

Gill's Shrimper Log 2017

This is the story of a Shrimper rally in Milford Haven, Pembrokeshire, West Wales. For 10 days during June 2017, I lived on board our Shrimper *Jessie May* as crew. Rather like camping afloat you might say. However, we had a most interesting time exploring an area that was new to us. My husband/skipper and I renewed friendships made over many years of attending these annual rallies and enjoyed making new friends.

We had an uneventful time travelling to South Wales, with *Jessie May (JM)* fixed securely to the trailer, provided you ignore our being pulled over by Avon & Somerset Police whilst on the M.5. It seems our trailer board had worked loose, but the officer was really helpful and appeared more interested in discussing his retirement plans with the skipper than enforcing the law. Soon we were on our way again. Strange that you have to pay to enter Wales via the Severn Bridge, yet it's free to get out!

We arrived early; in fact 2 days early, which allowed for *JM* to be rigged and launched at Neyland Marina, with a bonus for me of a few days in a local B&B and a chance to drive over to visit St David's Cathedral, in the smallest city in the UK. Over the next 2 days we saw 30 boats arrive, five of these being the new 21's.

And so began Shrimper Week. However life on board a Shrimper is never easy. I never seemed to get used to the proximity of the cabin roof, hatchway, boom and other unforgiving hard edges that made contact with my head over the next week or so. Next time I shall invest in a cycle helmet!

For the next three days it was very windy and often damp, although *Lady Eleanor* ventured out for an early sail. Friday saw Shrimper Week proper begin, with a lovely evening at the nearby Ferry House Inn; a great meal and happy people with the expectation of 10 days sailing to come. A couple of boats still had to launch on Saturday and of course there was plenty of help available. One or two boats went out for a local sail in the brisk SW wind, others stayed in the marina to catch up on news among the crews. Yet more took in an excursion to visit the nearby coastal resort of Tenby. Saturday night saw us in Neyland Yacht Club taking advantage of their very noisy beer festival.

Sadly, the first event scheduled for the Sunday, a race organised for us by Neyland YC, was cancelled by the Race Officer owing to high wind. He seemed more disappointed than us, as he really wanted to host this event. Most were in agreement with this decision as the wind was still very strong. Then as the day wore on there was considerable mulling as to whether the planned evening visit to Cresswell Quay by boat would take place. This was a trip to go up river with the tide to a magical destination, but the Cresswell River becomes very shallow as you progress. In fact, a local sailor the previous day had said, as if quoting a spell, 'When Black Rock is covered it is safe to go'. We never did find Black Rock!

The Cresselly Arms is a truly original old fashioned Victorian pub in beautiful wooded surroundings. The remarkable publican was to cook us all a BBQ. In the end 6 Shrimpers ventured safely up the river and arrived as the sun was setting, with everyone else resorting to cars for transport. A very good evening with a great BBQ and excellent beer. One Shrimper decided to remain alongside for the night. Was it the proximity of the loos or the best bitter that attracted them I wonder.

I awake next morning and something is different. The wind has stopped howling and the rain is not clattering on the awning. I lay in my sleeping bag relishing the warmth and comfort of the amazing Memory Foam laid on top of the bunk cushion, and listen to the usual creaking and groaning of fenders and rope. The sun is shining and after indulging in a late breakfast at the Brunel Café, we sailed out of Neyland Marina for a brisk sail down the Haven, avoiding the Irish Ferry and tug by hoving to whilst they safely passed.

Late afternoon found us at anchor taking tea at the entrance to the Pembroke River. The plan was for all the Shrimpers to meet at 1730, before together heading up the river to Pembroke. We wound our way slowly up this very winding, narrowing river. After buoy No.30, I gave up counting. Eventually the last bend was rounded and there before us stood the magnificent Pembroke Castle. There was some excitement as we waited for the tide barrier to be dropped and the footbridge pulled back, to permit us entry to the pool. Soon the tide was right and in we motored, to moor for the night with the imposing castle towering above us. A quick 'recce' that evening revealed that food outlets were scarce here, but one group, us included, found a Chinese restaurant below the walls of the castle, where we dined very well.

Tuesday morning saw all boats cast off by 0730 and jilling around in the moat, like runners at the start of The Derby. However, all was not well at the tide barrier. We appeared to be captured by the Welsh in the moat. A failure of the bridge motor meant we were stuck for the day whilst an engineer was summoned. This however proved to be quite fortuitous as we discovered that Pembroke was a great little town. We all managed a visit to the castle, brought alive for us by a very knowledgeable guide who painted a most intriguing picture of life at the castle through the centuries. By teatime, news had spread that the bridge was fixed and we could leave on the 1945 tide. The Town Clerk even came down to offer his apologies and wish us well. Prior to departure most of the fleet descended upon the local 'chippie' and enjoyed a fish supper on the quayside, just in case we were late arriving at the next port. At 1945 the bridge opened and the fleet took off down river. Our next destination was Milford Haven Marina. We just made it without navigation lights and luckily the lock was still on free-flow.

Sunshine and some easing of the wind on Wednesday allowed the fleet to set sail for Skomer, a small island just off the Pembrokeshire coast, some 14 miles west of Milford Haven marina. We had been advised by Roy to anchor in South Haven and what a joy when the little cove was reached, protected as we were by high cliffs. We were surrounded by

hundreds of little puffins, playing in and around the clear crystal waters, whilst hundreds more circled above. Add in hundreds upon hundreds of guillemots, shearwaters, razorbills and fulmars flying above the anchorage and it was an astonishing sight. Lunch was taken whilst we watched the sea birds and they watched us. As we made to leave, an inquisitive seal came up to watch and then nodded his goodbye. We enjoyed a long but uneventful sail back in light wind and sunshine, to successfully 'lock in' at Milford Marina.

The elasticity of the itinerary allowed for the proposed BBQ at Sandy Haven on Thursday to take place instead at Dale, owing to brisk southwesterly winds making the planned venue untenable. Having locked out of Milford Marina, we set out into a Force 5 and began beating west, down the Haven towards Dale. Luckily our 3rd reef meant that we were never over pressed. There were some big swells encountered as we passed across the Haven entrance, with deep hollows and high waves. Awe inspiring but a tad scary for the crew of *JM*. Then at last we were in the shelter and quiet calm of Dale Point and what a difference. We dropped the sails and motored up to Dale, with its pale sands, blue sea and pastel coloured cottages. The Shrimpers anchored and added to the pretty scene. Having rowed ashore, BBQs were set up on the sea wall, which proved perfect, being sheltered and with a pub and loos nearby. A most enjoyable lunch fest took place, interrupted only by an alert sailor noticing that the tide had receded to leave 2 Shrimpers balanced precariously on previously hidden rocks. However, all was dealt with quickly by the 'man of the match' Andy and helpers. The run back to Milford in late afternoon in lighter winds was great fun.

Friday saw us sailing back to Neyland in warm sunshine and enjoying a sunny afternoon with time to rest, play boats, or enjoy an impromptu cockpit party. A chance too, to take advantage of Neyland's good facilities and friendly atmosphere. Some boats would be departing on Saturday so a drinks and buffet evening had been arranged at the Brunel Café at the marina. Wayne the chef looked after us well with very good food, after which we were entertained by Trevor T, Jeannie and David, who were in good voice and encouraged us to sing along. A really jolly evening.

The weather was now firmly on our side and becoming warmer, so Saturday saw us sailing gently up the River Cleddau and then into the Carew River, where lack of wind caused us to fire up the motor. We managed to reach the tidal mill pond at Carew Castle just on high water and anchored for lunch. After an hour or so and studying the tide line on the wall, our nerves gave out and we motored back down the river to deeper water. Several of us stopped at Lawrenny at the mouth of the Cresswell River, to visit the Tea Rooms or to sample the beer at the Lawrenny Arms and indeed a couple of boats stayed there overnight on anchor. Later, back at Neyland a most enterprising Janet (of *Jolly Janet*) took orders for and arranged the delivery of a huge Chinese Take Away to feed the fleet, which was enjoyed on the terrace overlooking the marina.

With the temperature on Sunday morning nudging towards 30° the Shrimpers motored and occasionally sailed, as we explored the upper reaches of the River Cleddau. Once above

Neyland, the river wends through a mixture of wooded valleys and open farmland, with very little habitation to spoil the rural idyll. At Landshipping the river divides into the East and West Cleaddau. There was just time for us to explore a little of the West Cleaddau, but we had then to drop back to Llangwm, as a Shrimper lunch had been arranged. Boats anchored or picked up a buoy and once ashore there was a 15 minute walk in soaring temperatures to reach the Cottage Inn. However, the cold beer and very good carvery made it all worthwhile. Once back on board the boat, it was engine on and slowly motor down to Neyland on the ebb. I have to admit that the combination of beer, large lunch, hot sunshine and soporific engine drumming, caused *JM* to follow a most erratic course.

Sadly Monday morning saw most remaining boats hauling up or lifting out onto trailers, which when combined with long coffee and lunch breaks, seemed to take up most of the day. In the evening we all gathered again at the Ferry House Inn for the 'end of cruise' buffet, which was excellent. There were the usual speeches (thankfully short) and trophies awarded, with the Shrimper 'battle flag' being ceremoniously handed over to Robin Whittle who has agreed to organise Shrimper Week 2018. The evening ended with the crew of *Jolly Janet* giving a rendition of their latest Shrimper Week song, which of course went down a storm with the approving audience. We were sorry to say goodbye to our many friends, but I'm sure most will be back for Shrimper Week 2018.