

National Shrimper Week - June 1997

This was another record breaking event, though this year the records were all meteorological! Probably the best news of the week was that the pollen count was the lowest in living memory.

We listened to the weather pundits on the radio, only to learn that Britain is still in the grip of a 200 year drought. This was hard to believe, such was the volume of rain which fell on the Solent. The black storm clouds of the famous Hayling Island monsoon seemed to concentrate its whole force on the Emsworth Channel, turning the day into night and the rain gauge went right off the scale. We wondered if the hose-pipe ban was still in force? Similar freak wind and rain were encountered in Yarmouth and Cowes, making them more like the South Col than the Isle of Wight.



The conditions reminded one of that famous Turner painting: "A typhoon bursting in a Simoon over the Whirlpool of Maelstrom, with a ship on fire, an eclipse and the effects of a lunar rainbow".

Fortunately, Cornish Shrimpers float, and we were able to keep our chins above water, by constant bailing and summoning all hands to the pumps. Greatly to their credit, some boats and crews managed to get through the whole week, though others were forced to "scatter", like a war-time convoy after concerted attacks from the enemy.

The wind was sometimes up at 5-6, gusting 7, and enabled all the crews to perfect their reefing skills. Several boats made significant passages on double reefed main or furled jib, and there was talk of introducing triple reefing. We were also provided with the ideal opportunity to test out our oilskins - I now understand why the manufacturers refer to oilskins as 'foul weather gear'.

Despite the conditions, our two Commodores, Christopher Sharland (Shellback) and Trevor Heritage (Jessie) maintained a stiff upper lip throughout, and their sangfroid kept morale high in the whole fleet, with very few boats totally written off and not many crewmen/women lost overboard. Similarly, their leadership under fire meant that there were not many desertions, though some prominent members of the fleet were seen to jump ship, and opt for the Isle of Wight ferry. All in all, in terms of losses, our Commodores at least did better than Admiral Villeneuve at Trafalgar, and quite rightly they were re-elected for perpetuity!

Herewith a little more detail for the masochistic:

Saturday - The fleet had been instructed to gather in Chichester Yacht Basin, and indeed they came from far and wide, both local boats and those from more distant parts, such as: the East Coast (Albert - John Clogg), Mylor in Cornwall (Jebedee - Christopher Whitely), Plymouth (Solo Dancer - Stella & Peter Boundy), Yorkshire (Misty Morn - Alison & Roger Tushingham), Rickmansworth (Black Sheep - Christina & Ian Fisher), and from Belgium (Parnium IV - Freddy Glorie and his crew Ulrich, originally from Germany, and now living in Belgium).

Clementine had departed from the Beaulieu River entrance that morning (0930) bound for Chichester in company with Jessie (Trevor & Jill Heritage) and Outrigger (Tony Coups). The wind was judged to be SW 6, and we heard on the radio that it was gusting 40 knots. As you would expect, we made a fast passage past Portsmouth (the point of no return) and through the forts. Once out of the lea of the IOW, the seas started to build up (somebody called the waves the size of houses!) and we wondered what it would be like over Chichester Bar. We soon found out.

Well, we made it and were soon breaking all Chichester Harbour regulations by sailing through the moored boats off Itchenor. On locking into the Yacht Basin, we found around 15 Shrimpers already rafted up, as well as an interloper (Crabber - Winkle Too - David & Jean Cornhill). We were also in time to see Black Sheep make an attempt on the Shrimper launching record (which is 42 minutes). Unfortunately, they were judged to have been wind-assisted and were disqualified. A very congenial evening was spent in the local Yacht Club, and morale rose even higher when we heard that we were booked in for a cooked breakfast the following morning.

Sunday - after an excellent breakfast, we tacked down the Chichester Channel and intended to sail up to Langstone (The Ship) for a lunchtime rendezvous with the shore party. That was when we were hit by the now famous Hayling Island electric storm, with thunder & lightning. The sky turned to night and the visibility to zero. However, some members of the SOA luncheon club did make to Langstone and others to Northney (Saucy Anne II - Sir Clifford Champion - managed to attend both lunches!). All the boats then struggled back to Sparks, in time to prepare for another excellent dinner and congenial evening, thanks to the Hayling Island Sailing Club.

Monday - the wind had dropped, so after a delicious cooked breakfast ashore, we motor-sailed out of the harbour on our way to the Beaulieu. Once through the forts, the wind picked up from the west, and we tacked on with the ebb tide to reach the Beaulieu in good order. More boats joined us (making a total of 23), and having nicely tangled up our mooring lines between the posts off Bucklers Hard, we inflated our dinghies and went ashore for a bar snack at the Master Builder, where the wine flowed in torrents, not unlike the Hayling Island Monsoon.

Tuesday - after another delicious breakfast ashore, we slid down the Beaulieu River in company, and immediately noticed that the conditions were ideal for testing Clementine's new *Grand Foc* (see last year's Shrimper Week report for the background to this piece of scientific innovation). Once out of the river, we set course for Newtown Creek and the wind filled the sail to perfection, driving the boat in a most satisfactory manner. This enabled us to sail backwards at a great rate and were soon off Egypt Point (Cowes), not exactly on the way to Newtown.

We did finally make it for a pleasant lunch and the statutory contribution to the National Trust, and we then continued to Yarmouth, where the fleet had reassembled, some having been into the Beaulieu, some to Ashlett and some to Cowes. We all met up for dinner at the Royal Solent, and another most enjoyable evening in a prime setting.

Wednesday - the morning dawned with a ferocious rain storm, beating on the boom tent. After testing Yarmouth's brand new ablutions, and after several councils of war on the pontoon and over breakfast in the George Hotel, the racing was abandoned (shame - some people only go on Shrimper Week for the racing!). The fleet left for Cowes and the Medina River, including Perriwinkle, Demelza, Shellback, Parnium IV, Jaunty, Jessie, Just Right, Misty Morn and Catherine, as well as the Crabber (Winkle Too - Jean & David Cornhill) and the Pilot Cutter (Badger - Big Trevor Thomas). Clementine, Blue Shrimp (Clare Morrison), Tinker (James Templer) and several others decided 'discretion was the better part of valour' and sailed for home ports (in the case of Clementine, this was temporarily Hythe Marina Village). As is often the case, once outside, conditions weren't too bad and the rain eased off, making it an easy reach under reefed main.

Thursday - the wind was now strong and in the North, so the planned trip to Bembridge was abandoned. Some boats stayed in the Medina River, pinned down by the strong winds, while those wanting to get back to Chichester risked it, and made a lumpy passage in a decreasing Northerly. On entering Chichester Harbour, they were hit by another violent rain storm, causing the boats to seek shelter as best they could. Happily, most of the fleet managed to meet up in due course in Emsworth, for visits to the Laundromat, the Lord Raglan, and the local Indian Restaurant.

The remnants of the fleet left on the Island were not downhearted, and kept up the traditions of the SOA luncheon club in the Royal Corinthian in Cowes (as far as I know, they are still there!).

Friday - the boats in Emsworth Marina cleared the sill (0700) and then went ashore for a splendid breakfast (reported to be the best of the week). Regrettably, the Northerly wind had reduced the usual four hour stand to three hours, and the boats found themselves aground. In trying to get off, Parnium IV lost her propeller and eventually managed to get back into the Yacht basin under sail! This was a fine achievement, as the strengthening winds in the Chichester Channel made sailing hard going.

Of the 20 or so boats to start the week, only eight remained (Shellback, Solo Dancer, Albert, Parnium IV, Black Sheep, Maisie, Demelza and Just Right), a great credit to skippers and crews for having survived so successfully.

Friday night (our last night together) and our end-of-cruise dinner at the Yacht Club - morale remained high and everything ended on a high note, with Freddy receiving a well-deserved trophy for his participation (and stoicism) and reminding us to meet again next year for National Shrimper Week in the Netherlands.

Our two Commodores were re-elected unopposed and were applauded warmly for all their toughness under fire, their leadership qualities, and their impeccable organisation throughout the week.

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