

River Medway Cruise – Gillie and Robin Whittle

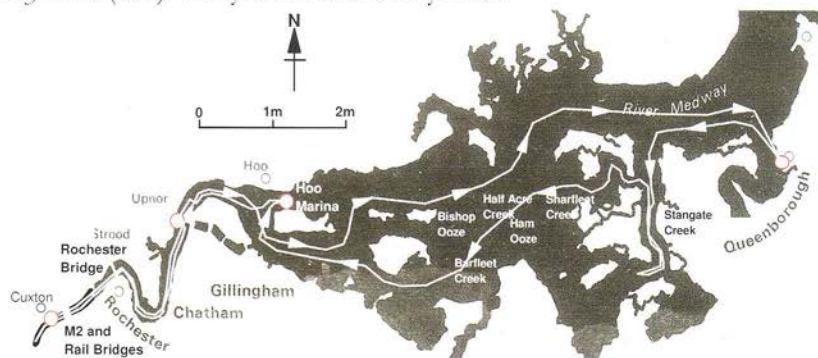
Four boats took part in the East Coast Rally to the River Medway (21– 27 May 2009) to explore the estuary and then to motor up to Tonbridge with rig down.

Thrift (96): Paul Durbin with grandson Andrew (first part only)

Bumble Chugger (124): Robin and Gillie Whittle

Gwendoline (823): June Bird and Des Kaliszewski (first part only)

Shy Talk (930): Tony Coles and Cathy Buck



Friday 21st May: After an easy journey to Cuxton Marina we met up with *Thrift* and *Gwendoline*. Once safely launched we set off down river with the tide and a pleasant breeze. Along the way we saw a seal and a Russian submarine and then passed Rochester Castle and Cathedral. The low arches of Rochester Bridge were going to be a problem and we approached very cautiously stern first with the sails down and the engine running. Our aerial clattered along the bottom of the bridge but was flexible enough not to suffer any damage. *Thrift* and *Gwendoline* waited for more head room as the tide went down. We sailed on down river past Chatham Docks in sunshine.



Mid-afternoon, after passing the massive Kingsnorth and Grain Power Stations and nearing the flat, open expanse of water leading into the Thames, we rounded Queensborough Spit at the entrance to The Swale to find Tony and Cathy in *Shy Talk* moored to a good sturdy buoy close to the pontoon ashore.



We all rafted up and enjoyed cups of tea and excellent flapjacks made by Andrew. There were various sorties ashore and, with the sun below the yardarm, we celebrated the start of our rally with gins and tonic. A tender drew up beside us, and we were asked for mooring fees but were generously told that if we left before the Harbour Master arrived at 8am there would be no charge. We all rowed ashore and found the Queensborough Yacht Club - very friendly with a great welcome by Margaret, the Commodore-cum-cook. She chatted to us while we downed Spitfires and ciders and then magically produced our orders for steaks, steak pies and sausages, followed by apple crumble - all very good.

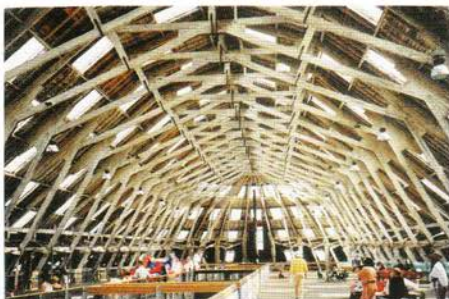


Saturday 23rd May: We woke to an amazing morning - very still and a clear blue sky. Grain Power Station and the moored boats around were perfectly mirrored in the water. We left at 7.30am as a light SW breeze started ruffling the water and motor-sailed out of The Swale and into Stangate Creek. We anchored in Halstow Creek for breakfast and watched the water slowly covering the muddy banks. We then sailed back to Sharfleet Creek in a force 3-4. Ham Ooze was now a vast expanse of water and we followed it through to Half Acre Creek and Bishop Ooze: an area reminiscent of Walton Backwaters but on a much larger scale, with miles of winding creeks round green islands. Arriving at Hoo Marina, we enjoyed a walk into Hoo Saint Werburgh village, after which we were given a friendly welcome at the Hoo Ness Yacht Club for supper.

Sunday 24th May: A beautiful morning. The wind E, force 2-3. Showers and a leisurely start, with the marina totally surrounded by mud. By 11am we were able to escape from the marina and sail the short distance to Upnor, picking up buoys close to the Castle. Tony did an efficient taxi service ferrying us across the river to the Chatham marina pontoon for our visit to Chatham Dockyard. An amazing place - the Wall of Wood tour showing how the old wooden warships were built; the covered slip with an immense, dramatic wooden roof; a tour of HMS Gannet,

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a Victorian naval sloop built for sail and steam; the Maritime Museum; and the ¼ mile long Ropewalk in the longest brick building in Europe, with a demonstration of how ropes were made. We ate aboard that evening, visiting *Sby Talk* for a drink afterwards, joined by Paul and Andrew.



Monday 25th May: We woke to a very different morning; cloudy and much cooler, with thunderstorms forecast. In very little wind, we drifted with the tide back up through Chatham and Rochester. Paul and Andrew had to get home, so they peeled off as we passed Cuxton, and we carried on up the narrowing Medway. Soon the forecast rain began and increased as the wind picked up. The river wound through some nice countryside, but we also passed old factories and works and remains of war defences. Tony, who was ahead of us, was caught by a huge gust and broached dramatically. We got our sails down as fast as we could, and saved my hat which had blown overboard in the confusion.

Aylesford Bridge is quite low and we anchored to take our masts down. There was a huge amount of debris being washed up the river, including quite large tree trunks. In the middle of sorting out the rig we realised that a log had caught on the anchor chain and was pulling us upstream towards the bridge. Just in time we got it free and were able to motor away feeling rather shaken at the narrow escape from breaking our mast! *Gwendoline* arrived to do some shopping before starting on the long sail back to Aldeburgh. After shouting our farewells, we set off under Aylesford Bridge and headed for Allington Lock, the start of the inland navigation. The rain had eased and the sun was quite hot. The river was quite wide through Maidstone, with leafy walkways along the edge of the river. Much of the river after this was very beautiful - narrower with trees overhanging the water, the banks harbouring coots, moorhens and duck.



It started to rain when we reached Hampstead Lock and by the time we got to Twyford we were all like drowned rats. The Anchor provided a good meal. Warm, dried out and well fed, we returned to the boats.

Tuesday 26th May: It rained a lot in the night and the wind blew. It was a dreary chug until midday when the rain stopped and the sun came out. We passed through pleasant countryside, much more open with views as we slowly climbed higher: Sluice Weir Lock, Oak Weir Lock, East Lock, Porter's Lock, Eldriges Lock and finally to the Town Lock in Tonbridge. We continued through the town to a recreation ground where we could tie up on the grassy edge for lunch.



We needed to get to Allington Lock by Wednesday midday, so we set off on the homeward voyage, seeing several kingfishers and a shag battling with an 18" eel that it had caught. We reached Twyford by 6pm and tied up where we'd been before. Gin and tonic on board with some very fine canapes made by *Shy Talk* and then back to The Anchor for another good meal.



Wednesday 27th May. Cloudy and the wind not so strong, but the rain had returned. We made good time to Allington Lock and had a couple of hours to wait. At 2.15 we were allowed through the lock, and continued our way to Cuxton, keeping a good lookout for debris which was being carried up the river. We got to Cuxton soon after 4pm and were home in Woodbridge by 7.30pm. Tony and Cathy had booked into the marina for the night as a gale was forecast. They set off very early in the morning and got back to their mooring in Oare Creek on the Swale by early afternoon.

