

NATIONAL SHRIMPER WEEK – CORNWALL 1999.

Text by *Barry Mellor*

This was another highly enjoyable, successful and well organised Shrimper Week.

The whole of the Falmouth estuary is enchanting, with lots of creeks and anchorages – ideal Shrimper country. Not surprising therefore to see so many Shrimpers, regrettably the majority with their sail covers still on – many owners no doubt unable to get time off to participate in Shrimper Week.

Having participated in 1994, *Clementine* was anxious to get on the water ahead of time, and so I came down from Poole on the Tuesday of the previous week. My plans to be craned in on the Wednesday were delayed by half a day, as a Moody 44 had that morning split its hull open on the Manacle Rocks, and had been rescued and towed in by the life boat. So great had the water ingress been that the helicopter had to bring up extra pumps. I had noted that the Shrimpers were to explore the Manacles the following Tuesday, and I therefore wondered whether to extend my life insurance arrangements or increase my subscription to the RNLI – or both.

Thursday - early morning off to Truro station to collect my crew Peter (who had arrived on the overnight sleeper from Paddington). Then off to the Helford River and a very pleasant lunch-time picnic at Durgan – this was a nostalgic trip for me, as I had enjoyed a family holiday there some years before (with car-top sailing dinghy). That evening, we tried dinner in the Ganges and were told by ‘mine host’ that the forthcoming Saturday night was likely to be a gastronomic disaster, so tough had the Shrimper Week committee been with the price negotiations. In fact, I think our legs were being pulled, as Saturday’s dinner was just fine.

Friday – exploring the Truro River, tacking up river in a brisk Northerly. We were given a warm welcome at the tiny Malpas boatyard where we stopped to lunch at the Heron Inn (and make a table reservation for Sunday). In the afternoon, it was on up to Truro to see the cathedral (and to spy out the location of Tesco’s), followed by a gentle sail back to the

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Pandora, and an excellent dinner and bottle of the local wine.

Saturday – less wind, but enough for *Clementine* to go and inspect the Manacles – they looked formidable, as if Poseidon had been sharpening them up, especially for our arrival. We then stood right out to sea and got an excellent view of the Lizard.

Meanwhile, back at Mylor, the skippers and crews were arriving, with some boats having come enormous distances eg *Tystie* (Martin Howard) from Scotland and *Whitecap* (Hermann Legger) from the Netherlands. We were also pleased to see George Fisher (*Black Sheep*), the youngest crewman in the fleet. In all, around 40 boats were registered for the week, with a dozen or so arriving by road trailer. We soon were making our way to the Ganges for our opening dinner and briefing. The dinner was both convivial and tasty, and it was clear from both the professionalism of the briefing (Mark Osborn - *Boyers Shrimper*) and the details provided in the joining instructions (prepared by Jane Bengé – *Grace of St Just*) that we would be in good hands for the week. The presence of Sheila Wellman (*Jenna*) at the gathering enabled several of us to put in our orders for rugby shirts with SOA logos etc. The briefing including an account from Phil Crook of the MetFax service – it seems that his boat (*Myrica*) is hooked up to cyberspace, from where satellite-transmitted digitised facsimile images of weather maps, high pressure systems and occluded fronts come wafting out of the ether. The list of safety equipment was also impressive: life belts, lead lines, buckets, torches and a variety of other high tech gadgetry. Well, we were soon to find out why a bucket was recommended! I also noted the need to be able to make “sound signals”, and regretted the absence of Sir Clifford Champion (*Saucy Anne II*). However, many skippers preferred to stow more traditional equipment, such as Cote de Rhone & Muscadet in wine boxes, as well as the infamous Black Sheep Ale and carboys of Scrumpy. Was it for this reason that *Albert* (John Clogg) looked so low in the waterline?

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Sunday – our shake down cruise to St Anthony's Head, rafting up for a picnic lunch just off the beach. We then made our way in convoy up the Truro River. At Malpas, a pontoon had been reserved for our overnight stay, on which we were to take part in a cooking competition, organised by (judged by and then eaten by) Mike Pollard (*Rachel-Jane*). No doubt this was his way of ensuring that he personally got adequately fed that evening! The winning entry (Wilf and Peter Coon - *Alba*) was by all accounts a gastronomic *tour de force*. Some Shrimpers did not participate in the cooking competition, no doubt inhibited by Mike's *cordon sanitaire* of security guards around the Truro Tesco's. It seems he didn't want any cheating. At that moment, siren voices were heard from the Heron Inn, which was most convenient as I had to pick up a new crew (Richard), Peter having jumped ship.

Monday – around eight boats started early (0500) and were led on a creek crawl up Ruan Creek by Martin Pumphrey (*Salt Horse*) – a Shrimper skipper who could be relied upon to display the Nelson touch. We then all sailed down the river and cruised in company to the Helford River, which looked as lovely as ever. Some of us then sailed/motor-sailed up to Gweek, and then back to Helford via Frenchman's Creek. The run back from Gweek enabled Toby Frere (*Woodstock*) to fly his new spinnaker, an interesting exercise. That evening, we were given a warm welcome and delicious supper at the Helford River Sailing Club.

Tuesday – a further display of Shrimper initiative saw us having a delicious breakfast in the Club, together with liberal use of their excellent facilities. Thereafter, there was shopping to be done in the village and then morning coffee back at the Club, while we waited for the morning sea mist to clear. Once visibility had improved we were off down the Helford River, accompanied by a school of porpoises. They seemed to like *Clementine*, and six or eight of them leaping and plunging all around us, like naughty children. This gave us the opportunity of photographing sections of sea where porpoises had been in view microseconds before! Regrettably the fog persisted, thereby testing those navigators who had

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recently acquired hand-held GPS's. There was much chatter on Channel 72, about "coordinates" and "waypoints", though whether this did much good is debatable. *Clementine* preferred to rely on more traditional methods of navigation, like following the man in front in the hope that he knows where he is going! Some boats made it out to the Manacles, and reported the rocks as razor sharp as ever. The mackerel out there were clearly eager to bite on a trailing hook, thereby providing delicious lunches for the successful. In the late afternoon, we made our way up to St Just Pool, where we were to enjoy a magnificent BBQ, in the garden of the home of Sheila & Claud Lanyon's (*Scalawag*). And what a BBQ, with high quality steaks, chops and sausages cooked to perfection by Joan & Mike Pollard and David Wellman. The salads and the strawberries were also wonderful, and the whole feast was a great tribute to the quality of Cornish agricultural produce and to Joan's expertise in selecting, purchasing and preparing everything. When I complimented Joan and Jane, I was told that Cornish wives like to look after their menfolk! I had to tell them that this admirable concept is completely unknown where I live in London N 7.

Wednesday – the day of the Treasure Hunt. This had the crews racing around Falmouth and St Mawes, trying to unravel a number of cryptic clues. Unlike the treasure hunt in 1994, it was not obligatory to memorise the instructions and then swallow the piece of paper. It was certainly not recommended to lose the instructions overboard, and so have to swim after them (well done Fred - *Catherine*). The winner of the Treasure Hunt was Ross Bell (*Forelle*), so many congratulations to him.

Thursday – gig rowing in the morning, lunch in St Mawes Sailing Club and the famous Falmouth working boats in the afternoon. Gig rowing requires a different technique, and several rookie oarsmen soon discovered the usefulness of being double-jointed. At lunch-time, it was wall-to-wall pasties, followed by a briefing about the working boats, which we were to race that afternoon. These magnificent beasts are still used to dredge for oysters under sail alone, have a gaff cutter rig, elongated bowsprits and a huge amount of canvas. We were on Mabel and were soon being drilled

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by Skipper (Peter) and Mate (Sally) in the art of sheeting in the staysail and jib (without a winch!), and shifting the backstays. The race was as much about tactics as about boat speed, as we vied for the lead with *Rita* and *Evelyn*, the latter being around 100 years old. A truly wonderful experience. We then set out on our own race, an anchors-down affair from St Mawes to the Pandora. With such an enticing finishing line, it was not surprising that Mike Pollard (*Rachel Jane*) and Trevor Thomas (*Barnacle*) vied for the lead (with Mike just winning) – they being the two most revered trenchermen in the fleet. It was chilly that evening, but we still enjoyed sitting out on the pontoon at the Pandora, eating gourmet plaice & chips, followed by locally-caught treacle tart with clotted cream – a feast fit for a king.

Friday – the last day for most of us – just as well as all *Clementine*'s batteries were by then completely flat (VHF, mobile phone, electric razor, electronic egg-timer). The fleet was fortunate to have a moderate breeze for a sail in company to Portloe and Porthscatho. For *Clementine*, it was haul out time and that dreaded hill. Fortunately, we were helped by a man with a large Range Rover, and another hurdle was surmounted. That evening, we came together for the last time for our farewell dinner at the Rising Sun in St Mawes (guest of honour - Roger Dongray). After Mark had made the presentations to the various winners, there was some discussion about Shrimper Week 2000, to be held in conjunction with Brest 2000. Those of us who participated in Brest 1996 expect this great "Festival of the Sea" to be another massive event, and a wonderful backdrop for the Shrimpers.

Finally, a special vote of thanks is again due to all the organising committee, every one of whom made us feel so welcome. Every member played his part, but I would like to name most especially Mark Osborn for his leadership from the front, Jane Bengé for all that typing, and Mike & Joan Pollard, who made sure we didn't starve!