

## Hampshire to Holland and Back – Peter May



We sailed from Lymington on an afternoon tide at the end of May, with a fair wind for a nice run to Chichester. Our eventual destination was the SOA Rally in Holland. Luckily we had the time, with no commitments for six weeks, and the inclination to do a longish sail in the Shrimper. We were rather at the mercy of the weather and, anticipating adverse winds, we left with time to spare.

Just inside Chichester entrance we picked up a mooring for the night. The next morning we were up at 4 am and sailing out past East Head, with a nice cup of tea and the dawn slowly brightening the sky. For the next three days we used alternating favourable tides to reach Littlehampton, Brighton and Eastbourne.

After leaving Sovereign Harbour, Eastbourne, the wind increased and was directly on our bow, but with the help of the engine and numerous tacks we arrived at the entrance to Rye in the afternoon of the fourth day, just before the tide turned against us. We motored the few miles up the River Rother to the old harbour in Strand Quay. Ashore, we found the finest 'Visiting Boat Owners Facilities' that we know of on the south coast, complete with indoor flowers and a guest book. We explored the neighbourhood on foot and, for our Saturday outing, caught the train to Winchelsea and walked back to Rye across the marshes. There were plenty of pubs and shops in Rye, so we stocked up on wet and dry stores.

Strand Quay was *La Mouette's* home for three days whilst we waited for the strong north-easterly to abate before continuing our voyage. After two days exploring and one day huddled in the cabin out of the rain, we were anxious not to spend another day sitting on the mud. So next day we were woken by the alarm at 3 am and were soon underway, feeling our way down the narrow unlit channel by torch and street light. In the main river there are proper flashing lights, so we swept on

at a good speed with the tide under us and cleared the river entrance at first light. We hoisted sail in light drizzle and a following westerly wind. I had the first watch, so the fishing line went over the side and back came three good mackerel for our dinner. Then the wind veered to northerly force 4, which suited us fine as we were heading across the shipping lanes toward Boulogne. Not many ships were in evidence, perhaps because the visibility was down to two miles.



*Strand Quay, Rye*

By midday we were only four miles from Boulogne, but as there was an east-going tide for the next six hours, it seemed a shame not to go on to Calais. The wind had freshened so we took in two reefs and beat up towards Cap Gris Nez. Off the headland it was a bit choppy, but the tide did the hard work and, once we were round the cape, the wind eased and we were able to shake out the reefs and lay a course for Calais. We were pretty salty on arriving in Calais and Robin walked into his shower fully clothed to wash the salt off his oilies. We had tied up alongside a friendly Irish cruiser and were invited into their spacious saloon for a cup of tea. They were on a delivery trip from Holland to Dublin, and so we acquired three folios of Dutch charts from them for a tenner. No excuse for not going on now.

The next day we had an easy sail to Dunkirk with a nice following wind. Arriving late and leaving at dawn, we were gone before the harbour master was out of his bed. Then on to Ostend, where we had a friend, which always adds to the pleasure of visiting a port. We stayed there a day being looked after by Colette, who furnished us with good cheer, Belgian buns and beer.

With a favourable wind we followed the flat dunes along to Blankenberge and Holland. The coastline has been spoilt in Belgium with monstrous apartment blocks erected haphazardly along the seaside. At the Dutch border these ugly buildings abruptly stopped. The highlight of these quiet days was changing the national flags as we passed from one country into the next.

## Hampshire to Holland and Back

In Flushing we discovered a most friendly 70-year old sailing club, up a backwater. The Club restaurant seemed well patronised, so we decided to eat there. We were not disappointed with our local fish dish and great puddings, all washed down with blond Dutch ale. The stop at this small club set the tone for the hospitality and kindness we were to receive during the whole of our stay in Holland.

We then entered the inland waterways and canals of Holland. At Flushing the road bridge opened only once an hour, and we called on VHF to request the opening times and sequences. The further into the canals we progressed, the less formal became the opening and closing procedures. Many of the locals seemed to pre-empt the signals for bridges and locks, and we willingly followed their example. We arrived at our final destination, Kortgene, on 11<sup>th</sup> June, in time for the Shrimper Dinner. It was good to see so many faces from past Shrimper gatherings.

At the end of the first week's sailing in Holland, we joined the cruise led by Freddie, which included a bumpy trip down the Schelde and ended with a farewell dinner in the old port of Flushing. Then, after waiting two days for a favourable wind, we sailed back to Blankenberg and, once there, had to wait yet again for the wind to moderate.

It was still rather windy as we ventured out again, hoping to reach Ostend. We were thrown around outside the breakwater, going nowhere fast against a very strong breeze, which was blowing spray directly into our faces. After half an hour we gave up, turned around and zoomed back into Blankenberg. Supped ashore from an enormous pizza and set off again at 0400 to be treated to much better weather. We were in Ostend for breakfast and invited Colette along for some cold pizza at lunchtime before we took the evening tide to Dunkirk. The modern architecture of the marina apartments has greatly improved the dockside at Dunkirk.

After a rather disturbed and noisy night, due to jolly locals on the next-door craft, we cast off early the next morning bound for Calais, where, six hours later, we picked up a buoy outside the swing bridge. We had lunch and a siesta then set out across the Channel to Dover. There was a definite improvement in the weather, the sun broke through the overcast skies and we had excellent visibility for the crossing. The only vessels that came anywhere near us were the cross-channel ferries. We saw the white cliffs of Dover shortly after departing Calais.

When we reached the coast of England, we ran along below the cliffs in order to keep out of the way of ferry traffic and tied up in Dover on a fine, warm summer's evening.

Next day, from our berth in the tidal marina, we saw the wind change favourably by dint of flags in the outer harbour. We cast off in great spirits and were under way in a matter of minutes, only to have the wind veer by 60 degrees as we passed out of the harbour entrance. On the plus side we were moving at a steady trolling speed, so we sailed on and caught our supper. There was a brisk wind and irregular sea. The cook had a memorable task that evening, with pans and fish sculling all around the cabin. However, the end result tasted excellent.

In the night it was sometimes difficult to pick out the navigation lights of other boats against the mass of shore lights. If they were motorised you could hear them. We only saw one other boat under sail during the night. One set of lights unexpectedly detached themselves from the shore lights and moved serenely past us. The night watches passed quickly and dawn was soon upon us. During the daytime an unexpected bonus was being able to listen to a test match and the shipping forecast on the same frequency. We sailed on through the next day and arrived in Littlehampton in the late afternoon, having sailed 87 miles in a little over 24 hours. It was a pleasant surprise to have Nigel and Sue, fellow Shrimpers, come down to have a beer with us that evening.



*Cooking at sea*

From Littlehampton we needed a couple of tides to get us to Lymington under sail. No giving up and using the motor now (the Skipper is a bit of a purist). We went ashore on the final afternoon for a walk at Woodside on the Isle of Wight, whilst we waited for the tide to change. It was after midnight when we finally tied up at Lymington and climbed into our bunks for our last untroubled night's sleep. This was our 32<sup>nd</sup> night aboard. The total distance logged on the trip was 618 nautical miles.

**Peter May and Robin Wearn** – *La Mouette* (379)