both!

*Mike Gibbons, Chair*

# News and letters

Email [editor@barges.org](mailto:editor@barges.org) with your news, feedback, events or comments for next time.

## Juliana Canal Closure

 The Juliana Canal between Maastricht and Maasbracht closed in August and will remain closed until Spring 2025. This is to allow removal of a damaged coffer dam and to widen the canal to allow larger commercial vessels to




Rush hour at Sluis Bosscheveld between Maastricht and the Zuidwillemsvaart.

use it. The shortest alternative route is via the Zuidwillemsvaart from just North of Maastricht back to the Maas at Maasbracht - normally well-informed sources advise that this route is unaffected by the closure.


*Thanks to Ken Keegan and others.*

## No Mooring in Reims

 Mooring of commercial and pleasure craft for the next year is not permitted at the "old port" in Reims, nor at the former Halte Nautique next to the Charles de Gaulle bridge. Both of these areas are officially designated as working construction zones and boats are not permitted in that area for reasons of safety and security.

*Thanks to Sharon Hammond*

## Shortest Canal in the World?

 A North Warwickshire man has spent £30,000 building his own canal in his garden - complete with a functioning lock system and a narrowboat converted into a swimming pool. Stephen Cuddy, 59, purchased a 10m (35ft) long vintage barge off eBay for £5,000 and constructed an accurate reproduction of a Victorian canal lock to house it.

The self-taught architect started by



Stephen Cuddy with the mini canal lock he built to house a narrowboat turned into a swimming pool on a plot next to his hotel in Coleshill - the barge can travel up to 60cm (24in).


digging out 30-40 tonnes of soil on a small plot of land in the grounds of a hotel he owns in Coleshill. Over the next six months he spent another £25,000 constructing a fully-functioning canal lock complete with lock gate and water pumping system to fill and empty it. He also built a redbrick lockkeeper's cottage, an outdoor patio within a decorative tunnel alcove and installed a 8m (29ft) long swimming pool inside the barge. The eccentric hotel owner now reckons he has the world's shortest canal - with his boat able to travel a mere 60cm (24in).

Stephen admitted he had committed to a 'ridiculous project' but set to work building the incredible canal lock system out of 7,500 bricks and railway sleepers. And the irony of filling a five ton boat entirely with water isn't lost on the wacky entrepreneur who runs Grimscote Manor Hotel. *"I thought I needed a way to make it look more presentable. The boat cost me £5,000, it was an empty shell. I wanted to put the swimming pool in it. When you buy a boat, you think to yourself, what's the last thing you need in a boat? The last thing you need is water."*

*"I'm going for the worlds shortest lock. I think it must qualify. I can't see why it wouldn't. I was born in Birmingham, obviously renowned for lots of canals. I spent a lot of times walking up canals and quite a few times falling in. So I've essentially built a therapy room to get over my phobia of canals."*

*Thanks to Warwickshire World*

## First North Sea Crossing by Hydrogen Powered Boat


 Students from Delft University of Technology arrived in Ramsgate, England in late July with a self-built hydrogen boat. They had left Breskens in Zeeland at the end of the morning and covered the more than 160 kilometres in 12.5 hours. It is the first time that a hydrogen-powered boat has crossed the North Sea.



The boat with two crew members was accompanied by a support vessel. The members of the Hydro Motion Team had hoped to make the crossing to Ramsgate in about eight hours. However, due to a broken pump, they had to make a stopover in Zeebrugge, Belgium. Valuable time was lost as a result. With the crossing, the students want to show the potential of clean hydrogen for shipping.

*Thanks to Vaarwijzer*

## IWA Report


 The most recent bulletin issued by the Inland Waterways Association includes a report on closures of the Lancaster Canal, proposed EA boat registration charges for 2025, planning for a new bridge on the Montgomery Canal,



Lancaster Canal

safety alerts for Morco LPG water heaters and Belling gas cookers, and an update on the Fund Britain's Waterways campaign. Go to *IWA Bulletin: Latest news and updates* ([waterways.org.uk](http://waterways.org.uk))

### France's Waterways in 2024


 This report by Judy Evans on the condition of France's inland waterways raises inevitable concerns as to the future of the smaller, non-commercial routes.

For those cruising the French inland waterways in 2024, weed has remained a constant challenge and has led to frequent stoppages and navigation restrictions on a number of canals during the summer. The Canal entre Champagne et Bourgogne has been particularly badly affected, as well as the Marne au Rhin Ouest, with boats struggling to progress and locks failing to open. Popular routes such as the Meuse from Toul to Verdun were closed to navigation for a period, with Avis notices imposing conditions on travel due to weed issued as early as 15th April for certain stretches, followed by depth limitations from 8th July. Good to report is that this year VNF invested heavily in tackling the weed on the Bourgogne, to the extent that Dijon, a port choked for years, is now apparently weed-free. Ironic therefore that VNF is looking to close the summit stretch of this canal within the next couple of years.

Especially challenging in 2024 have been the frequent torrential rainstorms that have swept across France throughout the summer. Flood conditions on all rivers persisted late into the season, causing navigation halts, such as on the Yonne and the Nivernais, well into July and again in August. In July, boats and their crews were stranded for nearly three weeks at locks whilst VNF sought to control the river flow through the weirs. Hire boats were abandoned far from their bases as crews had to leave them to return home.


These extreme weather conditions have exposed the vulnerability of the infrastructure of the canal and river systems. VNF has a massive investment programme, predominantly for the big commercial routes such as the Nord, Seine and Saone. The fragility of the smaller systems has become all too apparent, with weirs so damaged by the summer floods that various routes have already been closed to allow for urgent repairs, or water levels lowered to reduce stress on the infrastructure until repairs can take place. This has left many boats struggling to find a viable route to their winter bases in time.

### Shepperton Marina's 'Barge World' Facility

 Shepperton Marina opened its new 'barge only' mooring facility at its Thames-side location earlier this year. The new mooring is dedicated to barges over 18 metres in length; no permanent live-aboards are allowed, but the so-called 'high leisure' rules permit owners to spend up to 5 days aboard every week, year-round. The marina promises security access, private parking, shore power and on-berth pump out and water facilities.




### Not something you see every day!

 Most of us on our waterborne travels will have seen something out of the ordinary which made us scratch our heads in amazement! For instance, Deb Keir was fortunate enough to witness a tug boat festival in Elburg (NL), a fishing festival in Urk (NL), a boat jousting competition in Lobbes (BE), and a canal vaulting competition in Workem (NL).



*Please send us a short mention of the strangest thing(s) you've seen while afloat, together with a photo to prove that it wasn't a figment of your imagination!*


### Anderton Boat Lift Major Refurbishment

 The 150 year-old Anderton Boat Lift will be closed from Autumn 2025 for a period of 12-18 months for major renovation work. Anderton was the world's first major commercial boat lift, but now requires an upgrade to enable the ageing machinery to continue to transport around 3,000 boats a year between the




Trent & Mersey Canal and the River Weaver Navigation some 50 feet below. Without the lift, boaters would be forced to make long detours. Thanks to Canal & River Trust

### Zoom calls for Members

 Mike Gibbons will be chairing zoom calls for members on 4th November, 2nd December and 13th January – calls will be at 19.00 hrs GMT on each of these dates. Log-in details for each call will be published on the Forum the week before each call.

*If you want a reminder email, then send Mike a note via [chair@barges.org](mailto:chair@barges.org)*

### What do we love about the DBA?

 We are looking for testimonials from DBA members who would be happy to recommend DBA to other boaters. We'd love to hear from you with a little information about your boating situation, and what you think makes the DBA valuable for you. And a photo of your boat, with you in the photo if possible.

We plan to use some of these testimonials on our website and some on our Facebook page "DBA The Barge Association" as a way of attracting new members. We are hoping to get a range of boats in the testimonials including cruisers, new build barges, historic barges and any other boat that we have in our fleet, to show people that you don't have to have a historic barge to join DBA. And of course, we'd love to get a range of people as well to show that we are an inclusive organisation.

We'd really appreciate it if you could spend a little time to do this for us, and help us spread the word about DBA. If you are not sure about writing it yourself or want a bit more guidance, please get in touch and we can help you or even do an interview.

*Deb Keir.*

*Draft testimonials, requests for help or assistance, questions or comments can be sent to [deb.keir@barges.org](mailto:deb.keir@barges.org)*

# Molly - Circumnavigation

Intrepid sailors Andy & Debbie Kerswill embark on the second leg of their UK Navigation on board the good ship 'Molly'

## Second leg, Cardiff Bay to Campbeltown

In May of 2022, we caught the train to Cardiff Bay to reunite with MOLLY to begin our second leg around the UK coastline.



Spoiler Alert – the Rocky Rollies!

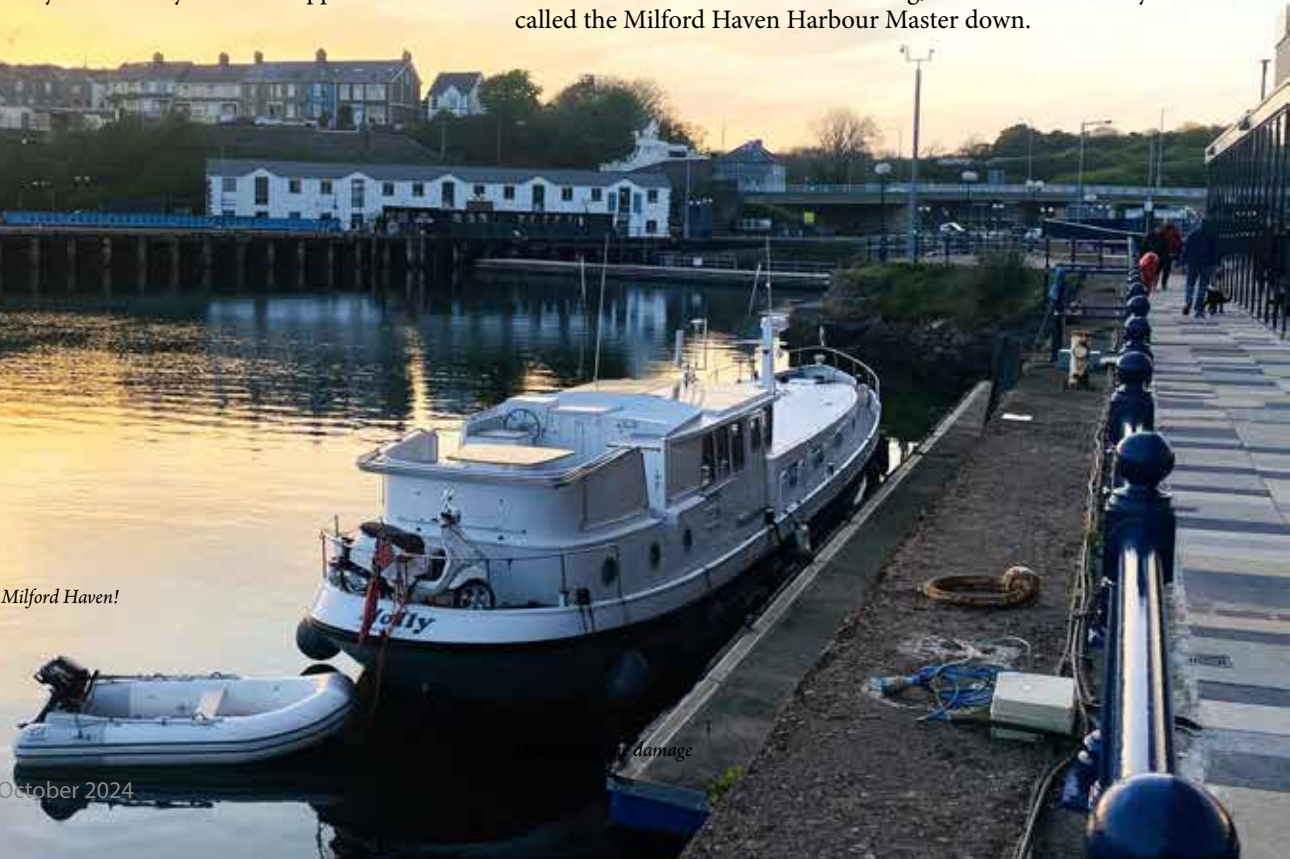
First stop Burry. I don't know what Burry Port Marina is like now, but when we visited (sister marina to Cardiff Bay) it was very tricky getting into via a very narrow dredged sea channel with sand bars each side. A small marina boat came out to meet us and we followed it back in. Easy stuff for a small boat, but with MOLLY rolling on the cross waves we appeared perilously close to the outer harbour wall and then we had a very 'spicy' rolling high throttle blast through the entrance and into the harbour. Day one and I was already back on my Trainline app.

Our next stop was Milford Haven Marina. Now, I am responsible for making all our harbour bookings and was on first name terms with most of the lovely harbour masters - taking pre-orders from some for cakes upon our arrival! However, Milford Haven is the only harbour we visited during our 2 year voyage where we had a shockingly bad experience. We had pre-booked to stay in Milford Haven for 5 days as Andy had a family funeral to attend back in Windsor and I had a hospital appointment.

Despite following their advice to the letter, calling them on the morning of departure from Burry and again as we entered the estuary to say we were an hour away, when we arrived into the sea lock at around 5pm, we were told by the (quite pleasant) lockie that the marina management didn't have room for us, that everyone in the office had gone home and we would have to find somewhere else to stay! This was now early evening, in an unfamiliar estuary full of oil and gas tankers. Andy was very unimpressed to say the least. He offered to raft up anywhere in the marina or dock. Still a 'No' came back. At this point and given we were already in the 9 metre deep sea lock tied to floating bollards, Andy said *'then we will stay here, in the lock, for the night as it is unsafe to kick us out into an unfamiliar commercial estuary'*. Andy refused to leave the lock until they found us somewhere safe. There then ensued a pseudo-Mexican (Welsh) stand-off, with threats that the harbour police would be called if we didn't leave!

With it now much later in the evening, the lockie eventually called the Milford Haven Harbour Master down.

Our 'non existent mooring' at Milford Haven!



# Navigation of the UK

Stage left enter David and was just brilliant, a true professional with safety in the forefront of his mind. Within a very short time, the marina suddenly found a mooring for us, but for one night only – but at least we weren't being turfed back out into the estuary. Our thanks to David Lockwood for his calm and professionalism – and a big fat raspberry to Milford Haven Marina. Sadly, by only being allowed to stay the one night, Andy and I both missed our commitments back in Windsor.

It was somewhat poignant to exit Milford Haven at 6:30am the next day in a blanket of thick fog, skulking out like criminals unseen by anyone, as we made our way to Port Dinorwic via a couple of lovely days in beautiful Aberystwyth.

Andy and I always revisit our mooring points online the night before. Port Dinorwic looked very straightforward – hammerhead mooring on entering the marina. Couldn't be easier. We were therefore somewhat confused when arriving the next afternoon to be told to reverse into the sea lock from the Menai Strait! As we got closer, we passed what we had thought was our lovely easy marina entrance and sailed further down to an imposing sea lock into which we duly reversed. When the lock gates opened the other end we both did a double take. We were expected to reverse MOLLY down a narrow dog leg gap with boats moored up on both sides – oh and a pub garden above full of lunchtime patrons. Some had started to leave but seeing us arrive, decided that the potential drama about to unfold was just too good an opportunity to pass up, and promptly sat down again ordering more beers!

So, no pressure. I was in charge of calling out 'distance clearance'. Ladies will be with me on this – but I'm always confused with what to call out here. Is it the actual size of the gap, or what our man tells us is the size! Anyway, I digress as size really didn't come into it here as there was virtually no gap between us and the boats moored either side. What we did notice, was all the men on the moored boats sending their partners out to attach (a lot) more fenders to their boats! So off we set, reversing fender to fender with Andy calling 'what's the distance' and me like a rabbit in headlights thinking 'there is no distance, we are touching'!

Calling out that we were about to hit another boat didn't sound very helpful so I coined a new expression, namely 'fender kissing' as we squeaked and bounced our way fender to fender both sides, down the narrow channel. Sounded much more comforting I'm sure to all the other boat owners! The last boat we passed (who we were mooring behind) called out '*please don't hit me I've just had her repainted*'. Needless to say Andy reversed us calmly and expertly all the way to our berth. Not a single scratch – and only a slight wobble to anyone's G&T from a bit of 'fender kissing'. Our one consolation – on leaving, at least we were facing the right way to the sea lock.

Port Dinorwic was just beautiful. We spent 4 days here and the marina staff were fabulous. Told us of a great walk on which we duly set out on day 2. We obviously took a wrong turn at some point, but saw what we thought was a public pathway through a field. Over the fence we went – horses in the far distance. Nowhere near where we were. Wrong! Having spotted us in their



Beautiful Port Dinorwic mooring

field, they became very inquisitive. Suddenly we had about 15 palomino youngsters surrounding us all becoming very excited and wanting to be patted. As they became more boisterous Andy decided that I was the horse lover and he took off at a fast trot himself (could have been verging on a slow canter!) and a few minutes later I saw him climb over the fence into the next field to escape. My hero! I slowly made my way to join him trying not to display my increasing nervousness around so many young and excited ponies.



*Debbie the horse whisperer!*

Once over the fence, we started laughing and getting our breathing back under control. Nobody likes cocky hikers and it would appear that we fell into that category because as we turned around, we saw a dozen more palomino ponies coming towards us over the brow of the hill. We both set off at a pace that would not have looked out of place on the end credits of a Benny Hill show, whilst trying not to make it look like a game of chase, and climbed over the hill. Safe at last? Nope, we came face to face with

*Beautiful Liverpool from the Mersey*



a pack of alpacas. If we thought the ponies were inquisitive, it was nothing compared to the alpacas. We both bolted for the fence, neither one of us wanting to be last, and once over, booked a taxi back to the marina.



*Just when we thought we were safe, the first alpaca spots us!*

From Port Dinorwic we made our way to Liverpool. I never thought of MOLLY as a surfboard, but that's exactly what it felt like. All we needed was the Hawaii Five-O music and we were that opening scene. Once at the bottom of the estuary, we then had to turn around to work our way back into the marina. All of sudden we found ourselves now doing 1 knot against the flow! Boating is quite bizarre.



*Mersey Estuary approach channel*



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After 6 days in Liverpool, we took off for 5 days in Douglas / Isle of Man arriving just before the start of the TT practice week. What a treat. Amid all the excitement of the TT, we did some tourist trips. Took the MANX electric train to Laxey and Ramsey. At Laxey we took the single track train up the mountain to Snaefell giving us the opportunity from the train to watch the bikes belt along past Victory Café. On the way up you pass the magnificent Laxey Wheel which is built into the hillside above Laxey village. It is the largest surviving original working waterwheel in the world revolving approximately 3 times per minute.

When we arrived at the top we were treated to the most incredible views of the Island. We had a beautiful clear and sunny day, but the wind was so strong you had to fight to stay on your feet. We also caught the steam train from Douglas to

Port Erin. There is something quite magical about steam travel. It is the longest narrow gauge steam line in Britain and still uses its original locomotives and carriages which have been lovingly restored.

Whilst in Douglas we met a lovely couple on a beautiful sailing boat. It was the husband's passion. The wife not so much (I bonded very quickly). He was telling us that on leaving Douglas he was taking them up and across the top of Scotland! Andy did think this was ambitious with a wife who hadn't really sailed before. I held a stronger opinion – instant divorce.

From Douglas we set off for Bangor/Northern Island. We decided to go around the north of the IoM. Hindsight is such an annoying thing. Everything was going beautifully, until we turned left across the north tip of the Island. We started to feel everything go



*IoM steam train*



*Douglas Harbour at night from our mooring*

a bit rocky rollie. Waves started to crash over the bow and hitting our helm windows with incredible force. Our fenders suspended as if they were filled with helium. Next thing we knew, we felt like we were in the highest spin cycle of a washing machine. Luckily, at the very beginning of the rocky rollies, we had moved into the wheelhouse. The force of whatever we were caught in meant Andy could no longer hold the wheel, so we basically had to let MOLLY do her own thing and crash through it. Journey to Padstow flashed oh so vividly into my mind – and we still had



*Beware the Irish Sea!*

6 hours sailing to Bangor! All we could do was literally hang on and hear everything in the galley cupboards rearrange itself with force. Most distressing of all was watching our wine fridge continually fall forwards and crash back into place with every roll. Our sofas also managed to rearrange themselves. I have come to realise that I am not from pioneering stock. Back in the day, I have no doubt that I would have been left behind on day two. Ok, maybe day one.

Thankfully, this (now more terrifying experience than Padstow) lasted only about 15 minutes. But at the time, we didn't know this and thought with our luck, we were into this for the next 6 hours. Once over this hiccup, the rest of the journey passed without incident and we arrived safely in Bangor. What was Andy's first priority on arrival I hear you ask? Nope, not finding me the nearest spa – but to bolt the wine fridge to the floor and put a lock on the door. He's a keeper!

On opening one of the galley cupboards, a can of coke fell out followed by a bottle of vodka which promptly broke when it hit the coke can. This in turn punctured the can and the next thing, from all the rocking and rolling, we had an eruption of coke in the galley – from floor to ceiling. Despite a thorough clean, we still felt like we were flies moving on fly paper for several days. Whilst in Bangor we took the opportunity to visit the Titanic Centre. What an amazing experience. Just fascinating and well worth doing even if you don't think you'll enjoy it (cue me). Initially I wasn't overly bothered about going I have to say, but it was brilliant.

*The Titanic 'hitting the iceberg'?*



From Bangor, we set off back over the Irish Sea to Campbeltown. All very calm and chilled – until I noticed something black,



*Vanguard nuclear submarine*

very large and imposing surfacing off our bow. Once it had fully surfaced and we got nearer (despite trying our best to get further away from it), Andy realised it was a Vanguard nuclear submarine.

It's a very scary thing to realise you are so close to something so deadly. Our fear factor was ramped up to extreme fear when we drew alongside (some distance away but still far too close) and then it passed us (all smiles returned on MOLLY) only for it to turn round and begin tracking us! It would have been nice to have got the call on our radio to assure us we weren't in imminent danger of being blown up – but apparently this isn't something nuclear submarines do! I did think about running a pair of my white knickers up the flag pole, but Andy thought this would more likely invoke a mercy torpedo. Thankfully we managed to shake them off and continue uninterrupted to Campbeltown harbour.

### **To be continued**

*Look out for Part 3 of MOLLY's Circumnavigation - the Scottish Western Isles, Caledonian Canal, Inverness, Edinburgh, Newcastle, Scarborough and back into the Thames – in the next edition of Blue Flag.*



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14.04 x 3.00 x 0.75 m, 1924  
€ 29.500,-



**Dutch Barge Motortjalk 16.59**  
16.59 x 3.81 x 1.10 m, 1907  
€ 139.500,-



**Motor Cutter 16.80**  
16.80 x 3.75 x 1.60 m, 1909  
€ 44.500,-



**Dutch Barge, Skutsje 17.08**  
17.08 x 3.28 x 0.60 m 1906  
€ 39.500,-



**Wide Beam barge 17.30**  
17.30 x 3.00 x 0.80 m, 1996  
€ 49.000,-



**Luxe Motor 19.08**  
19.08 x 3.60 x 1.00 m, 1925  
€ 224.500,-



**Dutch Barge 19.81**  
19.81 x 4.72 x 1.00 m, 1934  
€ 99.500,-



**Dutch Barge 19.98**  
19.98 x 4.14 x 0.80 m, 1914  
€ 99.500,-



**Dutch Barge 20.77 + TRIWV**  
20.77 x 3.86 x 1.00 m, 1900  
€ 69.500,-



**Luxe Motor 21.09 + certificate**  
21.09 x 3.23 x 1.15 m, 1914  
€ 79.500,-



**Luxe Motor 22.08 + TRIWV**  
22.08 x 4.33 x 0.60 m, 1906  
€ 139.000,-



**Luxe Motor 22.55 + ES-TRIN**  
22.55 x 3.84 x 1.20 m, 1924  
€ 129.500,-



**Luxe Motor 24.60 + TRIWV**  
24.60 x 4.25 x 1.20 m, 1925  
€ 149.500,-



**Inland / Coastal Barge 25.40**  
25.40 x 5.00 x 1.15 m, 1902  
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# Discovering a history

**Diana and Chris Grant tell the story of their ship “Esme”, originally the “Elizabeth” and formerly the “Max”. In the Netherlands, they discovered and met the family of her original and only commercial owner and also linked up with the subsequent owners and the craftsmen who worked on her conversion in the late 1980s.**

**I**t all started in the summer of 2004. We were enjoying another holiday on board our 11 metre boat on the River Great Ouse in Cambridgeshire. The question arose "Wouldn't it be great to live on board all the time? We could travel abroad and explore other waterways . . . . . yes, then we could take our home with us!" So what kind of vessel would we need? A narrow boat would be a bit small to live on all the time (especially if you are tall!) It would have to be comfortable for year round living and able to go to sea. So the seeds of our Dutch Barge life were sown.

We joined the Barge Association and started our research, meeting many bargees who received us on board and answered our endless questions. In this way we were welcomed into the world of barges. The advice, support and friendship we gained was invaluable and helped us to make the right decisions.

By the summer of 2006 the children were independent, we had sold our family home and the search for our barge could begin. We met Ruud Thomas, a Dutchman who arranged a three day barge viewing tour of Holland and we found our barge in North Holland. We loved her from the start, the price was right and a few weeks later were relieved that the survey report was good.



*The survey turned out to be fine, offer accepted and all good to go. What had we done?*

As it was mid winter, it took a while to get her over to England. Firstly the repainting of the hull, then some essential work to prepare her for sea and finally to bring her to Nieuwpoort in Belgium for the channel crossing. And so our new life began



*Waiting on the fish quay to cross the North Sea from Nieuwpoort to Woodbridge*



*Arriving at Woodbridge after a thirteen hour crossing, learning the ropes!*

and continued for over thirteen years living aboard Esme and travelling throughout Belgium, France and the Netherlands. In 2019 we decided to sell up and return to the UK but were delighted to hand over to new custodians Rob and Suzy Craven who are still enjoying new adventures.

The “Elizabeth” was built and launched at Amels, Makkum, Friesland in September 1927. She was originally registered to Johannes Timmerman from Breda as recorded in the Kadaster at Rotterdam and is described as a Motorvrachtschip of 89 tonnes (laden) and known as a Luxemotor, the first type of barge to be built with an engine and ‘luxury’ aft living accommodation. Named after his wife Elizabeth, they had a son Gerrit, the eldest

# 1, Elizabeth to Esme



*A model of the Amels shipyard as it was around 1920 building the last of the sailing barges*

and three daughters. The family had a ship before, the *Zeelandia*, a sailing klipper. When they all moved on board the new ship *Elizabeth*, Gerrit was then 13 years of age and already learning to be a skipper like his father.



*Gerrit aged 13 at the helm of *Zeelandia* with his sisters and parents Johs and Elizabeth*

Not long afterwards, Johannes Timmerman died prematurely, leaving a widow and four children. Gerrit took the role of the man of the family. The *Meetbrief* shows him as the skipper in 1931, aged 17. His sisters were Maria (mother of Elma, Hannij and Marieke), Tiny and Wily (Wilhemina). He did the heavy deck work and his mother was the steerer. The aft cabin was their home and in the foc'sle were two more cabins with beds for the girls.

The family lived on board in the Rotterdam area, working with various cargoes including grain, reeds (for thatching roofs) and turf. Later, after the girls had grown up, Gerrit and his mother Elizabeth worked together as a team for many years. He used to sleep in the foc'sle while she had the aft cabin. In winter he slept in the wheelhouse where it was more comfortable.



*Tarring the hatch covers*

During the Second World War the ship was commandeered by the Nazi occupying force. Gerrit's mother was evicted and sent to live with friends or family and Gerrit had to work to their orders. At the end of the war he was fortunate to get his ship back and happily it was undamaged, many were deliberately sunk by the fleeing occupiers as the allies arrived. His mother returned to the ship to work with him again as the steerer and they continued trading throughout the Netherlands.

Finally in 1969 and in her 80's Elizabeth's health deteriorated and she could no longer work or live on board, eventually dying in hospital about a year later. Gerrit, now aged 65, took the decision to retire the "*Elizabeth*" at this time but continued living on board his beloved ship in the *Wijnhaven*, Rotterdam for about twenty years. During this time he worked on the dredger in the port until towards the end of his life he moved to a house. He died in November 1999.



*Elma at the wheelhouse door, 1966*



*Elizabeth in the Rotterdam *Wijnhaven* where Gerrit retired and remained living on-board*

In 1990 the “Elizabeth” was sold, renamed “Max” and converted into a home by Walter Stamm-Teske, a Zurich born architect. The use of space and contemporary style in the conversion reflect his architectural skills while retaining the original ship’s lines and the historic character of the aft cabin.

In 1994 a new owner Horst Baruth had major engineering improvements made to the ship by a Dutch ship builder Jacob van der Horst. This enabled him to live on board and sail her more easily. He sold her in 1998 to a Swiss couple Peter and Eva Roethlisberger, who kept her in home waters in Friesland, enjoying her for holidays. They continued with many improvements including the complete refurbishment of the aft cabin by the Swiss carpenter and friend Matthias Haug.



*The original aft cabin with skipper Gerrit’s armchair still going strong but re-upholstered*

So in 2006 we became the proud owners and decided to change the name from ‘Max’ to ‘Esme’, a name of French origin meaning cherished and loved. She was the fulfilment of our dream to own a Dutch barge to travel in our retirement. We took her from Friesland to the UK for her first three years to carry out more improvements and to wind down our working lives.



*Revised saloon and galley but retaining Walter Stamm-Teske’s open plan design*

Then in 2010 we sailed back to her home waters on the Continent to discover more of her history and roots.

When Gerrit Timmerman had to give up his life on board, his nieces Elma and Hannij would have liked to buy their uncle’s ship but it just didn’t work out for them. They had childhood memories of school holidays aboard in Rotterdam with their uncle and grandmother. Especially for Elma the eldest, there was for many years the question about what had happened to the “Elizabeth” and whether she was still afloat. Then Elma’s friends Nel and Krijn helped to place a notice on a Dutch Skippers’ internet forum asking that very question. They knew about the change of name to “Max” and that provided the essential link.

By pure coincidence around the same time, we were helped to answer our question about the history of our barge, now called “Esme”. We had the name of the original owner and the ship’s name but little more. Our new Dutch friend and barge owner Maurits being very interested in ship history took our information, looked on the same internet forum and by an incredible stroke of luck found Elma and Hannij’s notice! He then helped with the language barrier to bring us together.

In June 2011 we met for the first time our very special guests and new friends who drove over from Rotterdam to meet us and the “Elizabeth”, now “Esme” at Roermond, a beautiful lake in the Limburg province of the Netherlands. Elma (Gerrit’s niece), was accompanied by Nel and Krijn (her friends) who helped us with our very poor Dutch! It was a memorable, emotional day and one



*Family and friends re-united with the Elizabeth, now Esme*

to treasure. There was so much to talk about, to piece together the story and to get to know one another. We quickly realised that Nel and Krijn were not just friends of Elma but that they are also retired skippers, had a commercial ship for many years and also knew Gerrit very well. So we learnt a lot about the “Uncle Gerrit and “Oma” (Elizabeth, his mother and Elma’s grandmother), the kind of people they were and their way of life.

After a glass of champagne, Elma could not be held back from going straight down into the aft cabin to see how much it had changed and to enjoy a little nostalgia; a tear or two were shed! She remembered precisely how the space was furnished and described in detail how daily life went on inside the home, exactly how the stove, the heater, the cooker, the cupboards, the table were placed. Uncle Gerrit’s chair is still there, she recognised it. A few changes have taken place since the cabin was carefully refitted but many features were as she remembered them. Numerous nice compliments in Dutch! Elma gave us some lovely photographs of the old days on the “Elizabeth”, which brought all the memories to life and which complete the history.

The original Kromhout engine was changed for the DAF at the time of the conversion. Also Elma confirmed that the fo’c’sle had two cabins in the old days where they all slept, now it houses the big bowthruster which was installed in Horst’s years, between 1994 and 1998. We also noticed from the photographs that the anchor winch (which is able to take two anchors) had been changed from the port to the starboard.



We shared a home cooked meal out on the aft deck and the weather was kind, the delicious pudding being the gift of our guests, lovely local patisseries! Lots to say, laughter and tears!

Elma, Nel and Krijn remembered Gerrit Timmerman as being an enthusiastic Christian and a man very popular with many friends. The skippers' church was a big part of his life, especially after his retirement when he was known as the "talking newspaper" in Rotterdam because he always had news to share. He was very interested in the bible and it was not unusual in the middle of a service or sermon for him to question the reverend about the meaning of the scriptures!

He was passionate about his ship and kept her in perfect condition, retaining her original features unchanged. The old photographs show her immaculately kept and freshly painted with him looking smart for the camera.

Over the years, we met up several times with the family, took them for cruises and shared happy memories.

Gerrit Timmerman never married but from an early age provided a livelihood for his widowed mother and sisters and worked hard all his life. We would like to think that we, and Rob and Suzy, the current owners of this wonderful ship, have loved and cared for her in a way that Uncle Gerrit would have wished and built on all the work that her former owners have undertaken since her conversion. A ship such as Esme is not just a pleasure craft, you inherit a fascinating past and a piece of nautical history.

*Chris and Diana Grant*



*The three nieces posing in the same place as their mothers (above in 1938) at the reunion*

*"Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbour. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover." [Mark Twain]*



# The Laurel Cooper column



## What to do if you lose a mast

Our plan had been to finish the extensive refit on our Dutch Barge Hosanna, and travel from Yarmouth to the Southampton Boat Show. On 1st September 2008, we launched; someone was still welding engine beds while we did so. At least the new engines were in. Next day we realised that too much was unfinished to be safe to go. Laurel spent hours in the engine room patiently greasing the new shafts, twenty one pots full of grease for each shaft, and each pot (about a coffee mugful) took twenty minutes to screw down with a brass wingnut, like administering a hypodermic of treacle to a rhinoceros. The weather forecast was dubious, southerly winds force three to four, increasing to five. The long-range forecast was predicting gales



by the weekend. There would be no second chance to get to the Boat Show. Next day we left. Everything went well for about eight hours. Comforting quantities of Irish Stew had stayed our stomachs. By midnight it was blowing force six from the south-east, and we had to ease speed as we were beginning to pound hard into a short, sharp sea. The ebbtide turned to flood and we now had wind against tide. The slamming and pounding became worse as the seas became steeper. With the increase in wind and with a wave height of about 2 metres it was getting dangerous.

East of the Kentish Knock (\*) just before five in the morning, Laurel was on watch and Bill was asleep when the big bang came, like an explosion. Laurel didn't need to wake him, as it clearly was not a typical slam into a wave. It took only seconds to realise that our foremast was not there anymore. The first and most important thing, after strong words to one's stomach about the Irish stew, and a recommendation to one's heart to get out of one's mouth and back to its proper place, was to stop engines in case any ropes had gone over the side.

Bill went forward to assess the situation - *"I think I can get it all inboard and out of harm's way"*. *"Do you need me?"* said Laurel. *"No. Stay there and keep the boat head to wind, or as comfortable as you can. The fewer jerks the better."* Dry mouthed, Laurel watched as he departed forward again, wearing his safety harness this time. He took with him bolt-cutters, and an axe.

When some calamity occurs at sea, the interdependence of the crew, especially if there are only two of you, is something almost unknown

to landsmen. Each of you has a part to play, each depends on the other for their very lives, each is sharply aware of the dangers. Bill was running the risk of going overboard, and Laurel blessed the foresight that had caused him to install stout steel guardrails along the bulwarks, for the benefit of her dodgy hip. He was now reaping the reward, clipping his safety harness to something strong. Laurel alerted heaven to the problem, and prayed earnestly for a satisfactory outcome. She, too, was busy conning the ship, and would only be in physical danger if Bill failed in his task.

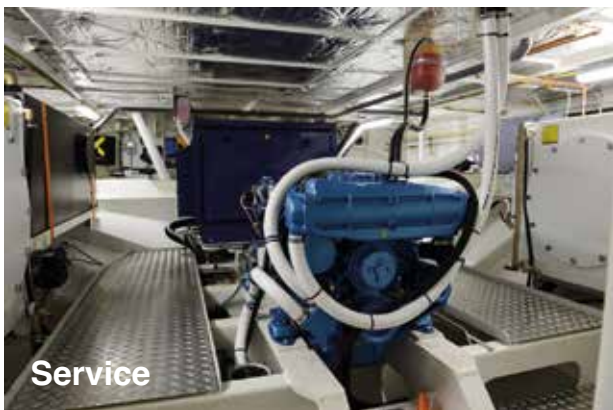
Going slow ahead on one engine she conned in such a way as to keep the ship's head just off the wind, thus the side Bill was working on had a very slight lee, but the ship, being almost head on to the waves, would not roll. Pitching did not matter so much. We had had very little sail set at the time. By the time the mast hit the deck it had broken into three pieces of about 3 metres each, leaving a short stump sticking up from the tabernacle. The foresprit, a spar of about 12 metres, had fallen by good chance between the mainstay and the roller gear of the mainstaysail, a little of which had been set. The sprit was firmly held; otherwise it could have been a formidable weapon sweeping from side to side like a gigantic scythe.

Bill hauled inboard all loose rope first, and made it fast. It was still blowing hard, with gusts over thirty knots, and the sea was sweeping every few seconds over our low decks which made standing difficult enough, let alone lifting and working. One hand for yourself and one for the ship is the traditional sailor's rule, but it has to be broken now and then. Thank God for safety belts, and a strong point to attach them to. He caught and lashed into the scuppers the larger of the two sections. There was plenty of loose rope about to do the lashing. If there is one thing that characterises the boats we own it is miles of string (well, about one mile actually, spread over all the three masts).

Our sail-setting capability was curtailed by the loss of the foremast. It is possible that with concentration and skill Bill could have handled Hosanna easing speed to the right degree, and playing the engine throttles, but he was already nearly worn out; and we judged it better that he should keep some reserve of energy and concentration, in case of further need. Under sail and engine, we headed for Ramsgate.

It was midday as we rounded the breakwater in rough seas and found a reception party of TV cameras filming us entering harbour. Somewhat hairy it all looked, with our snapped off foremast stump pointing this way and that as we rolled, and the spray flying over the boat. We were only two pensioners on board Hosanna, but we had coped with our mishap without injury to ourselves and made harbour without assistance. We felt good about this, because a few hours after and not far away, the fifty foot sloop Ingotism belonging to the Bank of England Sailing Club was dis-masted with eight athletic young men on board, four of whom were yachtmasters. They put out a distress call, and had to be helped back to safety.

© 2024 Laurel Cooper (\* the Kentish Knock is the most easterly shoal off the Thames Estuary; it measures about 7 miles north-eastwards and two miles in breadth; it is partly dry at low water). ■



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# Back across t

Readers will remember Lejla's brother Cuillin's story of their epic voyage from London to Scotland (BF 147 & 148). Now it's the turn of 11 year-old Lejla to share her diary of their trip across the North Sea and their first few days in The Netherlands.

## 19th July

Today was my last day at school before the summer holidays, in fact my last day at primary school altogether. After a day of saying goodbye, signing t-shirts, having water fights, and eating cupcakes, I returned home to find that our boat home had disappeared. Johanna – the boat on which I live – had been taken by my dad and brother down the river Thames with the ebb tide. She was being taken down to Sheerness and the Medway where we would be meeting them by train that evening.



Stangate Creek

This was the start of a summer of island hopping in the Wadden Sea. We'd been planning this adventure almost since we first bought the boat back from Holland seven years ago when I was just five. That was my first channel crossing, but to tell the truth, I can't remember very much about it.

As Anna and I arrived, my dad picked us up on our RIB and drove us out to Johanna who was tied up to a mooring buoy at the entrance to Stangate Creek on the river Medway. Johanna is a 23-metre Dutch sailing barge which houses me, my parents (Brendan and Anna) and my 13-year-old brother, Cuillin. As soon as we arrived, we jumped into the inviting cool sea for an evening swim. Once we got out, we had a delicious dinner of barbecued chicken, dahl and rice. It was our first evening at sea and we were rewarded with an amazing sunset which we watched as we played music and sang shanties late into the night.

## 20th July

We woke up in Stangate Creek and were faced with a long morning of preparation for our first exposure to the North Sea swell. We lashed down our flotilla of kayaks, paddle boards and a sailing dinghy, had a last-minute visit from an engineer friend of ours to check the engine was ok, and my dad went to pick up a life raft that we were borrowing for the crossing.

We were in convoy with another Dutch sailing barge owned by our good friends and neighbours Angus and Thomasin. It felt good to have company, especially for the North Sea crossing.



North Sea Sailing

# the North Sea

At around noon we set off across the estuary towards Harwich. We set sail and a strong steady wind set us broad-reaching past the container ships and other traffic of the estuary.

Many hours later we arrived in Pennyhole Bay, just outside the entrance to the Stour. The wind had dropped so we decided to anchor in the bay rather than detour further into the river.

## 21st July

I woke up at 8am for my first shift, pulled on my lifejacket and shoes and climbed up on deck to find myself in the middle of a bright blue dazzling sea. We had lifted anchor at 03.00 so by now we were already more than 30 miles offshore. The sea stretched on for what looked like forever with no land in sight. I felt like this is where I belonged. Later in the day the wind strengthened and we raised our three white sails.

A blissful calmness and quietness descended as we turned off the

whirring engine at last. Just sailing in the middle of a sparkling sea was enough to make our day.

Then from nowhere, disaster struck. One of the crew members on our friend's boat had been pulling on a halyard when it suddenly became slack. He had lost his footing and had fallen onto deck. They thought he was fine but as he went below, he passed out, hit his head and lost consciousness. They radioed us to tell us what had happened and to consult us on what we should do next. We read out our first aid manual over the radio and we decided to call "pan-pan medico" on channel 16.

At this stage we were still 50 nautical miles off the Dutch coast and the coastguard didn't hear us. Luckily a nearby ship was able to relay our situation using their satellite phone. After a few follow-up questions the Dutch coastguard decided to send a rescue helicopter. It was half an hour later when we spotted the helicopter on the horizon. It felt like a scene from an action



*Lejla at the helm*

movie. They told our friend to steer into the wind and they hovered behind him, just above his mast. They slowly lowered first one, and then two people down onto the aft deck of their boat. After a quick assessment they decided the casualty needed



North Sea rescue

to get to hospital. One of the medics went first, then the other strapped to the casualty.

As they swung clear of the rolling boat the downdraft created huge plumes of spray that soaked all the remaining crew. I was glad that our friend had got off (we found out later he was able to check out of hospital the following day) but was a bit worried about what might happen next. With a growing sea we made the decision to head to IJmuiden – the nearest port instead of our original plan of Den Helder further north.

After my last shift on the tiller, I fell asleep on the sofa hoping that tomorrow I would wake up in The Netherlands.

## 22nd July

I woke up at 5am in the morning coming into IJmuiden. Naturally we were sent into the smallest, least accessible part of the marina which we would not be able to get to without smashing into at least 100 yachts, so instead we moored up against an easier berth and hoped that we wouldn't be moved until the morning.

Once we had our lines on and our sister-ship next to us, we got out the champagne (in our case Sprite) and celebrated making it across the channel safely (well, most of us!). Then we ate breakfast and went back to bed for a well-deserved sleep.



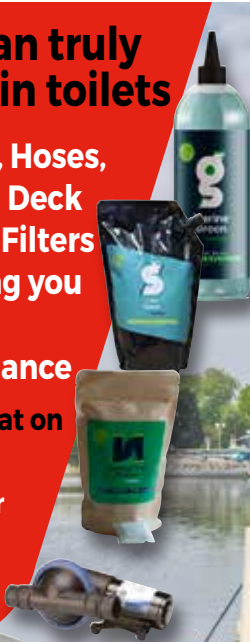
Arrival in IJmuiden

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## 23rd July

Having passed through immigration and tried the Dutch speciality of Kibbeling (deep fried fish) we woke up late, cast off our lines, left the marina and cruised away.

Our first lock went smoothly (well, apart from nearly leaving my brother behind by mistake) and soon we were cruising along merrily through the North Sea Canal to Amsterdam. At Amsterdam Marina we were met by a harbour master who, when we asked him to catch our lines, refused, saying that our friend's boat had to go first for some reason. We explained that we were travelling together and had agreed that we would come alongside first. He refused to help.

Eventually our friend's boat came alongside - but this wasn't the end of things. He began criticising our friend for a lack of fenders and then started shouting at our friend's crew, taking off their lines and even trying to push one of their crew members into the water! We decided it was probably best to leave at this point. We were shocked at what we had just experienced.

With the help of the Amsterdam harbour authorities (who restored our faith in the Dutch welcome!) we found a spot to moor a little way along the canal and jumped on a ferry into town and a much-needed dinner.

## 24th July

The following morning we decided to go into Amsterdam to visit the city's Holocaust memorials and learn about Anne Frank who I had read about in school. It was shocking to see how recent these events had been and how many people had been killed just in this one city.

After lunch and a visit to the supermarket, we cast off our lines and set sail for Marken – a small island on the Markermeer where we would be anchoring that night. My brother and I by this stage had become an expert team in the locks. My brother handling the ropes and me on the fenders. In no time we arrived at our destination and dropped our anchor.



Marken

My brother and I jumped into our topper- a little sailing dinghy- and went for a sail around the bay. Once our friends had arrived and tied up against us, we kayaked to the beach, building sandcastles and playing in the shallows under a small lighthouse that marked the tip of the island. We kayaked back to the barges for a lovely dinner and bed.

## 25th July

We woke up that morning, lifted our anchor and motored off across the beautiful sparkling inland sea. With a following wind, we raised our staysail and soon we were speeding along nicely through the shallow waters and into the IJsselmeer. It's amazing to think that it's only two metres deep for the vast majority of the lake.

We stopped that night in Enkhuizen. We wandered through the town enjoying the sights and sounds of the port town. There was a magnificent bell tower which played a tune every hour on the hour and a maze of canals and bridges. We spent the following day playing hide and seek on kayaks.

It was strange to see so many barges that looked a bit like



Enkhuizen

Johanna, we are used to being the only Dutch sailing barge around but here there were dozens, most of them charter vessels. We had an ice cream and later more Kibbeling for dinner.

## 29th July

We spent the last few days on a small island called Marker Wadden (*picture opposite*) – which is a man-made island and now a nature reserve. We were lucky enough to see a sea eagle while we were there but spent most of our time swimming and splashing around on the shallow sandy beach.

On the way back from the island it was my turn to be the captain (my dad makes us all take a turn). That meant planning the route and telling everyone what they had to do. I quite like being the captain, because I like bossing people around, but you also have to do the boring bits, like writing the log. Luckily we didn't crash into anything.



## 30th July

I woke up today and we were already underway. We had set off at sunrise to catch the tide to Texel, the first island in the Wadden Sea. The sea was flat calm and by lunchtime we had arrived in the harbour. It had several parts to it, a marina, a fishing section and a commercial area. We were told to head to the marina but as we arrived we were told we had been confused with another smaller vessel and that we wouldn't fit. We were forced to make a tight turn and then hold our position while a cruise ship arrived – never easy in a crosswind. After the cruise ship was alongside we headed to yet another part of the harbour.

We were making the turn when suddenly our engine cut out. We thought about dropping the anchor but there was no time and we drifted towards another vessel. Luckily someone was there to catch a line and we tied up while we tried to figure out what was wrong. It turns out our diesel day tank had simply run out of fuel. We re-filled it from the main tank and restarted the engine. Our dad felt very silly.

We made yet another turn, gently bumped (according to my dad) into a moored vessel and finally we moored up next to a restaurant for lunch. Phew.



Texel

We spent a good few days exploring Texel which is the biggest island in the chain. It almost didn't feel like an island. It has a museum next to the harbour which includes a four-hundred-year-old silk wedding dress that is almost perfectly preserved. We also visited a nearby seal sanctuary and went for a long cycle ride to the northern tip of the island to see the lighthouse.

This was the first of many lighthouses that we planned to visit on this adventure. When we bought Johanna, all of her doors had been painted with lighthouses from the islands. My brother's door was Texel, mine is Tershelling, my parents' Vlieland - you get the picture.

Marker Wadden



## 2nd August

That morning, we prepared to leave for Harlingen, a short journey back across the sea and onto the mainland. It was my brother's turn to captain the boat. All went fine until we entered the harbour. We had radioed in and were told that we were clear to come in however the current was enormous and even on tick over we were going at six knots and there was a ferry coming in fast to our port side. The channel we were in was too narrow to turn and we were going too fast to stop. We had no choice but to try and squeeze in before the ferry.

As we were drawing near a big fishing boat came out of the harbour and turned across our path which we narrowly avoided. Suddenly the enormous ferry sounded its huge horn which made us all jump at least a foot in the air. We spotted a gap in the moorings between charter vessels and were relieved to come alongside.

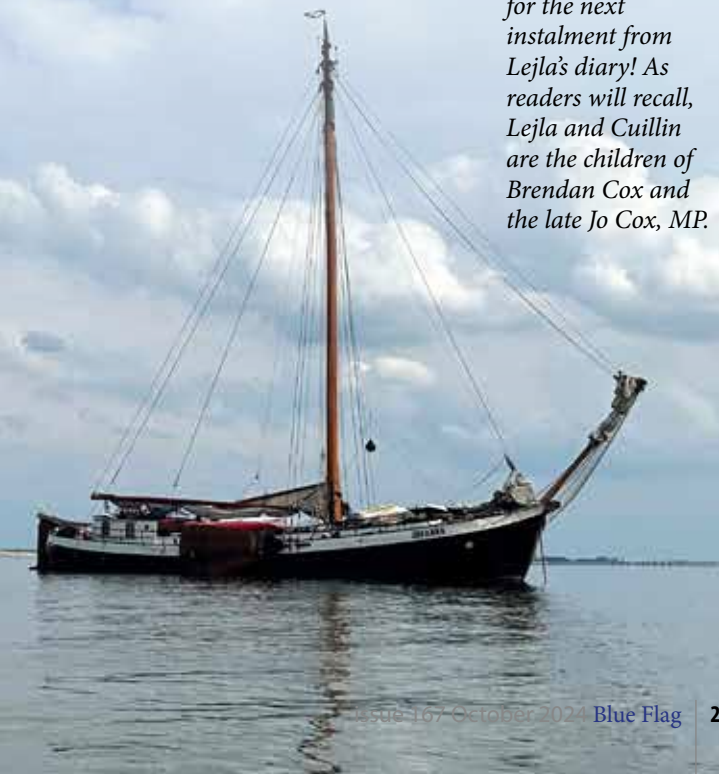


Harlingen

We had been to Harlingen once before, it was where my brother and I had first seen Johanna. It is also home to my favourite ice cream shop and my dad was so relieved to have escaped being crushed by the ferry that he let us have three scoops each.

**To be Continued . . .**

*Watch this space for the next instalment from Lejla's diary! As readers will recall, Lejla and Cuillin are the children of Brendan Cox and the late Jo Cox, MP.*



# Ten favourite

## Going Dutch again – the alternatives

*In my “Ten Favourite Moorings in the Netherlands” article (June 2024 – BF165) I asked readers to tell us about their own favourite moorings. Peter Cawson tells us about his preferred non-marina locations.*

I was interested to read the Ten Favourite Moorings in The Netherlands article in the June Blue Flag magazine. Our BF Editor Andrew asked for other favourite mooring suggestions, so how about a few non-marina Dutch moorings where shore power isn't necessarily available, or where ship dimensions preclude the use of a marina? Perhaps mooring places in lovely town or village centres where local restaurants, bars, shopping, or other local attractions prompt a lively overnight or longer stop. Or places in the middle of nowhere, where the silence is broken only by the wildlife. I'll have a stab at suggesting a few of our favourites of both these types.

### Great Town or Village Moorings:

**Maastricht** – the ‘Wall’ is free for those fit enough to scramble from their decks to the top of the wall, or (sorry, this is a marina!) ‘t Basin for its closeness to this previously derelict but now rapidly improving area of this wonderful and vibrant city. The main squares and other attractions are within a few minutes’ walk of either of these mooring places.

**Heusden** – rather than the marina, venture into the inner old harbour and tie up alongside the quay in this quaint and historic basin with its busy cafes and bars, the grand staircase, Van Gogh bridge and (Belgian) windmills. It may appear to be an impossibly narrow entrance, but it's not – go for it.



**Utrecht** – approach from the north and after the Weerdsuis lock, there are moorings for 2 or 3 large vessels as well as a small marina for shorter ones. An ideal spot for exploring this great city. Visit the National Railway Museum and the Mechanical Instrument Museum amongst other attractions.

**The Vecht** – for **Weesp**, leave the Vecht into the Smal Weesp where there are several central quayside moorings with shore supply. These are good for exploring this small town, or for taking the frequent 16 minute train journey to visit Amsterdam. This may be preferable to going by boat, paying high mooring fees and risking the no-go areas for diesel-powered boats! Nearby Vecht villages, such as **Loenen**, **Breukelen** and **Maarsse** also offer attractive river-side moorings and are generally free. All are busy at high season weekends and you may have to look under parked cars to find the mooring rings!



**Lemmer** – entertain the gongoozlers by mooring close to the Lemstersluis lock. Ideal for exploring the town and the nearby Wouda Steam Pumping Station, a World Heritage Site and the largest steam-pumping station ever built - and still in operation when required. Ideally visit at times of flood!



**Amersfoort** – moor at the end of this long cul-de-sac waterway. Named “Best European City of the Year 2023”, Amersfoort is well worth a visit, particularly if you time it for the World Jazz Festival (normally mid-August), when 4 outdoor stages and numerous indoor venues offer tons of mostly free music. Or visit the Piet Mondriaan Museum, or climb NL's third tallest church tower where you may be invited into the carillon chamber when this amazing 100-bell instrument is playing.

# te moorings

**Blokzijl** – a lovely triangular basin, once a Zuider Zee seaport, but now miles from the IJsselmeer! Moor alongside the wall and enjoy the local bars, restaurants and historic buildings in this attractive town, close to lots of wonderful cruising in attractive narrow waterways and magnificent lakes.



There are also great non-marina central town or village moorings in Sneek, Leeuwarden, Groningen, Gorinchem and dozens more. In most towns or villages (unless free), expect to pay a similar daily charge to a marina, but increasingly power is available, often via the somewhat challenging AanUit app.

## Remote Middle-of-Nowhere Moorings:

**Maastricht** – 4.5 km south of the city, just north of the Lanaye lock approach channel and the Belgian border is the Recreatiecentrum Eijsden, a large peaceful lake with a secluded island where you'll find a hidden pontoon mooring for 2 or 3 boats – though you'll probably have it to yourself.

**Maasbracht** – here's a real secret gem in this otherwise rather industrial area. Take the first right off the Wessem-Nederweert and right again into De Slag, a long and narrow lake with an unfortunate name! The entrance is narrow and shallow but should be OK. Sometimes covered by a surface film of harmless green algae, sliced by ducks and grebes like icebreakers through ice. Two lengths of chart-marked moorings with good walking nearby. While in the area, visit the "White Village" of Thorn with a few lakeside moorings, a short walk from this interesting town.

**Loosdrechtse-Plassen** – hugely popular, but well away from the numerous marinas there are many quiet moorings on the islands, or the offshore pile moorings near the SW corner of this vast magical lake. From these, you can explore in your dinghy the labyrinth of extraordinary narrow, waterlily-filled channels left behind by bygone peat-diggers.



**Veessen** – on the Gelderse IJssel, we discovered this place by chance. The river was in flood resulting in the Deventer marina moorings (2 km north of the city) being isolated from the shore. A phone call to Veessen 10 km further north, encouraged our visit, despite warnings of a difficult entrance and the antics of a ferry that uses the same inlet. We cautiously entered and moored on the 3-boat visitors' pontoon - the marina there is for locals only. What a beautiful and peaceful spot with many wild horses running free on the opposite bank and dozens of storks roosting in the trees as the sun sets. The on-site restaurant offered great food on the terrace overlooking the river, where we found the friendly harbour master serving us! Well worth a visit.

**The Biesbosch** – drop your anchor or moor bow-on with stake



and aft anchor in this popular nature reserve after the crowds have gone home. Enjoy a swim or do a bit of bird-watching.

**Friesland** – far too many lovely moorings to mention, but the purchase of an annual Marrekrite pennant for €20 or so, allows free stops of up to 3 nights on thousands of moorings, mostly without shore access or services, other than a refuse bin. Some lakes have Marrekrite mooring buoys for even greater isolation. One particularly magic mooring is in the Burgumer Meer. North of the Prinses Margriet channel are narrow islands. The first pontoon on the west side seems to be home to a number of kingfishers that bravely ignore their boating neighbours while fishing and flirting! But perhaps we were just lucky that evening!

Again, there are hundreds more remote moorings to choose from all over this wonderful country that seems designed for boating pleasure.

Despite the vast numbers of vessels travelling the Dutch waterways, there are plenty of great non-marina mooring places, both in towns and country, though it's wise to bag one by about 4 pm in high season. Moreover, in the Netherlands you can be sure these moorings won't be cluttered up with sinking, abandoned, or project vessels as you sadly find in so many parts of France. We've never encountered a waterway closed for lack of water, broken locks (well only once), or difficult to navigate through weed.

*Thank you Peter for some great suggestions.*

# Barge life

## First day / week Experiences

*I asked readers to share their 'first day' experiences as a follow-up to Alex's Sisson's article in BF 166 (August 2024); coincidentally and at almost exactly the same time, Karina Rook asked fellow readers of the Forum a similar question about their 'first week' experience - here are (extracts from) some of the responses:*

### Karina Rook

We have been through 39 degree days, no running water, four dead batteries, wasp infestations and almost lost our dinghy. And we don't know how the black water tank works, so still so much more to learn!

### Colin Stone

Our first week in 2005 was a few days crammed into one day with multiple fuel suction issues whilst trying to follow the engine manufacturer's quite complex running-in procedure and then drifting/sailing powerless in the Bergse Maas. Turned out that the brand new WW2 Rolls Royce duplex fuel filters for an Army tank were sucking in air through dried out rubber seals.

### Peter Cawson

My first outing on my first boat with an engine was from St Jean de Losne in 2008. The boat was a rather grand 4-year old 20m 50 ton motor cruiser I had somewhat rashly fallen for and bought - it seemed a good idea at the time and I negotiated an excellent price! One anxious moment was when we first loaded my car on board at Digoin lock. I spoke to the keeper who seemed happy to stop the flow of water out of the lock



at a suitable level while I drove across his lawn to the loading ramps - but the water level kept going down until he realised my predicament and hurriedly closed the paddles to allow a safe crossing onto my deck. An American bystander, probably convinced my car would end up at the bottom of the lock, took a number of photos.

### Jean-Marie de Wijs

We bought our first barge - a tjalk. We sail away to the shipyard with full power and we get 4,5 km/h out of it! Getting to the shipyard I understand why - more than 20cm of moulés under it.

### Richard Cooper

Bee was craned in at Stourport after I had fitted her out including fitting the rudder and all the steering system, sailed away and then tried to turn her around, the wheel had virtually no effect at all, steering geometry terribly miscalculated. Amateurs eh.

### Matthew Emeny

We bought our 12 m Dutch steel cruiser back from Belgium last year, it was the first time either myself or my wife had piloted a boat like this. The boat yard where we had stored the boat for winter had a mobile crane to lower the boat into the water over a high gangway, to say this was nerve wracking was an understatement. The water was tidal, it was windy, we had never driven the boat before and we had an audience gathering as the crane had to cross a road to get to the gangway.

They lowered the boat into the water and I started her up, the wind and tide pushed the boat against the slings of the crane and got stuck under the side railing. Not a good start, I checked



exhaust and water was coming so all good there and we managed to free ourselves from the sling. We reversed the boat away from the gangway and I went to sound the horn to say farewell and nothing happened except we lost the electrics at the helm (it had worked before but had just blown the fuse now, I later found out) Then my wife spotted we had lost a fender but managed to put her training to good use and recover it. This was all in the first fifteen mins.

It took us two weeks to bring the boat back from Belgium to France (three days waiting for a lock gate to be repaired) - it was an eventful time including the dog falling in and him learning to swim for the first time, learning about packing glands and that they need adjusting, and to always check the raw water filter cap is on properly otherwise the exhaust will overheat.

### Jan Pieterse

Even after 8 years of cruising/owning a barge you can get 1st week issues. A few days ago, leisurely cruising the Zaan, I noticed smoke/steam coming from the engine compartment, shut down the engine, opened the hatch, and holy moly is there a fire... NO a hose of the cooling system got loose. This happened while a bridge was opening, so w/o power the barge drifted and got wedged between a commercial, a fence and the bridge. After refilling the cooling system with water and putting new clamps on the hose, starting the engine, but because there was no room to manoeuvre, using the poles trying to push us off the bridge, with the Dutch wind blowing us against the bridge. A very tiny boat came along and helped us throw a rope to a fairly far away metal pole in front of the bridge and by pulling that rope we got a little bit more space. But yes the stern bumped against another rail in the water, some quick back and forth engine use we were able to get out of the spot. So we cruised to the closest shore to tie up ...while hearing "tie up now, give the boat away or sell it, I am done with boating".

### Boyd Godfrey

Our first month with our new-to-us boat we hired our harbourmaster to take us out for several hours to help us get a feel for the boat, I didn't have my ICC certification at that time. The day on the water was invaluable as we were able to familiarise ourselves with handling a vessel so very different from our old Grand Banks. We remain good friends with our "skipper for hire" to this very day!

### Balliol Fowden

We took over ownership of our ship in mid-August 1984 at a small shipyard in Lissebroek on the Harlemmermeerringvaart. The previous owner was busy removing his crane, conveyors, mast, generators etc. to install them on his "new" bigger Luxemotor. So we bought what was left - a nice hull, a galley shack where the wheelhouse should have been, a wheelhouse right up on the bow and big holes in the decks where the crane etc. had been. So our first week was mostly steelwork. We cut the wheelhouse off the bow and plonked it nicely over the hole left by the crane just forward of the galley shack, reconnected all the chain & wire steering via repositioned pulley blocks, fitted a new bigger anchor found in the weeds at the back of the yard, cut off old hoppers and sealed the holes in the decks. My mate burnt his hand badly on the oxy-acetylene cutter, but carried on cutting! A lighter moment was when we took the new cooker out of the back

of the Volvo. We were surrounded by Dutch ladies who had never seen a cooker with an oven before! Our first trip was 300 metres down the canal to load 30 tonnes of gravel ballast because the ship was bobbing around like a cork.

### Andrew Fells

First day on Hector I (second-hand Linssen Sturdy 360), we were delayed leaving Maasbracht while the bow thruster was fixed; we ended up sideways across the first big lock until I was able to convince the crew at the bow to loosen his rope so that I could bring the stern in; it rained all the way to Wansum, and we discovered en-route that the toilet didn't flush; I then discovered that reversing down a narrow lane in a rain storm isn't all that it's cracked up to be, and we ended up moored alongside a far larger cruiser, so that our 70 kilo Bouvier had to cross her legs until gravity took over.

First day on Hector II (new Linssen Sturdy 380), I decided to move forwards in a lock; unfortunately my partner didn't hear me and didn't detach the bow rope, resulting in a close encounter between the lock wall and Hector's pristine paintwork - guess which came out on top? Lesson learned, get some headphones (20 years on, still haven't done so!)

### Walkie-Talkies (aka Marriage Savers)

Talking of headphones and following on from Deb Keir's excellent article in the April 2024 edition of Blue Flag (BF 164) (she and Howard went for the Nautic Talk version), there has been a flurry of informative correspondence on this topic on the Forum - see under Barge Life / headset recommendations.

### Lighting in Tunnels

There has been a similarly interesting and erudite conversation on the choices for lighting when traversing tunnels - see in the Forum under Barges / lighting for tunnels.



*Many thanks for all the above contributions.*

# Up the Thames

**Paul and Carole Grainger recall how they upgraded from their narrow boat to a cracking (sorry) Dutch-style Barge, and set about exploring the Thames.**

We were around Runnymede, heading downstream on that attractive and historic reach of the Thames on a beautiful sunny May morning. I had my *“Going up the Thames”* music playlist on the wheelhouse stereo, and Kraken was purring along happily at a steady 5 knots, as she does. Lou Reed’s *“Perfect Day”* began to play - and it dawned on me that it was. At that moment in time, there was not a single thing that I could think of that would have improved my life. It just does not get any better.



*Dawn on a misty Thames*

My wife Carole and I have been boating in some shape or form since we first met in the early 1970’s at Severn Sailing Club near Tewkesbury. Our kids pretty much grew up there – it was a safe and healthy environment for them as well as us. When the last of our three daughters had flown the nest, we decided that we needed some kind of leisure activity in which we could both take part. This, we reasoned, would avoid the dreaded “mid-life crisis”, the “empty nest syndrome”, whatever you want to call it, that had put a premature end to the marriages of so many of our friends and acquaintances. Very soon, “Old Deuteronomy”, a 55ft narrowboat, arrived on the scene and, for the next 15 years or so, we spent most weekends and holidays travelling the rivers and canals in her.

The next big sea-change in our lives would be retirement. Neither of us wanted to just sit around the house and vegetate. We needed some adventure in our lives, so the idea of living on a boat appealed. Our narrowboat was great for a few weeks at a time, but we felt the need for something more spacious for permanent occupation.

A “Dutch-style” barge seemed to fit the bill, preferably sea-going, suitable for the continental waterways, with plenty of room for ourselves and our two cats, and with some accommodation for visitors. We wanted the boat to be able to operate independently of shore supplies and services as far as possible. The search was on.

In the event, it was pretty much 5 years from the dawn of the idea to delivery of the boat. We needed to retire from work, sell our shares in a business, sell our house, and get the boat built. We’d visited a few potential builders and spent hours researching on the Internet, and eventually we settled on Piper Boats in Stoke-on-Trent. We’d viewed many of their boats at events in Henley and Saint-Jean-de-Losne in France, so the decision was made.



*Kraken*

However, there were some dark clouds on the horizon that made us question whether we were doing the right thing. Perhaps the biggest and darkest was the cloud hanging over the Brexit negotiations, the outcome of which was far from certain. In 2016 we were told *“British people will still be able to go and work in the EU; to live; to travel; to study; to buy homes and to settle down... there will continue to be free trade, and access to the Single Market.”*

We were reassured, and decided to go ahead and place a deposit. After all, if you could not trust the word of a Minister of Her Majesty’s Government, who could you trust?

The second entirely unexpected cloud arrived in the form of a pesky little flu-like organism that was said to have originated in China. Personally, I didn’t take much notice of it at first.

# aboard Kraken

Sadly, neither did the powers-that-be until it was too late and, by the time they did, we were in the grip of a full-blown pandemic. I realised that the situation was serious when they closed the pubs. Even that utter swine Adolf Hitler had never succeeded in causing that level of disruption to our British way of life!

The result was that, almost two years after the pandemic first started, we were trying to sell our main house under difficult circumstances. Social distancing was still in force, although the government had introduced a stamp-duty “holiday” to stimulate the property market; in the event, we were able to complete the sale with just a day or two to spare.

In the meantime, Joe and Tom and the rest of the Piper team had been busy converting our “wish list” into reality; Fridays had never before been so exciting as we awaited the weekly update photos to arrive in our inbox. Gradually Kraken took shape, firstly in the steel-working shop, and then in the fitout area. (*Piper Boats were featured in the December 2023 edition of Blue Flag – BF 162*).

Fast forward to November 2021, and we are about to take delivery of Kraken. Perhaps because of the lack of movement due to Covid, the only winter berth we were able to find was in Limehouse Basin in London’s East End. Unfortunately, the EA

had embarked on a rolling programme of Thames lock closures, making it impossible to get to Limehouse from the launch location at Reading as originally planned. I spent hours trawling the Internet seeking craneage facilities on the Thames with sufficient capacity to lift Kraken. I discover that the PLA (Port of London Authority) have a 70-tonne lift at their Denton facility near Gravesend. But there’s no phone number or contact details. I email them twice with details of boat dimensions and weight. No response. I phone their main office and ask for a contact number. No joy, they don’t know. Carole calls them several times, and, after 2 weeks of trying, I eventually get through to a bored-sounding person “*Your name’s Grainger, you say? Oh yeah. Saw your email. But the boat transporter won’t fit through the gate. Turn’s too tight.*”

Well thanks a bunch for letting me know promptly, I don’t think.

Imagine my surprise when I’m contacted just a few days later by Andrea Piper, who tells me that the launch at Denton is “on”. Not only does the transporter fit through the gate (confirmed by the transport company, who have visited the site), but Piper have launched similar boats there before. I’m both relieved and angry. I did rehearse a few choice lines, just in case I bumped into the disinterested individual I’d spoken to on the phone.



Preparing for launch at Denton

This only left us with one small problem – that of navigating the unfamiliar tidal Thames in a new and untried boat. Enter Shaun and Tracy, owners of a lovely Piper barge “Ascension” who kindly volunteered to pilot us up the tidal Thames to Limehouse as they had done the trip a few times before. So it was that we arrived at Denton first thing in the morning to find Kraken already suspended in the slings of the boat lift, Piper engineers Vinny and Josh busying themselves with final preparations.



Shaun & Tracy

It turned out to be a wonderful passage on a bright and sunny day. The wide-open spaces of the Thames Estuary were possibly a novel experience for Piper engineer Josh, but he was kept busy checking things over and ensuring that all systems were functioning correctly.

We had great views of the large container ships at Tilbury and the mighty Queen Elizabeth II Bridge carrying the M25 over the river, before we passed through the Thames Barrier; the 180 degree loop around the O2 Arena was next, followed by the tall buildings of Canary Wharf. Eventually we reached the Lower Pool, and Shaun expertly negotiated the awkward turn into the entrance to Limehouse Lock with about 30 minutes to spare before the tide fell too far to be able to get over the cill. We'd arrived!

Our winter in Limehouse was spent doing all the usual London touristy things, which was fun, but not really what



Leaving Limehouse April 2022

we had bought the boat to do. Apart from the trip up from Gravesend, the furthest Kraken had travelled was the pump-out at the other side of the marina; however, April 1st (yes, April Fool's Day) soon arrived and Kraken was back in Limehouse Lock ready to enter the tideway, bound for Teddington.

What an experience this was, especially for the first time; passing all those famous London landmarks, all of which appeared to be very different when viewed from the river. Tower Bridge seemed to mark the beginning of the really busy area of the river, replete as it was with tourist trip boats, Thames Clippers, and other private vessels like ours. It all kicked up quite a chop, and the time that we had spent in preparation for this voyage - stowing fragile ornaments and glassware away, taping up drawers and lockers down below - now seemed well justified.

The Boat Race was scheduled for the next day, and we saw several crews out practising as we passed Fulham football ground. Gradually, as we made our way upstream, the channel began to narrow, the amount of traffic reduced, and we could relax a little and enjoy the scenery. For once, my tidal calculations were correct, and we were able to bypass the lock at Richmond, finally arriving at Teddington Lock and the non-tidal section of the Thames in mid-afternoon.

Our schedule was blank for the next two months, giving an opportunity to explore the river upstream of Teddington at a leisurely pace.



Lady Lindsay's Lawn May 2022

In theory, our air draft allowed us to pass Osney Bridge on the outskirts of Oxford with an inch to spare, but given the variable river level, it was obviously not a good idea to try it. In the event, we were able to moor right outside the Isis Farmhouse Pub, enjoying live jazz on Sunday night with the landlady demonstrating amazing musical skills on her violin.

It was still dark at 4am on the first of June, as our little flotilla entered the mighty Barge Lock at Teddington, Andy Soper in his lovely barge Neeltje in the lead.

The first signs of dawn were showing in the sky as we followed Neeltje out of the lock. The passage down-river needed some concentration as her navigation lights disappeared from sight from time to time as she passed through banks of fairly dense early morning mist. We'd discussed the passage plan in some



detail the evening before, with the other skippers in the cosy wheelhouse aboard **Neeltje**. Our destination was Chatham, for the DBA's 30th anniversary Rally, so essentially it was our previous two Tidal Thames voyages combined into one, with a little extra tacked on the end.

Our departure was just before high water, so the sluice gates at Richmond were raised, enabling us to sail straight through and bypass the lock. Very soon, dawn had broken fully, and the banks of mist began to clear; much to my relief the task of the helmsman became a much more relaxed affair as we proceeded downstream at a steady pace, again passing the famous landmarks.

The estuary widened progressively until we were in the realms of large shipping again, several of which passed our little flotilla. The weather remained benign and cruising remained a comfortable experience until we made the turn to starboard to enter the mouth of the Medway. Beam seas here made for an uncomfortable half hour or so until they subsided as we made our way into the estuary proper.

Finally, the entrance to the marina beckoned, and we locked up to take our berths alongside the eastern dock wall and its interesting array of historic craft.



Moored up in Chatham

This being our first ever DBA event, we had no idea what to expect; suffice it to say that we enjoyed a superbly-organised event that was both interesting and entertaining, including social events in our very own shoreside marquee and entertainment by musicians playing live on the decks of **Neeltje**! From memory, there were twelve DBA craft at the event, and it's true to say that I rarely, if ever, met a more friendly and welcoming crowd.



Fleet on the way back in Richmond Lock

We are very much looking forward to further, equally happy times in the future.



Moored up at The Anglers, Walton

And speaking on behalf of our readers, we are equally looking forward to reading about your next adventures on **Kraken!**

Fleet approaching Tower Bridge



# Membership matters



*Dear All*

I hope you have all enjoyed the summer, be it at home or abroad, on the water or on land.

As the warmer clothes and autumn coats are now coming out of closets in the Northern hemisphere, please spare a minute for the DBA and check your subscription details by logging in to [www.barges.org](http://www.barges.org) and going to the menu "Members", then choosing "My Details".

Is your email address still in use, is your postal address still up to date? It makes our day-to-day work so much easier if we can reach you quickly and efficiently.

Good news: work is happening to make sure a continental rally will be held in 2025, probably somewhere mid to late June in Belgium or northern France. More information to follow as soon as possible!

Stay in touch, post on the Facebook page or the Forum and let us know if there is something on your mind we might or should be able to help you with!

Best regards,

Liza

*Membership Secretary, [membership@barges.org](mailto:membership@barges.org)*



## Welcome to new members

### Australia

Steve Bailey  
Peter & Susan Beilby  
Paul McAleer  
Richard Willis



### Austria

Isa Ravenscroft



### France

Jonathan Bean  
Nick Lassman



### Netherlands

Willem Boomstra



### Poland

Andrzej Bazgier



### Switzerland

Marc Lombard



### United Kingdom

Simon Andrews  
Christopher Bader  
Chris Broadbent  
Geoff & Melanie Chittenden  
Angela Hill  
Adrian Johnson  
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**Barge Buyers Handbook - Seventh Edition**

Andy Soper and Tim Cadle have completed a significant update of the DBA Barge Buyer's Handbook. Aside from general editorial changes, Andy has put in much-expanded detail on buying a new-build barge and some changes introduced since the UK left the EU. As has always been the case, while written from the perspective of owning a barge, a great deal of the content applies to buying any type of boat. So, if you are about to take the plunge into boat ownership, or know someone who is considering taking this leap - this book is highly recommended and a trivial cost when matched to the expense of boat ownership.



Cost is £10 for members, £14.95 for non-members plus postage. Visit [barges.org/dbabooks](http://barges.org/dbabooks) or contact DBA admin using the details on the back page of Blue Flag to buy your copy.

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# A bit of history

## The Severn Trow

Sailing barges were the work-horses of the estuaries and coasts of England: the keels of the Humber and the Tyne, the famous Thames barges, the Mersey flats and jiggers, and the Severn Trows of the Bristol Channel. Trows worked up and down the Severn and coast of the Channel going from port to port, like Bristol itself, Minehead, and Barnstaple, and back and forth across the estuary to industrial South Wales. Marine transport in Trows declined rapidly towards the end of the nineteenth-century as the railways took over their trade, but they struggled on until the outbreak of the Second World War. Today, only one survives, the *Spry*, an estuarine Trow, which is housed at the Ironbridge Gorge Museum, near Telford.



*The Spry*, courtesy of Tewkesbury Historical Society, *Bulletin Vol.4* (1995)

This article is about a personal connection to the Trows as they are seen in the accompanying illustration, a water-colour by the Barnstaple artist Allan Smith (1889-1963). It shows two Trows, the nearer called the *Barnstaple*, according to the name-board on its transom. They sit on the mudflats at low tide at one of the town quays. The *Barnstaple* (and its unnamed companion) are identifiable as coasting Trows because they are ketch-rigged and have raised gunwales. They were about 24 metres long with a breadth of about 6 metres and could carry around a hundred tons of cargo. Their sterns were rounded to cope with following seas instead of having the vertical transoms of older vessels. On these later Trows, the hatch coamings were made of wood to protect the hold against the choppy seas of the Bristol Channel. The bottoms of the depicted vessels were sufficiently flat to allow them to take to the ground against a wall without having to use legs. Smith's illustration did not include lee-boards (which the sailing keels had) so perhaps the Trows had sufficient depth of keel to make them just about manoeuvrable with the aid of the steady sail on the mizzen mast. There would have been leeway

in a cross-wind and a sea-going Trow would have needed plenty of sea-room in order to tack. Much skill and local knowledge was necessary to thread the shifting sands of the west-coast estuaries and harbours as well the seamanship needed to work the tempestuous Channel.

In Smith's picture opposite, the Trows are at the head of navigation of the little river Yeo, a tributary of the River Taw. The distinctive bridge which crossed the river at the head of navigation indicates that the barges are moored to the Rolle Quay in front of its warehouses. It is not known whether Smith painted a real Trow called '*Barnstaple*' or whether he composed an imagined version and identified it as the town-barge out of a sense of local pride. To inject a personal note as a child, I saw my first dead animal, a drowned calf, lying on the mud-flats more or less where the *Barnstaple* lies in the picture. The tideways, their quays, and wharfs were potentially dangerous places.

It is unlikely that the barges in the picture were meant to be laid up in spite of the difficult trading conditions (the water-colour is dated 1912). There are indistinct figures on the quay to the left and some barge-men work on the deck of the second Trow. The *Barnstaple* flies a pennant and maybe has a topsail hanging out to dry. The other (blue) sails are furled so perhaps their skippers are waiting to take a load out to sea in a few tides' time. At high slack water, the Trows would have been winched round so that they could tide it down the navigation to the vast estuary itself.

*Barnstaple* grew up at the lowest bridging point of the estuary of the twin rivers Taw and Torridge. It is one of the oldest market towns in England and was renowned not only for its markets, but its great woollen fair. Provided that a barge could navigate the treacherous sands of the outer estuary, *Barnstaple* was a welcome haven for barge masters who probably had houses in the town too.

The predecessors of the *Barnstaple* brought wool in from as far away as Ireland to feed the industries in towns like Exeter and Tiverton. They of course carried loads other than wool: sand, gravel and stone; the colliers brought in coal from Wales, carrying limestone back in return; grist for the flour mills; fuller's earth for cleaning the wool from further up the Severn Estuary and elsewhere; clay for the potteries one of which, *Brannans*, survived into this century. Today, much of the heavy commerce has disappeared in *Barnstaple*. The estuaries are too silted nowadays to take loaded barges even if they existed. Pleasure boats now moor to Rolle Quay and the warehouses have been turned into a popular inn. The market town is an administrative and tourist centre for people drawn to the town for its history, its museums, the nearby sandy beaches, and the moors of Exmoor in the hinterland.

Barnstaple has an honourable tradition in the arts. Two of the most famous painters who worked in the town were J.M. Turner and Frederick Richard Lee. The famous architect William Richard Lethaby was a student at the Barnstaple School of Art. Smith was one of a talented group of teachers at the local secondary school and he also taught in the Art School where he may well also have been a student himself.

The twin grammar schools for boys and girls in Barnstaple were established in 1910 and Smith apparently joined the boys' school as art master in 1924. He is known to have painted local scenes from 1912 onwards and so *The Barnstaple* is a work from his early twenties. He also painted the medieval Long Bridge across the Taw in 1921. He published school textbooks, such as *'Object, Plant, and Memory Drawing for Schools'* (1939). He eventually retired from the school in 1954 and died in 1963.



*The Barnstaple*, water-colour on card, Allan Smith, 1912 (37.5cm x 28cm), author's possession

The water-colour was painted on cut-down card (37.5 cm x 28 cm). The back of the card is a surprise: it had been cut down from a larger piece and the remnants of academic art figures have been discovered, pencilled in almost like doodles. A classic male nude with an outstretched arm is to the left and several studies of hands and fists are to the right. These practice-pieces support the idea of The Barnstaple being an early work; they could have been part of Smith's own studies at the School of Art.



*The reverse of The Barnstaple, remnants of academic sketches, pencil on card, Allan Smith, before 1912*

On the front of the card, the colours are still bright where it matters, but the buildings in the background are rather dull, clumsily sketched and now faded. Most impressive is the rigging which has been delicately and accurately painted. The bluey-grey hulls, probably made of larch wood, are the solid results of close observation.

Why my interest? My grandfather, Edward Evans, was the woodwork master at the Grammar School before and after the First World War and so was a colleague of Smith's. Evans was a cabinet maker of some distinction. He was a skilful carver and designed and made furniture in limed oak. My guess is that he was given The Barnstaple as a thank you for framing some of Smith's pictures. He framed it for himself in dark oak; it and its wooden backing of thin pine-board is beautifully made. And so, it came down to me by family descent.

Then, from 1978 until 2024, my family and I owned the 19 metre ex-sailing grain barge, the Humber keel, Danum. We converted her, took her across to the continent and wandered the European waterways ever after. Two coincidences arise: The Barnstaple was the town barge by name of a market town with the Latin name of 'Barum'. 'Danum' is the Latin name for the Yorkshire market town of Doncaster in South Yorkshire so Danum is also a town barge by name. Danum is on the watch list of the National Ships Register.



*The Sheffield-size, Humber Keel Danum, built Thorne Yorkshire 1932 for the bakers, Thomas Hanley and Sons. She is a Part One Registered ship. She was one of the last sailing keels and was motorised at the time of the nationalisation of transport in the UK in the 1940s. She is lying on the upper quay at Tournus on the river Saone*



*Danum in dry-dock at St Usage, Cote d'Or. Her rounded stern is reminiscent of that of the Barnstaple*



*The bluff bows of a Humber keel: the orange tow-rope, the fisherman's anchor, the hessian bow-fender were part of her gear in the 1930s*

In 1998, we asked the author and waterways painter Edward Paget-Tomlinson, to do us a water-colour of Danum. It is a re-creation of her under sail also with an unnamed companion leaving Keadby lock on the Stainforth and Keadby Canal. She is imagined as if on her way to discharge grain at the flour mills of Doncaster or Rotherham. Her steel hull is painted in Hanley's original light blue livery. The keels are passing the old coal-fired power station. Its prominent chimneys, now demolished, were known as the 'Three Sisters'.



*Recreated view of the Humber keel Danum and an unnamed sister-ship on the Stainforth and Keadby Canal, South Yorkshire and Lincolnshire (September 1998) water-colour, E.W.Paget-Tomlinson (1932-2004) (30cm x 21cm), author's possession*

I only know of the Spry and the other Trows from the surviving pictures, so Smith's water-colour was hung in pride of place as a memorial on the bulkhead not of a sister ship but a quite close cousin.

*Robert L.S. Cowley*

# and finally . . .

## . . . the Editor's last word



As I write this in late September, it seems as if summer has finally arrived at least in the UK, although this is not a sentiment that's likely to be shared by anyone afloat (with or without a boat) in central Europe – it's surely getting increasingly hard for anyone to deny the existence of climate change. The weather hasn't been a concern for us this year, as Hector's sole journey has been a trip by road from one winter storage facility, which burnt down, to another, which hopefully won't.



However, one of the major perks of being Editor is interacting with contributors, and being able to share their experiences is nearly as much fun as being there yourself! High on this list are Andy and Debbie Kerswill, whose circumnavigation of the UK is a testimony to their sense of adventure and humour! Equally impressive is Lejla Cox's story of her trip across the North Sea to the Netherlands – and in case you missed it, Lejla is 11! Also in The Netherlands, Peter Cawson describes his 'non-marina' favourite moorings, as an alternative to the Editor's earlier suggestions.

For the few readers who felt that there was not enough 'UK' content in Blue Flag, you'll have been pleased to read Paul Grainger's account of his first year on The Thames, while Robert Cowley's history of the Severn Trow provides a fascinating insight into these iconic vessels. Finally, talking of iconic vessels, Chris and Diana Grant share the history of Esme, the classic Dutch barge they owned for fifteen years.

As ever, and I'm sure readers get fed up with me saying this, please do contact me with your suggestions for future articles, and your comments - good or bad!

Enjoy the autumn wherever you are,

Andrew

[editor@barges.org](mailto:editor@barges.org)

# DBA Diary dates

## November

### Zoom call for Members



Monday 4th November at 19.00 hrs GMT – check the Forum the week before for log-in details.

### Blue Flag



Friday 15th November – deadline for copy, adverts and feedback for the next (December) edition of your favourite magazine.

## December

### Zoom call for Members



Monday 2nd December at 19.00 hrs GMT – check the Forum the week before for log-in details.

## January

### DBA Board Meeting



Monday 6th January at 19.00 hrs GMT; please email [chair@barges.org](mailto:chair@barges.org) to be included on the zoom link.

### Zoom call for Members



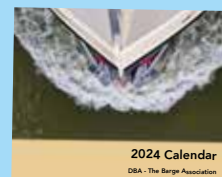
Monday 13th January at 19.00 hrs GMT – check the Forum the week before for log-in details.

### Dusseldorf Boat Show



The world's largest yacht and motorsports show. Saturday 18th – Saturday 25th January.

See [www.barges.org/events](http://www.barges.org/events) for the latest info.



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### Aims and Benefits

The aims of DBA are to promote interest in barging; be the representative body for non-commercial barging; be the premier source of barging information; establish contact with and influence other relevant clubs, societies, navigation authorities and trade associations; keep members informed on all barge related topics; facilitate communication between members to provide the opportunity for discussion of all aspects of barging.

Membership of DBA is open to anyone from anywhere in the world who is a barge owner, a barge dreamer or just interested in barges. Our club is around 1700 strong with members from all over the world cruising and living on their barges in the UK and in mainland Europe, sharing knowledge and information. Tap into a huge amount of accumulated knowledge and wisdom about barges and barging; become part of an international barging community; fast forward to find your barge and all the practical information you will need to fulfil your dream; know that your club is looking after your barging interests whether you just want to live quietly onboard up a backwater or plan to cruise the length and breadth of Europe; gain access to a database where cruising members share detailed information about good moorings both long and short-term.

**DBA - The Barge Association** is a not-for-profit organisation formed in 1992. The association relies entirely on the voluntary contributions of its management team and members. Volunteers represent the membership at both government and non-government levels within Europe.



#### DBA - The Barge Association

Our public Facebook page for finding out more about the Association.

[www.facebook.com/DBA.The.Barge.Association](http://www.facebook.com/DBA.The.Barge.Association)



#### DBA - The Barge Association Facebook Members' Group

A closed group for subscribing members of DBA - The Barge Association.

[www.facebook.com/groups/abd.chat](http://www.facebook.com/groups/abd.chat)



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