

Round Britain Cruise in Peggy

Philip Newman

Peggy is an ex working prawning boat, believed built about 1910 by Crossfields at Arnside in Morcambe Bay, and worked out of Maryport on the north side of Bay. She was converted back to sail in the 1990s and has been owned by us (Phil & Rose-Marie) since 1998

In 2011 we learned that the Old Gaffers Association (OGA) intended to organise a cruise around Britain in 2013 as part of celebrations for its 50th anniversary. Both Rose-Marie and I were immediately enthusiastic about taking part: it would take us to most parts of the UK that we had tended to think were out of our cruising reach. Also we would be part of a small fleet so there would be safety from not doing it on our own.

A year later the trip became a lot more imminent and real, so we started active preparations: a new cooker- safer and reliable, a safety rail around Peggy's stern to make the cockpit less exposed if things became rough, a self-steering wind vane, better waterproofs and thermal clothing, Christmas ideas were not difficult for our family in 2012. As we all remember, spring 2013 was snowy and cold, but we simply had to keep working if we were to be ready on time. When April arrived things got really hectic with Rose-Marie painting the cabin and me building the cockpit cuddy in just a few days.

Finally, late in the afternoon of Monday 29 April we left the Clubs visitor pontoon and headed down the Orwell to Pin Mill for a good dinner aboard, some navigation preparation and a good nights sleep. We had done as much as we could and all the other jobs would have to be done when we could on the way around. We were myself, Rose-Marie, Chris our son, and Spike our cat.

Next day a moderate north easterly blew us out of the river and on towards the northern entrance of the Black Deep, although we had to motor to avoid being swept south too early by the tide. Once through Fisherman's Gat, as often seems to happen, the wind freshened and we had a good sail to Ramsgate. All was well except for our VHF aerial which, unfortunately, had been broken by our burgee flagstaff working loose and knocking into the aerial. I had a spare hand-held aerial but this meant poor VHF performance for the time being. With the wind in the same direction we had a cracking



1 Peggy's Crew

sail next day to Newhaven. We saw our first porpoises just before Beachy Head. By the time we had rounded this it was dark, the wind freshened, and Peggy really did her "racehorse act" as we call it - reaching in smooth water at about eight knots towards the darkened shore where Newhaven was (somewhere), and our cat decided that this was the time to walk on deck!! We simply had to grab him, and shut him below into his box. As we got closer the lights for Newhaven appeared and we were glad to be in.

Unfortunately the next day saw the wind change to south-west and Chris had had to return to work in Ipswich so me and Rose-Marie were on our own. Peggy is quite heavy to sail to windward for any length of time so, instead of rounding Selsey Bill into the Solent, we stopped off at the charming little port of Littlehampton, although the entrance is interesting!. Here we spent the next day trying (unsuccessfully) to buy a replacement aerial and make the new LED nav lights work. That evening we were joined by crew Tim (excellent breakfasts and reliable helmsman) and John (yachtmaster and very familiar with the South Coast). Next day we motor sailed to Yarmouth. Having filled up with diesel and provisions, but no aerial, we set at lunchtime to go down to the Needles and overnight to Plymouth. Tim and I took

the first 4 hours, Rose-Marie and John the second, etc. It was a lovely clear night with the new LED masthead tricolour really bright, not much wind but, again all was well and it was great to be off Plymouth breakwater at 10.00 am with a gentle south-easterly to blow us in. Having called Mayflower Marina they directed us in were we tied up in what was to be the last good weather for ten days. Tim and John left us as arranged. The OGA had arranged a fish & chip supper where we met some local gaffers and first experienced the friendliness of people that we met on the way around. The harbour sail-by was postponed as we had south-westerly winds of force 5, 6 and once, 9!

Mayflower were really generous in extending their discount all the 10 days that we there. We left on 21st May for Falmouth. The wind was north easterly but fresh, so we had a fat reach with two reefs along the coast. Unfortunately about five miles from Falmouth I heard a loud sound from under the boat as we hit something, and as we entered Falmouth we had no drive from our propeller (self-feathering variable pitch). We managed to motor sail to Falmouth marina and arrange for a haul-out inspection. Like in Plymouth it was cold and we had the diesel cabin heater working all the time. It was also very windy with a constant shriek of the north westerly blowing through all the nearby masts. This made manoeuvring Peggy in the tight marina spaces difficult and when moved Peggy to the travelhoist unfortunately we were swept backwards into another yacht - damage to that was a few scratches but we had seriously smashed our self-steering vane- I felt fairly despondent as we were lifted out! Fortunately there was no underwater damage as such. All the repairs were helped by the kindness of the local people; we experienced this throughout the trip and it is one of our lasting memories.

We left Falmouth at 06.00 motoring on a sunny calm morning. We rounded Lands End at 13.00, still sunny but sailing with one reef, towards Millford Haven. At 21.00 I tied in the second reef, and by midnight Peggy was "racehorsing" again before a strong south westerly wind. At 03.00 I tied in the third reef and disconnected the self-steering to steer by hand. The wind and waves were really building- and Peggy was occasionally surfing!! We reached the Haven about 8.30 with 6m waves; we didn't take water over the stern (which is low) but did have waves breaking amidships and filling the deck. The entrance is wide and we got in easily although a supertanker was going in at the same time and we had to gybe to keep out of his way.

A week later the persistent northerly had changed and we set out for Dublin- we were behind on the OGC schedule so planned another overnighter to catch up. The Irish Sea was calm and benign and thirty hours of motoring later we tied up in Dun Lahage in Dublin bay- we had wanted to avoid another gale but would have liked a little less motoring.

This was our first experience of Ireland and we quickly appreciated the spectacular scenery, wealthy towns, and friendly people. Next evening we set off overnight to Belfast where the OGA had planned a busy weekend and we were to meet out son Andrew and his girlfriend who had flown over to see us. Belfast has been, and I think still is a very enterprising place and we really enjoyed it: an excellent OGA BBQ and shanty party, visiting the Titanic centre and taking a bus tour of all the places made notorious in the "troubles".

Next stop Scotland - Ailsa Craig appearing out of the mist like a giant beehive! We went between the Mull of Kintyre and the Isle of Arran- the mountains on this are spectacular and Scotland seems so scarcely populated compared to the Ireland that we saw. We had decided to go through the Crinan canal: narrow and taking you right up and into the countryside. We bought diesel at Crinan from a perilous multi-float fuel berth (I moved across it on all fours). The passage to Oban means navigating narrow sounds with fierce tidal currents that sometimes



2 Locking up on the Crinan canal

take the boat sideways as well as forwards. Oban is a lively tourist centre with excellent fish and chips! From there to Fort William where a fleet of racing day boats kindly offered us their visitors mooring and showers at their club (by now I have resolved to be more friendly to visitors at OYC).

The Caledonian Canal was varied with part canals and part Lochs. Ben Nevis had snow on even though it was June. The flights of locks taking you up and then down are spectacular feats of engineering. Unfortunately the engine water pump failed as we entered Loch Ness. We sailed across and then sailed/were towed to Inverness for 5 days awaiting a replacement. Again the marina staff were great, but 5 days was an unwanted delay.



3 Peggy leaving Fort Augustus on the Caledonian Canal

Engine working we set off towards Peterhead slightly uncomfortable about how far we had to go and how behind on the programme we were. Contrary winds encouraged us to visit the tiny harbour of Hopeman (to the surprise of the locals) where we unfortunately dried out- uncomfortable and worrying! Whitehills is a friendly harbour although very small - again good fish and chips. I really wanted to drink a pint in a Scottish

pub so walking around we found one with cars parked outside although no windows to see inside; slightly nervously, we ventured in and we were welcomed. Next morning the engine starter motor worked (just) and for the last time- we did not dare stop the engine before Peterhead. Our son Andy phoned to say that Spike had been found- he had jumped ship in Belfast, so RoseMarie flew to meet Andrew in Belfast while I stayed to fit the new starter motor when it arrived. By now it was obvious that the engine was coming to the end of it's useful life because spare parts were hard to obtain and the engine was putting a lot of oil in Peggy's bilge.

Four days later Rose-Marie was back aboard, although Spike was left safely in Ipswich with Chris. By now it was August and we were thinking about getting home. We made three overnight passages to get south as quickly as possible. Unfortunately the wind was generally south or southeast, but light, so again we were motoring except for a lovely sail from Arbroath to the Farne Islands. Whitby is an interesting vibrant town. The Humber has a lot of commercial traffic. Lobster pots are a hazard all along the North Sea coast with trailing lines sometimes 10 metres long. Lowestoft was sunny and hot, and almost home, so we were glad to arrive there when the weather forecast seemed to suggest worsening weather, although this didn't materialise.

It was slightly surreal to enter Harwich and to think that we had "done it" so we could fully relax! We had good times and tough times but, overall, I am really glad that we did it and saw all the sites and met all the people that we did.