

Sailing to Cambridge

25th - August - 2nd September 2013

The week of the 18th August had been a busy and very successful Aldeburgh Regatta for Rob. Very tight and hard fought racing, but he and Robert came away with four straight wins and the Bedford Trophy.

We returned to Aldeburgh on the Saturday, with the car laden with all the pots and pans and stores that had been removed for the racing, plus petrol and water ready for our Cambridge trip. We went to fetch 'Bum Chug IV', but she was not where Rob had left her tied to a post near the club house. After some searching we found her pulled up on a slipway near the starting hut. The beautiful new thwart that Rob had made for her was missing, and also one of the paddles. We suspect that she had been taken out by revellers from the end of regatta ball that had been held the night before. Very annoying, but we were hopeful that we could borrow spare bits from 'Bum Chug III' which Jamie had.

We carried on with our plans, with Rob sailing 'Bumble Chugger', or rather motoring, down to Orford, while I drove round - very carefully as I'd been told by the cardiologist the day before that I was not to drive until after I'd had a pacemaker fitted. On my way the heavens opened and the rain absolutely deluged down. I felt sorry for Rob sitting out in the boat, but in fact he didn't suffer from a single drop of rain! He was worried about getting ashore at Orford with no thwart and only one paddle and the tide running quite fast. In fact all went well and we headed home with a diversion to Telegraph Cottage to pick up the dinghy bits. It took us a while to find them, as Jamie and family had all left for their week in Abersoch for the Cadet Nationals.

Sunday, 25th August. At 11 o'clock our friends Robert and Jane picked us up from Woodbridge and took us to Orford. There was more wind than we expected and quite blustery, but although we were well weighed down with our luggage, we had no trouble getting out to 'BC' with the borrowed paddles. Robert and Jane waved us goodbye and we made good progress down the Ore. Before we got to the sea, we put a couple of reefs in and donned our wet gear. In fact, out to sea the wind seemed less strong and we took one of the reefs out.

It seemed a long slog up to Southwold. I had been beguiled into thinking that it was a 4 to 5 hour trip, but in fact it took 7 hours. The wind was northerly, so two long tacks out to sea, well out of sight of land with no sign of anything else existing - no other sails, no birds - just endless sea. The wind picked up, and once the tide had turned, the waves were quite uncomfortable and we put the second reef back in. At last we neared Southwold. There was a strong ebb tide, and the waves at the entrance to the river looked daunting as they hit the main ebb current. In fact it was not too bad getting in, but it was a long, very slow crawl up the river against the 5 knot current with the engine only just making headway, but we finally got up past the Harbour Master's hut, and rafted up onto a big white plastic job - the outer boat of four big white plastic jobs!

It was 7 o'clock by now, and it was a great relief to have finally stopped and to get out of chilly, damp clothes. An assault course ashore and into the wonderful warmth of The Harbour Inn. On the quay we passed a huge 1960s American car, all chrome and fins, which was attracting a lot of attention. Very tasty smoked haddock fish and chips, and back across the assault course to bed.

Monday, 26th August. Blue sky and gentle wind, though still northerly. Our next door yacht wanted to get out soon after 9 but we wanted to wait until high water, so after a visit to the Harbour Master's office we crossed the river and moored onto an empty pontoon.

A leisurely walk into Walberswick, where we were early enough to settle ourselves on a prime position bench where we could check charts and almanacs and watch the world go by. The village soon seemed full of tourists and dogs. A cup of tea from the nearby tea rooms and then a stroll back to 'Bumble Chugger'

We left at 2 pm after some lunch. The tide was still coming in, but it was quite an easy motor out, but it was a long haul up the coast against the wind, and most of the time against the tide as we had left earlier than we should! But Lowestoft slowly came into sight, and as we got nearer so did an ominous line of breaking water ahead of us and along our starboard side. We edged in nearer the shore hoping that there was a passage through at the end though it wasn't clear from the charts if there was. We fortunately made it through, though there were anxious glances at the depth finder, and we emerged quite close to the harbour entrance. We were well ahead of a large yacht who we'd ding-donged with all the way from Southwold. He had stayed inshore for the first part of the journey and then gone out to sea round the sandbank.

Two very high speed jet cats arrived at the harbour entrance the same time as us, but the harbour control had warned us of their arrival so we were able to avoid them, and inside the marina we found a perfect little space for us on the visitors' pontoon. It was just after 7 and again the journey had taken much longer than predicted. We were cold and wet from waves splashing over us: the sun had been shining most of the day but it was a very cold wind. Once we were dry and warm we took stock of our surroundings. We were tucked in among some very large yachts, mostly from Holland. The two astern of us were attractive roosting spots, I think for starlings, and hundreds of them were settled on their top crossrees and clinging to the rigging.

We paid our marina dues, had some tasty Rob eggs and bacon and heavenly cake, and settled down for an early night as we were getting up at 4 in the morning. Rob had a bad night worrying about the next day's trip and especially the time of our arrival at Blakeney and getting over the bar. After doing some more calculations, he decided we didn't have to leave quite so early in the morning.

Tuesday, 27th August. We were away just before 6 with a favourable tide. A calm morning with a Force 2-3 wind, and we saw the sun coming up, a big red ball. It was not long before we moved into fog. This cleared fairly soon on the sea, but the land remained draped all morning, which hid anything of interest which might distract us from hours and hours of chugging through very bumpy grey sea. The wind was straight on the nose so we had to motor. We came to a windfarm - that gave us something to look at and count! Only 1 not working out of 28 - not bad! Slowly we crept past, and by late morning we could see the coast line, but the wind which was forecast to move round to NE had moved to NW, which destroyed any hope we had of sailing. All day the GPS had been having trouble picking up enough satellites and we kept having to unfix the machine and wave it in the air. We had an early lunch and treated ourselves to snacks the rest of the day. The sea remained grey and mostly empty - a few gannets flew past, a couple of guillemots, and a few gulls and terns - and there was a spectacular air battle between a gull and a tern, swooping and dive bombing. One gull stayed with us for quite a long time, flying low very close beside us and behind us: almost seemed to want to land on us. The only sign of boats were two yachts some distance away as we neared Cromer.

The land became more interesting with steep, unstable sandy cliffs appearing. The houses and caravan sites perched along the top looked in imminent danger of falling into the sea. Every now and

again the sun almost managed to break through, but all day the grey cloud dominated and the wind was chilly, feeling cold and damp. The afternoon seemed to pass more quickly. There was Cromer to take an interest in with its pier - surprisingly not marked on the charts. For several miles either side of Cromer we had to dodge many flags marking crab pots, and then on the cliffs just before Sheringham where two paragliders were having lots of fun. One of them flew along parallel to us for nearly half a mile, and then soared up over a high lump of cliff near Sheringham, where he swooped and played around for a while before returning along the lower cliff.

Contrary to the forecast, the wind stubbornly stayed N and NW, so Rob's hope of using the sails once we started going round the top of Norfolk was dashed, and so on we chugged with the engine doing a fine job. We finally arrived at Blakeney Haven at 6 pm, having travelled 47 miles. This was completely the wrong time to get in over the bar which showed as a continuous line of breaking water for half a mile. Rob had had conversations with the local knowledge, John Temple: there had been no way we could have arrived earlier and we needed to arrive before dark, so we were going to have to wait until 8.30 (when the water was covering the nearby wreck) before we could get in. We anchored for a bumpy, cold 1 ½ hours, thankful that the wind was quite light. Rob wrote up the log and after he'd checked the autohelm log it froze, and when we needed it for getting into Blakeney it went dead!

At 7.45 with the wreck only partially covered, we decided to have a go and got in with no problem. We followed the green buoys along banks covered with seals, literally hundreds of them lolling around together. We continued to follow the green buoys leading to The Pit where we could moor for the night, and soon found ourselves aground. We managed to get off and go a bit further, but then got very firmly stuck with the water flowing fast and pushing us on even more. It was going to take a while for the water to rise enough to get through, we didn't know where we were going and it was almost dark, so we dropped anchor, cleared out the cabin and settled in to get warm and have some food.

Just then a motor boat pattered up to us and we groaned! We were anchored mid channel and probably in the way. But it turned out to be Charlie Ward who had been alerted by John Temple that a Shrimper was coming in and could he keep an eye out for us! He said we couldn't stay where we were as we were in the middle of a mussel bed and would not be popular if found there, but he led us through to The Pit as the water had risen enough, and he put us onto one of his buoys where we would be able to stay upright for the night - a real knight in shining armour! Rob knew of him already as the designer and producer of Norfolk Gypsies. He used to own a Shrimper and he was a great friend of the Pumphreys!

We settled down for a comfortable evening and were ready for an early bed - it had been quite a day!

Wednesday, 28th August We woke to an extraordinary sight surrounded by mud and green weedy slopes and boats tipped at drunken angles all round us. We were aground but had just enough water to stay upright. We had originally planned to stay the day at Blakeney, but when Rob checked the forecast we decided it would be a much better day to travel to Kings Lynn with the wind due to be more easterly, and with stronger winds coming in the following day.

At 9.15 we set off. It had been a beautiful clear blue morning, then clouds had gathered and then mist had come down, and it was looking horribly like yesterday's cold grey weather, but after a couple of hours the mist cleared and the sun came out, and the sea was blue and oily calm. We called in at the barge 'Juno' to get Charlie Ward's details but there was only a little black dog on board, so we headed out uneventfully following the green buoys, past the seals who were fast losing their sandbanks, and out over the bar. Our problem for the day was that the electrics were not working properly. It seemed

that the main battery was not holding its charge. Luckily the GPS map had its own power for a few hours, and with care we were able to use the map and echo sounder for short periods as the solar panel trickle charged the battery.

After our unpleasant day yesterday, it was a very pleasant, if long, day. The sun shining, the sea calm though a frustrating day for Rob with almost no wind. The Wash was like a millpond and we chugged our way southwards towards Kings Lynn. The Pilot warned us that we should not try to go into Kings Lynn at low tide, and advised us to anchor near buoy 8 in Bull Dog Channel, some 6 miles away. This we did amongst low lying sandbanks some occupied by more seals. There followed a surreal period - anchored in a calm sea with miles of empty water all round us as the sandbanks were slowly covered, no sign of any land in any direction: us in the cockpit with our g & ts playing Scrabble (I won for a change!). We saw a fine murmuration of starlings, and heard some noisy jet aircraft on exercise.

We went below when it cooled off and had a good supper of chicken in white sauce, rice and corn. It was calm when we went to bed but soon a wind got up. It increased to a 3 - 4, and we had a most uncomfortable night being rolled and tossed about by the short, sharp waves it kicked up. Sometime in the night it died down, so we did manage to get some sleep.

Thursday, 29th August. It was a calm morning and sunny, and we woke to find ourselves still in the middle of this huge empty expanse of water!

Today we had the problem of getting to Denver Sluice before the tide turned early afternoon. We needed to stop in Kings Lynn to do some shopping and get petrol and water. As we didn't know what the mooring would be like in Kings Lynn and as the sea was so calm, Rob decided to de-rig while we were at anchor. He was loathe to get the sail down but in fact as the wind started to get up it had moved to the south (sod's law), so at 9.15 we set off for Kings Lynn yet again motoring against the wind.

We found there was a smart new pontoon right by the town centre so we could have arrived last night. There was a tea shop just where we emerged onto the quay, and we ordered coffees with the ulterior motive of using their loos. On the next door table were Ernie and Kit Bird and hearing that we needed petrol they very kindly offered to drive Rob the ½ mile to Morrisons which was the nearest petrol station. Extraordinarily we discovered that he had made the key that Jamie had lent us for opening the Cam locks! I went shopping and we all arrived back at the quay at exactly the same time. The powers that be were expecting a £5 fee for letting us back onto the pontoon, but Rob visited the Tourist Information Centre in the fine old custom house and argued our case that we'd only stopped for supplies, and they let us out.

We left on schedule at 12 noon for our dash to Denver Sluice. It was a head wind but we made 6 knots with the tide. We were expecting a strong flood current - 4 knots, but it was only 1 knot! The Great Ouse became shallower, banks lined with reeds and rushes, there were many coots and moorhens with young scuttling about, and ducks and swans. We saw a Marsh Harrier and grebes with their tiny striped young. Roofs of houses just peeped over the banks showing how low the land was on either side of us. At 2 pm we arrived at the sluice in good time before the tide turned. We were let straight into the lock where a narrow boat was already waiting to go through. Once deposited in the river on the other side, we tied up and got our river licence and had lunch. The lockkeeper gave us an excellent chart of the river.

The calm of the river was wonderful after the bumpiness of the last 4 days. A very different feel here to the downstream river: neat piling along the edges, boats moored, willows leaning over calm water and a mass of yellow and white water lilies along the edge of the river. There were now more cows and sheep grazing on the grassy bunds. The sun was still shining and we pottered along for a couple of hours to where the Little Ouse split from the Great Ouse and the Ship Inn beckoned. We had a drink sitting on their grassy bank before moving on to the next mooring area. It was still quite early but we tied up there and got going on a Scrabble challenge. Rob was determined to win! He did, just - I was only 10 points behind him. A fairly main road ran along beside the river here but the high bank sheltered us from most of the noise and it was a very peaceful evening and night.

Friday, 30th August. Not such a fine looking morning, but the clouds cleared later and the sun was warm but the strong south wind was cold.

After breakfast we set off for Ely arriving 10.30ish. The scenery along the river had become very different with flood plains with willows on one side and many tall trees. Soon the impressive towers of the Cathedral appeared above the trees. We chugged through the town and stopped at Bridge Boatyard to enquire about a windlass and to visit their loos. We were advised that they didn't have the right sort of windlass, and it was likely that we wouldn't need one anyway, so we chugged back towards the town and moored up outside the Cutter Inn.

We found a beautiful grassy park area, full of trees, with a path winding uphill to the Cathedral, and inside we marvelled at the wonderful roofs, especially the octogan tower, and the stained glass windows - glowing with the colours of brilliant jewels. Returning to the Cutter Inn via the shops, we had a bowl of chips and a pint before setting off again. The map said it would take us 8 hours from Ely to Cambridge, but it was much quicker than that and we were outside the Cam Sailing Club by 4 o'clock even with a long delay at Bottisham Lock. Following a slight misunderstanding, the key I had to operate the lock was not the correct one, and Rob went off to borrow a key from one of the narrow boats moored nearby. It then took an age to sort out all the buttons and levers to make the lock work - it will be quicker next time!

There was a big cheer from Rob when we entered the Cam, his home territory! The water meadows and the many willows and poplars made him nostalgic - and even more so when we moored for the night in the exact spot where 'Puffin', the family boat when he was growing up, used to be moored at the edge of the grassy lawns of the Cam Sailing Club. There was time to relax in the cockpit before it got cold - the sun was still shining but the chilly wind was still blowing. Rob met up with a Richard who was doing restoration work on a flat bottomed boat in one of the huts. He gave us the code for the clubhouse and lent us a key for the locks. A class of novice canoeists kept us entertained with their antics, and the two daughters of a family barbecuing nearby were having fun in and out of the water with their young springer spaniel. Their father and grandfather came over for a chat, David and Mike Hawthorn, and we exchanged sailing anecdotes. Coincidentally - Mike lives at Ufford and keeps his boat at Eversons.

After supper it was the deciding Scrabble challenge - another horrible nail-biting battle. All a bit of a farce as the scores ended up the same, which meant one of us had gone wrong with our scoring as Rob had to be way ahead of me having gone all out, and I had done nothing special and was left with the 'Q' and the 'Z' in my hand. Also I was querying the use of 'jesty' which I will look up when we get home. (Author's note: I have now looked up 'jesty' in the Scrabble Dictionary, and it does not exist so the game has been announced nul and void! The deciding challenge has still to be played.)

Saturday, 31st August. Amazing sunshine again, and strong, cold wind. We made use of the showers in the Cam Sailing Club - a very nice well appointed clubhouse, and there was plenty of hot water and soap provided. A couple of members came in who were going off on a cruiser race to Ely. Rob photographed the list of Club Commodores showing his father 'C.H.Whittle 1957 - 1959'

We continued our way into Cambridge. There was not as much weed as Rob had feared, though we had to put the engine into reverse now and again to keep the propellor free. We passed water meadows with contented cows grazing in the sun shaded by willows and poplars. Rob saw his 3rd and 4th kingfishers, though so far I'd failed to see any. And the number of swans increased enormously. There was a lot of activity all round us, with dozens of cyclists and runners on the tow path and many rowers in the river.

Once in Cambridge the banks were lined with narrow boats, but we found a nice little gap just after Jo's bridge alongside Midsummer Common. Rob went off across Midsummer Common to get the paper and bread in the town centre, and I stayed on board and had a lovely time doing a painting. There were many distractions from cycle races along the tow path, rowing lessons for beginners on a pairs and on an eight, plus many other rowers up and down the river. I had a visit from the River Bailiff as we weren't displaying a licence number. Rob had the registration certificate in his wallet so I was issued with a 'notice', but later he returned and Rob was able to give him the information he needed.

We had a relaxed afternoon doing the crossword and sudokus, and eating some of the goodies that Rob had brought back from Fitzbillies, including some rather strange and extremely expensive sausage rolls. At 5.30 Jo (Rob's daughter) arrived at the run bearing champagne and the champagne flutes that we had given her for her birthday. We toasted 'Bumble Chugger's arrival in Cambridge and then chugged off down river to The Plough, where we had a good meal of duck and sea bass. They were rather slow producing our food and we had to keep chivvying them as we had to get back to our mooring before dark. We found our way back alright and had some tea before Jo left us to go home. It was only about 9 o'clock and she couldn't believe we were going straight to bed!

Sunday, 1st September. Jo arrived, at the run again, very promptly at 7.55 and off we set down river retracing our way past The Plough. Cambridge was already very active for a Sunday morning, with runners, cyclists and rowers. It was a lovely day with the sun shining: we operated Baits Bite Lock and Bottisham Lock very efficiently and chugged our way to the junction of the Cam with the Great Ouse - we had a brief glimpse of Ely Cathedral in the distance.

There was a different feel to the Great Ouse heading westwards: it was narrower and more reeded than the Cam and there were higher banks on either side. Around midday we reached The Lazy Otter and went ashore for a drink. We didn't stay long as we needed to be at Jones Boathaven before they closed at 5, as we were leaving 'Bumble Chugger' there for the night. The river changed quite a lot during its length, widening and narrowing, rushes and reeds along its banks, sometimes there were fields, sometimes willows and bushes. We saw a harrier and some hawks and a huge number of herons. Rob saw yet another kingfisher.

We neared Hermitage Lock which looked rather different from the other locks we'd passed through, and there was a red light shining - we weren't sure what we would have to do. Then magically as we approached, the lock gates opened and the light went green. A lockkeeper had seen us arriving and with no effort on our part, we were deposited out the other side. A very different scene met us: we were now in a tidal part of the river, with shallow water and muddy banks. The large Earith Sluice towered above us on one side. We chugged on through Earith and the two or three miles to the next

lock. We were excited to see two seals, as well as several more herons and egrets. Through Brownhill Staunch Lock and we were back to the pleasanter non-tidal part of the river.

Onto the last leg of our journey to St.Ives. The last lock required a windlass, and we had not been able to get one, but our luck was good and as we arrived at the lock we were waved in ahead of two motor boats and a couple of canoeists who were waiting on the pontoon. Round the corner from the lock was Jones Boatyard where we left 'BC' for the night, and set off walking across some fields and a long bridge into St.Ives. Part of the bridge looked very old and had a little chapel built into one of its parapets. St.Ives is an attractive old town. We walked through it looking for the guided busway to take us back to Cambridge where we were spending the night with Jo. It was quite hard to track down with no directions to it. When we finally got to the terminus, it was to find that there were no more buses running that evening. There was someone else there who had been caught out, and we shared a taxi.

In the morning we left the same time as Jo went off to work, and headed for the station and a train back home. It was very tempting to stay at home having got there, but we strong-mindedly picked up the car and trailer, drove back to St.Ives and returned with 'Bumble Chugger' in tow.