

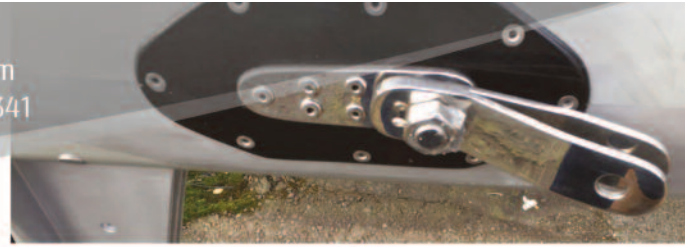


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Soundings

2026





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This picture, the Contents one and those on the Front Cover by Elysia Ehrhart

The Poole Yacht Club

The Yacht Haven, New Harbour Road West,
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department options follow

Welcome to the 2026 Edition of Soundings.

May 6th, 2026, and Soundings is off to the printers today, phew! Is it me or do things take more effort nowadays?

It's a bumper issue, eight pages up on last year. That is partly due to the dinghy classes responding to my plea for more input. I say my plea but it was actually James Stafford who encouraged the dinghy captains to do their bit, thanks James.

Aside from the dinghies there are articles with a wide range of subjects, not just sailing related. Swimming, rowing, even an appearance on TV, are covered. Confessions have been introduced this year, put simply these are learn from our mistakes articles, which will, hopefully, amuse you too.

I met a new member recently who she said that very little information was given out to her when she joined. I found this odd as there used to be a New Members' Pack, which included a Welcome Letter, a copy of Soundings and forms for this and that, a great way of getting info out. There also used to be a New Members' Evening where newbies could meet reps from the various sections and classes. That seems to have disappeared too. I've met many a new member at New Members' who I encouraged to get involved crewing on cruisers, a great way to make new friends. Then I see the word 'unfriendly' written in a report, really, what is going on? Let us make new members feel

Soundings 2026

welcome; we can all do our bit with this.

I recall entering the clubhouse and not knowing anyone, I used to get a pint and a copy of Practical Boat Owner and sit in the corner. If you don't already know people it can be daunting. However you can get to know fellow members by getting involved, volunteer, there's an article on volunteering on page 18. There are many differing roles you can get involved in.

Thank you to the contributors, you've created a great issue. Special thanks to Elysia Ehrhart, who provided many of the pictures. Mike Millard is always around taking pictures too and you'll find his scattered throughout this issue, thank you Mike.

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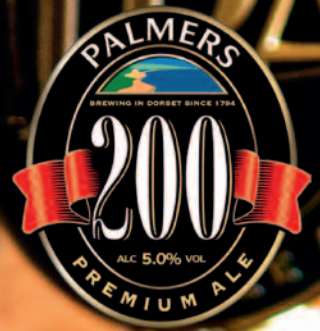
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Contents



2Welcome	from the Editor
9The Commodore	Tim Edom
11Commodore's Charity	Tim Edom
13	.....Vice Commodore Facilities	Chris Playfair
15	.....Rear Commodore Sailing	Simon Robinson
17	.....Rear Commodore Services	John Yonwin
18	.....Volunteering	
19	.....PYC Youth Pathway	AJ Windsor
20	...From Ham Bay to the Olympic Ambition	James Foster
24	.....Old Harry to The Needles	Chris Elfes
28	.....The Sherwood Cup	Rich McAvoy
30	.....2023 Rolex Fastnet	George Beevor
33	.....The ISW 2025	Richard & Jenny Marshall
37	.....Gannets and Gowns	Jo Macgregor
41	.....The Lilla Trophy	Tim Edom
42	.....Team Duette's Endeavours	Joe Cross
44	.....Dayboat Week '26	Steve Wilson
45	.....Dinghy Sailing	James Stafford
48	.....Novice to PYRA	Simon Cross
51	.....Overlord	Tracey Lee
52	.....Social Scene	Amanda Jones
54	.....The Social Programme	Amanda Jones and the Social Committee
55	.....The R19 Interview	Andy Macgregor
56	.....The GP14 Class	James Stafford
57	.....The Laser/Aero Class	Stephen Ehrhart
58	.....Training Opportunities	AJ Windsor
59	.....The Cruising Section Programme	Peter Hayton
62	.....Cruising's Winter Walks	Roy & Wendy Davies
63	.....Frederick H Jennings	Sue Thornton-Grimes
64	.....Studland Bay	Howard Davidson
67	.....Confessions	Misc.
70	.....You Row Girl	Amey Sparks
72	.....The Longest Four Minutes!	Peter Hayton
73	.....Ian Wall Memorial Trophy	
74Commodores' Challenge	Fraser Burnet
76WLYC 24-Hour	Mark Champion
78Dave Peters	Owain Peters



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Our Commodore

Tim Edom

It has been my pleasure and privilege to serve as your Commodore for this past year and thank you to those who supported myself and the other members of the team at the AGM to serve another year. I would also like to especially thank our General Manager Chas, Flag Officers, General Committee and all the staff who work tirelessly for the Club.

We are working hard to deliver on the key initiatives I wrote about last year so thought it would be good to see how we've done on these.

Listed here are last year's aspirations with a comment below each on progress.

- Costs down and Income up. Easy to say, harder to do but the team's focus and hard work over the past year is showing positive signs of paying off.

Through the efforts of the General Committee, especially our General Manager, and close scrutiny by our Treasury team, we achieved a healthy surplus at Full Year ending October 2025. Current projections are encouraging for this year due to continued focus on keeping a lid on costs and driving income opportunities. From this position, we are now in a better place to look at further investing in Club infrastructure

- Increase Sailing and Racing. Facilitate more members, their guests and especially youth to get sailing, both cruising and racing.

2026 sees a bumper year of Sailing Events ; Co-hosting the Poole International Paint Regatta and hosting Optimist UK Championships, Zenith, Dayboat and Hobie 16 Nationals, Topper Southern's and Class. In addition, we are running all our regular Series and Trophy races coupled with Social and Cruising activities throughout the season. We are still not seeing enough of our own dinghy sailors out racing so please let us know what would help to encourage you to participate. Please do get involved to help us make these activities a resounding success.

Wing foiling – a taster session has been arranged, which has attracted interest from over 60 members, so we are testing the water with this exciting branch of sailing, to see if this will appeal to existing and new members

Big welcome to Sailability as a new addition to the Club and the Haven! After many weeks of due diligence and discussion, their four Hawk dayboats and rescue boat are berthed at the end of the Waiting pontoon. They take less able sailors out 4/5 times per week, mainly when the Club is quiet, introducing them to the sport we all love. I know that their volunteer skippers are finding our facilities much improved from their previous location and am confident that this initiative will be mutually beneficial for both the Club and the Charity.

- Rebuild our reputation for being a friendly Club – this has taken a dent over the last couple of years and I hope we can all work together to restore this.

Following many conversations with members, it seems that there has been a positive shift and the normal friendly



atmosphere has been largely restored. As part of being in a Club, it is vital that we continue to treat each other with respect, members and staff so we can all make a difference here.

- Bring back the Volunteers! A huge thank you for all the volunteers on and off the water who keep the Racing Programme, Nightwatch, fuel delivery, and odd jobs going. Gaps are appearing in the rotas so I am keen to re-energise this core aspect of Poole Yacht Club, which can increase engagement and drive down costs

Room for improvement on this one, to be honest. The fact is that the key volunteer coordinators are struggling to fill all the roles due to the lack of members stepping forward. If it doesn't improve, we will end up with having to cancel races or other activities, which would be disastrous. Please step forward to help if you can; If we all do a bit, then we don't have to rely on our fellow members doing a lot.

- Plan ahead. Combine the great work on the Masterplan and Asset Survey to produce a costed 10-year plan for the members

On the basis that the future is more than usually unpredictable currently, we have focused our planning on the next five years, taking input from the Masterplan and Planned Preventative Maintenance plan. This should go for review to General Committee in May before release to the wider Membership

Ongoing initiatives

- 1 Reviewing the Membership fees for the Under 40's to look at how we can make the Club more attractive for this sector. At the same time, we are continuing the trial cont.> of the over 80 Associate membership following the successful launch last year.

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- 2 The Odd-Job team did a great job of refreshing the Changing Rooms over the winter as an interim measure. We have now set up a working party to finalise requirements and initiate a project to look at necessary improvements, which will be shared with the Membership before proceeding.
 - 3 We have an Open Day in May to give interested folk an opportunity to see what we do before applying for membership
 - 4 Following the decision to bring the support of the Club Website in-house, our Office and volunteers are working hard to put the final touches on the revised site, which should be launched in the near future.
- Sweat our assets. A good thing that came out of the 2025 AGM was the mandate to trial large non-member events here to generate income. Our focus must remain on

bringing large scale sailing events here but to augment our income, and keep our fees to a minimum, we do need to embrace all opportunities to help balance the books.

Steady progress on this. We have successfully brought in Sailability and have run wakes for a small number of non-members. We have had a few enquiries about weddings, but the dates have clashed with Sailing events so we have had to decline these opportunities to date.

So, all in all, progress in the right direction but much more to do. Please do email me with any offers of help or suggestions of how we can continue to grow our Club further into the vibrant, thriving place it needs to be for current and future members. Meanwhile, I hope you have a fantastic season on and off the water at the Club and further afield!

Fair Winds, Tim



Commodore's Charity

The Ellen MacArthur Cancer Trust is a registered charity that supports young people aged 8 to 24 to rebuild their confidence after cancer. The charity offers free sailing and outdoor adventures to help young people rediscover independence, confidence and purpose. I got involved in this Charity a few years ago following a big nudge from a fellow member, who is also a nurse for the Trust. I applied and went through an assessment, that checked my UNO card game, baking and empathy skills as much as my ability to skipper a 45-foot yacht. Happily, I got the nod and have skippered for them for three to four weeks each year since.

To see the changes in the young folk as they get to grips with life afloat is truly heartwarming. Our job is to keep everyone safe whilst providing an adventurous challenge to the young people to help them compare experiences with their peers and have fun.

The Trust has bases in Cowes and Largs on Scotland's West Coast, and it provides long-term support through sailing trips. The Trust has supported over 2,400 young people across the UK since its inception in 2003. The Trust's mission is to inspire young people to believe in a brighter future living through and beyond cancer.

Every day around 12 young people under 25 in the UK are diagnosed with cancer.

Happily, survival rates are increasing. But what happens after treatment can be as difficult as, if not even more so, than the treatment itself. This is not talked about or is understood as much as it should be.

Young people remain vulnerable after treatment as it comes at a time of rapid physical, emotional and social development. Cancer in young people often leads to lower educational achievement, relationship and friendship difficulties, body image issues, and/or ongoing late effects, such as extreme fatigue, infertility, osteoporosis, thyroid problems and hearing or vision loss.

Through the Trust's free sailing and outdoor adventures, young people laugh, gain a new sense of purpose and self-worth, rediscover independence, and feel optimism for the future.

I am delighted to appoint them as my Charity for the next two years and appreciate any support you can give.

To find out more about the Trust, please visit:
www.ellenmacarthurcancertrust.org

Thank you – Tim Edom
Page 11

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Facilities

One of my jobs is to chair your Facilities Committee, consisting of Chas Kirkby, Sarah Burnet, Bob Hazell, Andy Macgregor, Andrew Tate, John Lewis, Mark Titterington, Matt Latham (Yard Team) and until recently, Ian Hull.

We meet monthly to walk around and talk about your Club, with a view to maintaining and improving it. Robust but polite and respectful debates are leading us to what seems to be a sensible way forward. We draw on the Masterplan and Phil Hunt's Planned Preventative Maintenance (PPM) Programme to guide us and have been grateful to many members for advice and practical inputs.

- We rely heavily on the superb negotiating skills of Chas our General Manager. He seems to be able to get a better deal than us every time. It might be worth thanking him when you see him. You will be aware of the excellent way Matt, Ian and Toby, our yard team, have organised haulout and facilitated the arrival of our dinghies.
- Not long ago, there seemed no doubt that the slipway and roof would need expensive replacement. We spent £20,000 on a detailed slipway survey and many hours investigating. The wonderful results are that rumours of the demise of both slipway and roof were premature. What they need is planned maintenance and sensible use: the 13-ton weight limit for haulout is working and we have regular inspections planned for the roof.
- I hope that you are enjoying the automatically opening gates. This came on the back of a complete change of our alarm systems, making us all safer. If the gates do not open for you, inform the office of your car registration number.
- Sailability joining the club has been a high point this year. We are working with them to improve disabled access to their boats. Please make our new members and guests welcome.
- Our solar panels have been a great success and we are considering whether boosting our electricity generation further is a sensible option.
- We are exploring repairs to the yard surface.



- Sarah Burnet is leading a group looking at improving our changing rooms. The initiatives to get more women into sailing has been successful but a spin-off is that the old facilities for them are dated and cramped.
- Paul Thorneycroft has raised the problems of climate change and storm surges, threatening our haven. We are taking this seriously and considering our options. No decisions yet.

I hope that gives you a flavour of what volunteers and staff are doing on your behalf. Please do get in touch if you can contribute to the smooth running of our friendly Club. We need more members to join us, especially those who are not as male and old as me!

Finally, it has been a privilege to work alongside Tim, John, Simon, Jan (our Treasurer) and Richard Cake (our sprightly young Honorary Solicitor) and to know that we are building on the work of those before us, notably, Tracey Lee who pushed both social and women's sailing. There have been many changes at the Club and to stay ahead, more will be needed. We will need to look at how all parts of the Club fit and contribute together, in particular, looking to attract more younger members (join us wing-foiling!) whilst caring for those who have sustained the Club for many years.

Onwards and upwards
Chris



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Sailing

In our Commodore's report, you will have already read that we are hosting a lot of events and, off the back of this, Volunteering is key to making these successful. Over the winter we have been running PB2 courses, our own Dinghy Capsize & Recovery Training, Mark Laying, VHF and First Aid courses to name but a few. We're also trialling a 'reward' for volunteering this year with a chance to win discounts off your Club membership next year if your name is pulled out of the hat, the more duties you do through Dutyman, the more chance you have of winning. Dutyman is core to scheduling volunteers for our volunteer activities and a big 'Thank You' to the team working behind the scenes to make this happen!

Dinghy Race Participation – The RYA recognise that sailing is under significant pressure from other recreational activities, what are we doing at our Club to ensure we are best place to tackle this. We have seen significant growth at the Club with Social Sailing, in previous years we've opened up to those that have paid Social Sailing Fees, Big Shot / Hot Shot and Youth Training fees to be able to enter both our Summer Trophy Races and our Sherwood Cup Pursuit Race series. For this year, Sailing Committee have extended our offering to also make Monday Night Dinghy Racing available to these sailors with a view to encouraging more to 'give racing a go'. We have a working party looking at how Monday Night Racing may evolve to make this more attractive to our racing newbies and our Youth Members transitioning from Hot Shots, by having a racing environment that is friendly and where other competitors can provide advice and guidance to our newer members to encourage them to catch the 'racing bug' and improve their sailing.

Youth R19 – John Lewis has kindly purchased an R19 for use by our Youth Section, this is to help us build on the fantastic success of our Commodores' Challenge Team that currently train from September to December, by having a boat available to them for our entire racing season. We have a working party shaping how this will be crewed and managed and will be bringing this to fruition.

We have another busy year hosting events at our Club, these include:

- Cherup / ISO / International Canoe Open – 18th & 19th Apr.
- Opsrey & Contender Open – 9th & 10th May
- International Paint Poole Regatta – 22nd to 25th May
- R19 Worlds – 20th June
- Topper 5.3 Invitational Training Weekend – 4th & 5th July
- GP & Dayboat Open – 25th & 26th July
- Dayboat Nationals – 27th to 30th July
- Hobie 16 Open – 8th to 10th August
- Zenith, Zen and Zen2 Nationals – 18th to 20th September
- IOCA UK Championships – 3rd & 4th October
- OK Open – 10th & 11th October
- Topper Super South – 17th & 18th October



In the middle of these we have our Club Regatta from Friday 26th June to Sunday 28th June, save this for your diary!

With the above packed diary, we can only make this work with the help of all our volunteers, a big 'Thank You' in advance for all our members that make our on the water events happen day in day out! If there are any training requirements that you have that are holding you back from volunteering, please email AJ (training@pooleyc.co.uk) and we'll see what we can do.

Following on from the Club Forum and our AGM, I'm joined on Sailing Committee by the following:

- Simon Philbrick – Sailing Secretary – Race Management
- Sarah Agnew – Assistant Sailing Secretary – Youth pathway /RYA Principal
- AJ Windsor – Sailing Events Manager /RYA Chief Instructor
- Andy Macgregor – R19's
- Fraser Burnett – Youth Rep
- James Stafford – Dinghy Lead Rep
- Ian Aitken – Cruiser Lead Rep
- All Dinghy Class Captains
- David Evans – Race Participation
- Rich McAvoy – Social Sailing Class Captain
- Cruiser Race Class Captains and Cruising Section Class Captain also join us once a quarter (or for any meeting if they request)

We have a new safety boat on the fleet this year, after 20 years of service and suffering from a rotting floor, Safety 11 has been replaced with a new Ballistic 6m RIB. This has been spec'd to meet future RYA powerboat training requirements by providing an option for four people to be seated inside the boat with the rear two seats being removeable to provide a suitably large working space for Mark Laying etc. The boat has been supplied Copper Coated and we will be monitoring how this performs over the coming seasons. The outboard has been transferred across from the old boat as it was only two years old.

Looking forward to seeing you out enjoying the water,

Simon
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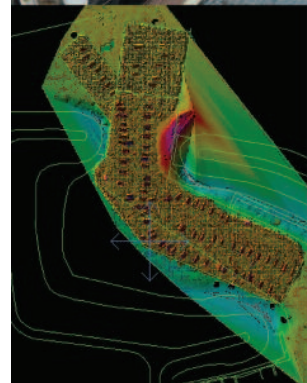
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Dear fellow members



I am pleased to be writing this piece for Soundings, having now completed my first year as your Rear Commodore Services. I am looking forward to getting into my second year of working with fellow Flag Officers, Committee members and our staff colleagues.

Thank you for electing me. When the role of “Services” was introduced a few years ago, the aim was to give more focus to the aspects of the Club operation that provided the supporting activities and services.

So much of the Services activity just churns away, mostly in the background, to ensure that our members receive from the Club, the bar, catering, social and other activities and support to the standard and requirement that you, our members, wish to receive.

I do thank our team of staff, under the professional watchful eye of our General Manager, Chas Kirkby. They really give us great support and service. Much work is underway with IT and the new website, and we are really pleased how this is coming along. Many thanks to the colleagues involved and the technical inputs from Carla, our IT Support.

The Social Team, led by our Social Secretary, Amanda Jones, organise for us a fantastic range of social events and I do thank Amanda and the team for all the hard work that is undertaken, on our behalf.

Financial pressures, inflationary effects, changes in demographics, changes in the ways we wish to spend our leisure time and events around the world do affect all of us and the Club is no exception.

We will continue to review these and then adjust our offerings in response to these challenges. An example is the changes we have made to the winter opening hours. We keep a very close eye on the level of bar and catering subsidy. It is something of a fine balance.

Our financials are reviewed every month at our committee meetings, under the watchful eye of Jan Hunt, our Honorary Treasurer and the Treasury Team.

We do need to continue to invest in our Club assets; not only to ensure we have the structures and equipment that are in working and safe condition for today’s needs, but for the future. You will see from the minutes of General Committee, such debates and decisions are high on the agenda.

The Membership Committee is looking at how we best recruit and select new members and ensuring how we help make their journey into our Club life a satisfying and enjoyable experience. Sarah Agnew, our Assistant Sailing Secretary, with AJ are planning a Club Open Evening in May. Particular focus, at this time, is on families and under 40s joining our Club.

The Nightwatch team, of which I am a member, is reviewing its activities and we will, in the weeks ahead be concluding this work and making recommendations to General Committee. The take up of Nightwatch duties by fellow Members over the last two years has been disappointing and we are considering what changes are needed.

In addition to the above, I still greatly enjoy being part of the volunteer Race Officer Team and owning my Drascombe Lugger “Jambo.” Regrettably, due to increasing family responsibilities, I have had to step back from RYA Regional Committee duties.

I am always pleased to receive your comments and suggestions. Please call me, drop me an email, or catch me when I am around the Club.

John Yonwin
Rear Commodore Services
07966 551038
johnyonwin3@gmail.com

Volunteering



Picture by Mike Millard

We've all heard it before at the various briefings; "*Volunteering is the lifeblood of the Club*", but it's only when you start looking at the sheer volume of volunteers the Club needs every season that you start to appreciate how true this is.

For example, the Monday, Thursday and Saturday dinghy racing series comprise approximately 120 events that require nearly 1000 individual duties to be fulfilled. The Friday and Sunday Social Sailing events are another 50 events that need a further 200 duties to be filled. The Regatta needs 120+ people to ensure it runs smoothly – on both Saturday and Sunday. This is before we run Open Events, Trophy Races, Youth Training, Frostbite etc. so it's easy to see what a Herculean effort members make to ensure all of these events run smoothly.

The Club is always looking for more volunteers to ensure these responsibilities are shared equally. So here is a quick guide to the roles we need to fill each season.

Safety Boat Drivers

The Club is lucky to have one of the biggest fleets of RIBs and Rigiflex boats in the south and they are all used to good effect during our racing and training events. To drive a Safety Boat, you will need the RYA Powerboat Level 2 qualification, which can be done at the Club during one of the regular courses that run each season, the cost of which is mostly refunded after a certain number of duties. The Club also offers powerboat refresher courses and a one day safety boat course to practise recovering capsized boats.

Safety Boat Assist

Every Safety Boat needs both a driver and an Assist. Assist is one of the most important jobs on the water as it's likely you will be the one actually righting capsized boats or rescuing sailors from the water as the driver keeps the boat steady. No previous experience is necessary and it is a great way to spend time on the water.

Principal Race Officer

The PRO is in overall charge of each event, from completing a Risk Assessment to the organisation of the actual race. PROs may start races from the Race Hut or a Committee Boat but the PRO will always have a number of people assisting. It is a very responsible role but one that the Club offers full training for. The Club requires more people to train to be a PRO, so if you have experience of racing dinghies or cruisers at Club level or above, plus an organised mind, we would be very grateful if you could give up a few evenings each season to ensure our racing programme can continue.

Race Assist

Every PRO needs at least two or three race assists to help record

the positions and times of the racers, raise or lower flags or start the timing lights. No previous experience is necessary and this is a great way to learn about racing and meet new people.

Night Watch

The security of the Club is very important so we ask that everyone tries to undertake at least one night watch duty a year. You won't be expected to wrestle any would be burglars to the ground, but you'll walk the perimeter of the Club shining a powerful torch around the Haven and out onto the moorings.

It's more to show a presence and let any would be thieves know that they will be seen and reported if they try to enter the Club. If you have PB2 and have completed the launch training, you can also take the Club launch out into the harbour. We try to encourage people to do this in pairs for safety reasons so why not do this with a friend?

If you are available for a Night Watch duty please contact Mike Jones on nightwatch@pooleyc.co.uk

Electronic Volunteer Forms

Lastly, a note on completing the electronic volunteer forms. These form the basis of every volunteer team leads rota and they save an enormous amount of time when scheduling events. Once completed, the forms are downloaded into Excel so they can be filtered according to the day and duty type, meaning each team lead has an instant list of volunteers to choose from.

Please fill out your electronic form every season, even if you have done the same duty for many years as it saves a huge amount of time emailing and calling people to see if want to continue volunteering. Forms are usually sent out in October after the volunteers "Thank You" meal and it really helps if you can complete them as soon as possible. By submitting this form every year, you guarantee your name is on the list of volunteers for the coming season.

The Social Team

The Social Committee is always on the lookout for new members, they bring new ideas and enthusiasm. These pluses, coupled with the experience that others have gained, creates a balanced blend that can achieve anything!

Thank You

Lastly, a huge thank you to everyone that has been involved with volunteering at the Club, either this coming season, or for previous seasons.

If you have read this and would like some more information on volunteering, feel free to look on the website for more information or email dutyman@pooleyc.co.uk

The Poole YC Youth Sailing Pathway

by AJ Windsor

For full up-to-date details see the Club Website



- Parent & Child Mirror Racing
- RYA Stage 1 & 2 (Oppy or Pico, depending on age)

The aim for all our new young sailors is simple:

FUN ON THE WATER!

Parent Mirror Racing is a great way to give your child the confidence of sailing whilst on the water with you.

From the age of 8, they can start their own sailing journey on the water with **Our RYA Youth Training Group**

Mirror Racing:
Fridays @17:45hrs
Contact: Matt Burge –
mburge@hotmail.com

RYA Youth Training (Manic Piranhas): Wednesday @ 17:45
Contact Sailing Manager:
sailing@pooleyc.co.uk



- RYA Stage 3
- RYA Seamanship Skills
- RYA Start Race

Once we have our excited new sailors, it's time for them to start understanding the technical and safe side of sailing.

One for parents to encourage as this is how they learn what to do in different situations. They also start exploring what sort of sailing is right for them. This could be solo sailing, sailing with a friend, racing or social sailing.

RYA Youth Training (Manic Piranhas): Wednesday @ 17:45
Contact Sailing Manager:
sailing@pooleyc.co.uk

It is possible for children to come straight in to one of these groups if they are competent with sailing. AJ can advise on the best courses for them



- Multihull Sailing & Racing
- Double-Handed 420 Sailing & Racing
- Youth Race Coaching
- Cruiser Racing – Commodores' Challenge

It is time to give them as many experiences as possible:

- Weekly Racing, on a specific youth only course. We would recommend this in a Topper, Laser or a 420.
- Multi-Hull or 420 Sailing. Learn the techniques for these performance boats and propel their enthusiasm for racing.
- Cruiser Racing: join the Commodore's race team and take part in the prestigious Commodores' Challenge against Parkstone Yacht Club.

RYA Youth Training (Manic Piranhas): Wednesday @ 17:45
Contact Sailing Manager:
sailing@pooleyc.co.uk

Hot Shots (Youth) Racing:
Thursday @ 17:45

Sailors must have Start Race or signed off by a Club race coach



- Competitive Weekly Club Racing
- Club Social Sailing
- Instructor Training

At the Club we are keen to grow our classes and ultimately have as many people as possible sailing each week. We offer Dinghy and Cruiser Racing, plus social sailing seven days a week!

We also have an Assistant and Dinghy Instructor Pathway, which offers many job opportunities within the industry.

Look at the Notice of Race Calendar for the year and see what takes your fancy... We have so many opportunities to get you on the water.

Any questions contact:
sailing@pooleyc.co.uk



From Ham Bay to.....

Part One - The Journey

Some of my earliest memories are of learning to sail at Poole Yacht Club. I was very young, sailing an Optimist called *Poppy the Oppy* and, like most sailors at that age, I spent far more time bumping into other boats than sailing in straight lines. We played pirates in Ham Bay, which provided the perfect safe haven for chaos, laughter and mistakes. I was incredibly lucky to be taught by two of the Club's stalwarts, Andrew Tate and Andy Hadley, who somehow managed to turn all that chaos into learning.



One memory stands out clearly. Before the Poole Regatta, one of the Andys drew the racecourse in the sand. It was simple, but it was the first time sailing stopped being about just floating around and became something else. That was my first real experience of racing, and from that moment I was completely hooked.

I didn't win that regatta – not even close – but I was struck by the unique challenge sailing offered. It wasn't just about going fast. It was about thinking, adapting, and solving problems in an environment that never stayed the same.

At the following regatta, I noticed a group of slightly older sailors racing further out from the shore. They had newer boats and looked confident and composed. To me, they seemed like superstars. I overheard someone suggest that one of them might

one day go to the Olympics, and that idea stayed with me. From that moment, becoming an Olympic sailor became my dream.

In 2012, my family took me to Weymouth to watch the London Olympic Games. Seeing the Macgregor girls compete made everything feel real. From then on, sailing was no longer just something I enjoyed - it became an obsession.

Every weekend, my dad, Simon Foster, would take me and my friends out on a small orange safety boat and tow us into the harbour. We raced endlessly around the islands, turning Poole Harbour into our own racetrack. Wednesday night training with Colin Rainback taught me about the harbour's unique tides and eddies, while winter training with Rob Kemp taught me how to hike properly – using explanations that may not be entirely suitable for print, but which I've never forgotten.

One of my defining early experiences was the Spring Championships at Poole Yacht Club. I came dead last. In fact, I was scored a DNS after taking more than four minutes to cross the start line. Despite barely racing at all, being surrounded by sailors from across the country was incredibly inspiring. It was there that I first learned about Zone Squads - and, more importantly, noticed the jumpers the sailors wore. From that point on, all I wanted was to earn one and wear it with pride.

Rob suggested that if I wanted a real chance, I needed to sail through the winter. So I did. I trained in a leaky drysuit, getting far too cold far too often. That following spring and summer, I travelled all over the south coast competing in events to qualify for the Zone Squad. Being selected was a huge moment for me, especially as many of the sailors were significantly older.

My first large fleet regatta at Grafham was another turning point. Finishing third introduced me to a completely different type of racing. Sailing became less about speed and more about tactics - a game of chess played on the water. That problem-solving aspect is what really drew me in.

As my ambitions grew, the goalposts shifted again when I saw the National Squad sailors in their distinctive red jackets. Like the Zone Squad jumper before it, the jacket represented



Olympic Ambition!

excellence and opportunity. It was another symbol of where I wanted to go.

Throughout my Optimist years, Poole Yacht Club remained at the heart of my development. Thanks to the dedication of many volunteers, the Youth Section grew to over 140 sailors on Wednesday nights. We had a brilliant Optimist race group, constantly pushing each other, and were often coached by Jonny House, who managed to balance our tendency to mess around with delivering outstanding racing insight. Parents regularly organised additional coaching, making Poole YC the central hub of my training.

In my final year in the Optimist, I won the Southern Traveller Series and had the opportunity to represent Team GBR abroad. I sailed in Flanders, Naples, Lake Garda, and the Braassemereer. Those events were intimidating, with bigger waves and stronger tides than I was used to, but they were formative experiences that marked my transition from club sailor to international competitor.

Moving from the Optimist into the Laser 4.7 was a shock. I was immediately introduced to sailors like Angus Kemp, whose experience in the class helped bring me up to speed. I qualified for the national squad during a period dominated by light winds, where my low body weight worked to my advantage. As soon as the breeze picked up, however, the limitations were clear – the boat was simply too big for me!

At my first major event, I capsized fourteen times in a single race. Unlike the Optimist, you didn't have to bail out the water, which was both brutal and liberating. Despite the setbacks, I qualified for the squad, and the winter training that followed was intense. We had serious discussions about what it meant to be "World Class", setting ambitious targets for fitness and discipline. With limited coached training each year, everything else depended on self-motivation.

The environment was demanding. If you were late – even by a second – you had to do ten press-ups for every minute the last person arrived late. You were never late twice. Days often

began with an hour of intense activation, which frequently ended with someone being sick. At fifteen years old, it was a steep learning curve.



Between camps, we were expected to log gym sessions, sailing sessions, and cardio sessions. For me, that meant playing basketball five days a week for cardio, gym sessions every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, and sailing whenever possible at weekends. Within eight months, we attended the World Championships in Poland, where I finished ninth. A few weeks later at the Nationals, I placed second, just two points off first.

The following year, 2019, after transitioning into the Radial, I won the Youth Nationals. That result earned me selection as the sole British male Radial sailor for the Youth World Championships - effectively a miniature Olympics across all sailing classes. Being selected gave me a real glimpse of what representing your country at the highest level could feel like.

While still at school, I was able to dedicate most of my time outside lessons to sailing and fitness, completing my school work during school hours. I also had to manage significant physical changes, moving from 49kg to 78kg across successive class transitions - a process that involved a lot of time dragging my parents to the gym.

Picture courtesy of Anders Dahlberg



After school, I faced the challenge of balancing elite sailing with university. Inspired by sailors such as Micky Beckett, I enrolled in Ship Science at the University of Southampton, combining my love of sailing with engineering. It wasn't easy. I swung between focusing too much on sailing and too much on studying, eventually having to step away from sailing almost entirely in my final year to achieve the marks I needed.

At that point, I assumed full-time sailing might no longer be financially viable. But after graduating, further support from my parents allowed me one final year to pursue the campaign properly, with a clear deadline: the 2025 World Championships in China - my first real opportunity to qualify for the British Sailing Squad.

With a single season to prove I belonged at that level, everything I had worked toward was suddenly compressed into one year. It was the point where ambition met reality, and where the safety nets began to disappear.

Part Two follows that year - and the attempt to earn a place on the British Sailing Squad.

Part Two:

The Year Everything Was Tested

By the time I stepped into my first senior season, I knew this wasn't going to be about just one race. It was going to be about whether I could sustain a full international campaign – physically, mentally, and financially – long enough to earn a place on the British Sailing Squad.

The calendar was full before the year even began. Two winter Vilamoura Grand Prix events would build the foundation, followed by a long European circuit and three key qualification regattas: the Princess Sofia Trophy, the World Championships, and the European Championships. To be selected, I needed to finish inside the top 50% at one of those events – but in a fleet made up almost entirely of full-time international athletes, that meant competing against sailors with a decade or more of senior experience.

Vilamoura – building belief

I began the season in Vilamoura, Portugal, where winter training and two Grand Prix regattas set the tone.

I won the Silver Fleet at both Vilamoura Grand Prix events, **Soundings 2026**

finishing right on the edge of the Gold Fleet. That mattered. The Silver Fleet is often filled with very strong sailors who have been pushed out of Gold by a single mistake – a black flag, a breakage, one bad race – which means you're racing against people who are often far better than their position suggests. Racing at the front of that fleet also requires a different skill set. You're not just trying to survive in traffic – you're managing risk, controlling the fleet and making decisions that affect dozens of boats behind you.

Those regattas showed me something else as well. My speed was there, but my starts weren't consistent enough. Over the winter I began working with a sports psychologist, using visualisation to rehearse what a good start feels like – how the boats stack up, how the pressure builds in the sail, how it feels to commit and accelerate, and how you shoot forward and break free. That mental shift began to change the way I raced.

Princess Sofia – the first standard

The Princess Sofia Trophy in Palma was the first qualification regatta. It's the hardest regatta of the season, filled with Olympic medallists, funded national squads, and sailors who have been in the class for a decade.

I finished 70th out of 174 – inside the top 40%. That was well within the standard I needed, but selection didn't come.

Hyères - and the van that nearly ended it

From Sofia, the season rolled straight into Hyères. It wasn't a qualification regatta for me, but it was the final build-up before Worlds - the last chance to sharpen everything. This is where things went a little pear-shaped.

The van made it onto the ferry – just. But by the time we came off the other side it was barely alive. The power steering had gone. The ABS lights were flashing. The dashboard looked like a Christmas tree. When the ramp dropped, the van wouldn't move. With a line of traffic building behind me, I climbed out in flip-flops and pushed just to clear the way for the eager travellers behind me.

The van ended up stuck at a mechanic's in Toulon. Our boats were locked inside the port. While everyone else was training for Hyères, I was watching days slip away.

When I finally got back on the water, I was behind – but I still raced, and finished 47th out of 112.



World Championships:

Prepared for one thing – given another!

As Qingdao was the venue for the 2008 Beijing Olympics, we knew that the tide would be a major factor. That's why, before travelling, we had a training camp in Lymington focusing on fleet positioning, laylines, and how to race effectively through tidal gradients.

When we arrived in China, some days were 15–18 knots, full hiking, big waves and big pressure. Others were 3–8 knots, where everything came down to patience, positioning, and timing. All of which was done in a strong tide, building a picture of how races unfold when the current is doing half the work.

Unfortunately as the regatta began, the 'wind machine' turned off – the first five days passed with only two races sailed. Fog settled over the bay. A long rolling swell pushed through the course. The wind never quite established itself. Everyone waited. Then, on the final day, the whole place turned on.

A 25–32 knot offshore breeze blew straight off the city. The wind was weaving between the skyscrapers, breaking apart and tearing across the racecourse. You could be flat hiking on one tack and seconds later the boat would try to tack itself as a gust slammed in from a new angle, forcing you to dive across just to keep it upright. It was wild - but it wasn't random.

The pressure was visible on the water and, if you committed to it, you could still race. In many ways it was strangely familiar, like sailing in Poole Harbour in a winter northerly, where the breeze comes off the land in sharp lines and you have to read it fast.

Through all of that, I finished 56th out of 138 – once again inside the top 40% of the fleet and my best result yet. Two qualification events. Two times inside the standard. Still no selection.

The financial edge

By this point, something else had become very real. If I didn't qualify for the squad, I had just enough money left to make it to the next Princess Sofia – but only if I moved back to my parents' house, so I left Portland and stepped away from the training group and environment I had built. The European Championships weren't just another regatta. They were a fork in the road.

Euros - when it all had to count

By the time I arrived at the Europeans, everything was hanging on it and, when it mattered most, I delivered. I finished 46th

out of 129 – top 35% of the fleet. My best performance yet and winning a race on the final day topped it all off.

Three qualification events. Three times inside the standard. And, finally, it was enough.

I earned my place on the British Sailing Squad!

The season you've just read about wasn't just built on training and results - it was built on logistics.

Between winter training in Portugal, racing across Europe, the World Championships in China, and keeping a boat – and myself moving from event to event, a full international campaign costs around £28,000 a year.

That covers travel by road, ferry and air, regatta entry fees, boat transport and chartering, sails, equipment, and the training blocks that make it possible to compete.

None of it is optional. It's the cost of racing against full-time athletes from around the world.

I don't share that number to ask for sympathy – only to give context. Because behind every result is a chain of decisions and commitments that most people never see.

The reason I've chosen to share this story is because this journey began here – in Ham Bay on Wednesday nights, with volunteers and coaches who gave their time because they believed it mattered. I wouldn't be where I am without that support, and I'm deeply grateful for it.

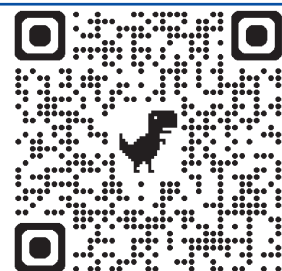
If you would like to be part of what comes next, I've set up a simple way to help support the campaign. Contributions go directly toward the practical costs of racing: travel, entry fees, equipment and getting the boat to the start line.

There is absolutely no expectation. Just by reading this, you're already part of the journey.

If you would like to help in a more tangible way, you can do so via this link: <https://revolut.me/james0srl/pocket/DU8nMjzhvk> or scan the QR code.

Thank you for being part of where this all began

If you'd like to explore how your business could get involved, please email me at:
foster.james@mail.com



Old Harry to The Needles

by Chris Elfes

A one-day passage (without a boat)!

We all know the route from Old Harry to the Needles. It's a classic. Line-of-sight navigation, steady compass bearing across Poole Bay, reassuringly recognisable landmarks at either end. Many a yacht club member has made the passage with little more than a glance at the chart, a decent cup of tea and maybe a lie down.

I decided to attempt it without being in the boat!

The swim from Old Harry Rocks to the Needles became part of my three-year build-up to an official, solo English Channel swim attempt. I had completed a relay Channel swim in 2018, which was both inspiring and mildly delusional in equal measure. Being relatively new to serious swimming – and having taken it up at a stage of life when most sensible people are buying comfortable slippers – I knew I needed time. Lots of it.

Learning to Love the Cold

Winter sea swimming without a wetsuit is something one does not so much embrace as gradually stop complaining about. Dorset's waters are invigorating in July and character-building in January. Still, week by week, season by season, I adapted.

Much of my structured training took place at Canford School. I had the privilege of sharing lanes with some exceptionally talented swimmers. I was never going to match their speed, but they did note my ability to “just keep going”. Stubbornness, (as described by Juliette when being polite), so it turns out, is a transferable skill.

Expert advice was generously offered. My once-terrifying technique slowly improved. I began to understand nutrition, hydration, and the peculiar logistics of marathon – and later ultrathon distance open-water swimming. Feeding quickly from a bottle on a rope while treading water in a sea swell is a skill in itself.

The Seed Is Planted

Through Dorset's welcoming and many sea swimming communities - ranging from nervous beginners to hardened Channel veterans – I heard that the first ever crossing between Old Harry and the Needles had only recently been completed as a two-person relay. Shortly afterwards, a super-fast local female swimmer achieved the first ever solo crossing. That left me to try and become the first ever solo male swimmer – my very own ‘world record’ perhaps?

Both swims had used the same highly experienced local,



Poole-based fisherman as pilot. He knew the tides intimately, and for a swim of this nature, tidal planning is everything. Even on neap tides, the ebb around The Needles can be very intimidating on a small boat, let alone as an aged swimmer. A swimmer must arrive at The Needles before the tide turns against them – or risk becoming an exhibit in a Cherbourg ‘Museum of Idiots’!

The crossing seemed a logical stepping stone. If successfully completed, it would be excellent preparation for the Channel. So I booked the boat for an early August 2022 neap tide. Remarkably, the simple act of booking focused my training overnight. Clearly, I need targets.

Passage Planning (and Humility)

I had studied the tide tables carefully. My view was that we should leave Poole Harbour at 0900 for a 1000 start from Studland. The skipper disagreed - firmly. He wanted an 0700 departure.

We discussed tidal speeds, my swimming pace (brutal honesty required), and the consequences of arriving at the Needles with the ebb increasing. Eventually, I did the sensible thing and deferred to the man who makes his living on the water. Departure: 0700.

Ultrathon distance sea swimming is never a solo endeavour, however much the swimmer may appear alone. It requires planning, safety cover, and a committed team. My Dorset-based open water coach was due to be on board but had to withdraw two weeks beforehand due to family commitments. Fortunately, two outstanding swimming friends – Hannah and Trish – stepped up from crew to coach, along with my naturally clumsy brother-in-law, Sean, whose primary role was photographer (and, as it turned out, comic relief for the crew).

Hannah and Trish are vastly stronger swimmers than I ever will be and are both experienced in long-distance events. Crucially, from multiple swims together, or rather with me trailing some distance behind, they understood my pace, temperament, and how I respond under pressure. In endurance swimming, the crew has the unenviable responsibility of pulling the swimmer out, if safety demands it. Trish herself had once been withdrawn from a Channel attempt with just one nautical mile to go after 15½ hours, requiring hospital rehydration. These were not people who would let me quit lightly - but nor would they let me sink due to my own pride. I was quite certain however, that they would (enjoy) pushing me to my limits and shouting at me a lot. They are a tough pairing! Reassuring.

The Start

We left Poole Town Quay just before 0700 in glorious sunshine. Even so, nerves made themselves known. There is a peculiar pre-

swim routine: stretching, hydration, sun cream, and the application of generous quantities of grease to prevent chafing in salt water. For me: armpits, the front of the neck and, for general affect, a bit of groin rubbing. Glamour knows no bounds.

By the time we reached Studland, mild performance anxiety related nausea had set in. At that point, the only cure is to get on with it. I jumped into the sea, adjusted my hat and goggles, and waited for the start signal.

Friends in Swanage watched the start from atop the cliffs at Old Harry. My brother-in-law began the day as a keen, semi-professional photographer but ended it horizontal, burping, sun-burnt, heavily medicated for seasickness, and intermittently asleep.

The Hard Part (Which Came Early)

Within 20 – 30 minutes the sea turned choppy off Old Harry. Wind against the last of the ebb created awkward, breaking waves. When I rotated to breathe, I was frequently rewarded with a big mouthful of salt water, sometimes inadvertently inhaled. Waves bounced off the boat unpredictably increasing the number of times I took in seawater. For the first time ever, I felt seasick while swimming – a disconcerting development.

After one hour and 55 minutes swim time, the standard five-minute warning whistle was blown and a large “5” sign hung over the side of the boat. Verbal instructions are useless in wind, swell, diesel engine noise and, of course, with a swimmer’s ears being both underwater and enclosed in a swim hat! The swimmer must acknowledge the messages with a quick thumbs up, mid front crawl stroke when facing the crew. At two hours, on the dot, my first feed was delivered by dipping a feed bottle ahead of me, tied to a fishing line for quick retrieval.

Although I felt terrible, I knew I needed regular calories to succeed, so swallowed quickly. Unfortunately, at the same time, a wave broke over me. I ingested more salt water; and promptly vomited back all the feed. There was simply a ‘*get on with it, you can feed in an hour*’ voice from above. The swimmer simply must get going again, hungry or not. Feeds





are strictly timed to prevent the swimmer drifting off course and starting to feel the cold. My feed times were terribly slow 'like a day out for a picnic' was Hannah's view, I believe.

It was, in hindsight, an 'educational gift', although at the time I would not describe it quite so positively.

I wanted to stop. I could see we were being pushed west towards Swanage rather than east towards the Isle of Wight. Internal mental frustration mounted both with myself and my blaming of the choice of start time. I felt slow, off-course, and unwell. Negative thinking is unhelpful.

Luckily, I also began thinking of the people who had supported my training – the early mornings, the winter dips, the endless lengths. I imagined their comments. Some sympathetic. Some truly merciless. That did the trick!

I realised that, compared with the Channel, this was 'only' a rehearsal. I would need to master feeds in rough water and made a note to myself to buy some proper feed bottles. My screw lid, wide-necked, one pint plastic milk containers might be cheap, but were useless! I learned that I would need to accept seasickness as a probability. However, I would need to keep going regardless.

By the three-hour mark the tide had slackened. The chop eased as we moved clear of the small race south of Old Harry. The second feed went down successfully. Well, the warm liquid component did. However, Sean was given 'one job' by the girls and failed manfully. All he had to do was hold a fishing net in front of me, so I could take out a much-anticipated M&S mini-pancake with butter on. Sadly he simply dumped it in the cold, salty water and I watched it dissolve in front of me. He then promptly had to lie down and shut his eyes again. We all know that horrid feeling, but I'm afraid to say that, at that



moment, I did not feel as sympathetic as I should have done....

Feeding would move to hourly, then more frequently as dictated by my speed and need for energy maintenance. Complex carbohydrates and a small amount of quick acting sugars are the order of the day. Too many quick carbs cause a temporary 5-minute high before a problematic and prolonged low, so must be avoided. A swimmer must drink enough (based on their bodyweight) to be able to pee (while swimming) hourly. This is carefully checked for and noted by the support team. Failure to pee is a potential red flag as regards hydration and crucial, internal salt balance.

I felt better almost immediately. The southwest wind was also now helping rather than hindering, with a gentle swell behind me and the sun shining overhead.

Across Poole Bay we went

The Middle Miles

Endurance swimming is a study in rhythm. Ideally, the swimmer stays midships, neither too close (touching the boat is not permitted) nor too far (unhelpful and unsafe). I prefer swimming slightly forward, as though encouraging the boat to keep up with me rather than the reverse. Diesel fumes discourage a position astern.

Hannah and Trish each swam short stints alongside – just behind me, never in front as that is illegal in terms of swim distance rules. If racing, swimming behind someone to gain 'drag' gives a competitive edge. Their presence was hugely reassuring. They are both strong, and I am used to them slowing down for me. For once, it felt helpful rather than humiliating to pretend that I was ahead of them because I was faster!

Hours passed. According to Trish's meticulous notes, by hour six they were concerned I was slowing. "Why is Chris looking tired?" she wrote. Quite! Cannot understand it myself.

Yet my stroke rate remained remarkably consistent. Technique held. I was tired, certainly – but not failing.

As we approached the final stages, the crew became acutely aware of the next tidal turn. Timing mattered. Both Hannah and Trish entered the water again for the final push. I cannot repeat their motivational speeches in full, as yacht club decorum must be preserved, but suffice it to say that they were 'very direct and clear'.

With the promise that we were within twenty minutes of the finish, I found another gear. Eight hours and twenty-eight minutes after starting, I completed the crossing.

Champagne and Perspective

Hannah had secreted a bottle of champagne on board. It tasted magnificent. Almost as magnificent as having our reserves of fresh drinking water poured over me by Trish to remove the crusted salt that had effectively laminated itself to my skin.

As we motored back towards Poole Harbour at a civilised speed, I collapsed into an exhausted sleep. Reviewing the data later, I realised I had effectively swum almost two-thirds of a Channel distance. I also now knew that I could keep going, albeit slowly, even after over eight continuous hours. It was a significant stepping stone.

The Channel and Beyond

The following year, Hannah completed her solo Channel swim in 13 hours. Ten hours into it, after very tough wind against tide conditions for the first four hours, and being sick twice, she faced her own psychological low. This time, it was my turn to swim alongside and offer encouragement – again, heavily



seasoned with language unsuitable for print. At one point I swam one-armed to avoid overtaking her; this indignity of being nearly overtaken (and attempt annulled) by one of the slowest swimmers in the group proved the perfect motivator!

My own five-day booked Channel window arrived in September 2024. The date had been etched in the calendar ever since successfully booking two years earlier. With the weather forecast looking dubious, rather than wait in Dover, I stayed at home. Each day the skipper would ring at midday, to discuss whether we could start at midnight (after promptly driving over). Each day, having already looked at multiple weather Apps, the predicable outcome was agreed – ‘no swim tomorrow due to strong winds’. No solo swim attempts are started in F5 or above. I found this psychologically difficult, and subsequently found out it is well known as the “Emotional Dover Coaster”.

A second, short notice additional late-season slot also fell victim to the same ongoing poor September weather. The daft thing was that Poole Bay was experiencing gentle F2 winds! Shortly afterwards, I injured my wrist in a 4-hour training swim and had to postpone a 2025 attempt. Surgery beckons shortly.

Whether I have another two-to-three-year build-up in me remains to be seen. Whether my lovely, but long-suffering wife, Juliette, does is another question entirely. Perhaps I need

to politely ask what she ‘really’ thinks?!

So, for my solo Channel attempt, I did not even get a toe into the water... I even wondered whether the charity I had raised money for, Compassion in Dying*, would need to give their £20,000 back.

What I Do Know

What I do know is this: sea swimming has given me some of the best friends of my life. It has provided challenge, perspective, humility, and joy – in equal measure, plus an unequal amount of coping with being cold.

There are countless swims still to be done, in Dorset and far beyond. Short ones, long ones, sociable ones, and perhaps the occasional slightly mad one.

And if any member of this club, having read this, is even mildly curious about sea swimming, then do get in touch. There is a welcoming community ready to help. Just don’t expect the water to be warm....

Chris Elfes

*Please consider looking at or recommending this fantastic charity, which affects every single human on the planet:

<https://compassionindying.org.uk>



Left to right: Trish, Chris and Hannah

The Sherwood Cup Pursuit Races



Picture by Bill Frewing

The 2025 season saw the inaugural races in the Sherwood Cup, a new series of three reverse handicap, or pursuit races.

For those unfamiliar with this format, boats start slowest to fastest, according to their handicap, and race until a predetermined time, where their position at that point is their finishing result. If all goes well, and the starting times have been calculated correctly, the fleet should finish around the same time if everyone has sailed an equally competitive race.

There are a number of advantages to this format if you are new to racing, not least of which is that, unless you're winning, there will be a boat in front of you to follow, so the risk of getting lost on the course is minimal. And, of course, if you overtake someone, that's a position gained in the race so it's fun chasing everyone down.

Race 1 - 23rd May FW: 18:30 - SW 12 to 16 knots

48 boats competed in the first race, which took place on a beautiful spring evening with a light southwesterly breeze and very little tide.

The RO, Simon Lawson, set a long circular course around the top triangle, which proved to be perfect.

First across the line was Dave and Amber Hale in their 420 but, regrettably, they were later disqualified on a technicality promoting Martin Clooney and Peter Frith into first place in their Osprey.

Social Sailor - Claire Daniels (Wanderer)

Big Shot - Chris Townsend (ILCA)



Soundings 2026

Lady - Sally Ross

Winner - Martin Clooney & Peter Frith (Osprey)

Youth - Lottie Eyre (ILCA)

Race 2 - 11th July FW: 18:25 - S 5 to 7 knots

The second took place on the Friday evening of our Club Regatta. Parkstone Yacht Club were invited to attend and 24 boats sailed from Parkstone to the Top Triangle along with some of their safety boats to help out.

102 boats from Poole took part, so 126 overall, making this event one of the best attended since Barts Bash in 2014.

Simon Lawson was the RO, once again, and set what has become known as the "Pac Man" course – a circular course around the top triangle with a dog-leg inwards. So the course resembled the famous Pac Man.

The weather was hot and sunny, but the high pressure seemed to have chased the wind away and so there was some concern the race would be abandoned. However, there was just enough breeze to start the race westwards against the tide.

One of the main features of this race was the Wednesday night Youth instructors decided to compete in Club Oppys, although progress against the tide at the start proved difficult.

It was also great to see that several of Rich Sherwood's friends and crewmates came out to support the event in Club dinghies, with Will Dennis (skipper of Blues/Saska), Dale Rickard and Paul Haigh all racing. Will and Dale (Hartley 15) even won a medal each in the Social Sailing category. Special mention goes to (Insert Name) from Parkstone who came 5th overall in an Optimist!

Social Sailor - Nicky (GP14)?

Big Shot - Chris Townsend (ILCA)

Lady - Sally Ross (ILCA)

Winner - Ollie and Amber Hale (GP14)

Youth - Alex Pluck (Topper)

Race 3 - 29th August 18:30 SW 8-10 knots

The third race saw regular RO Simon Lawson bring back the well proven Pac Man course, but this time it was run anticlockwise starting with a beat up towards the Wareham Channel.

The Met Office had forecast 27 knots and thunder earlier in the week, which caused some concerns, but come Friday there was no sign of heavy weather: it was a gentle 10 knot southwesterly breeze which dropped to eight knots over the course of the race.

The strong ebb tide meant some of the sailors who don't regularly race struggled to get over the Yellow Line but, once



out of the tide, made good progress to Mikey. The course then proceeded to be a series of gybes round the marks until we finally turned upwind.

30 boats competed, which was excellent considering the weather forecast, and the race finished in the twilight (some might have said the dark). Then it was back to the bar for dinner and the awards ceremony, which was presented by our Commodore, Tim Edom.

Social Sailor - Claire & Jo Macgregor (Wanderer)

Youth - Devon Green & Fraser Burnett (Hobie 16)

Big Shot - Sandra Macgloughlan (Laser)

Veteran - James Stafford (GP14) Pictured far left

Lady - Lottie Eyre (moved from Youth as she's just too good!!) (ILCA)

Winners: Richard Hattersley & Peter Frith (Osprey)

Congratulations go to the overall winner of the event who was Peter Frith in his Osprey, helmed over the series by Martin Clooney and Richard Hattersley.

Sherwood Cup Endeavour Award

This award was voted on by the Safety teams and Race Management and is given to the sailor who showed positive energy, determination on the race course.

Many names were nominated: Laiyla Stewart in her Topper, Nick and Carol, who raced for the first time in their new

Wayfarer: *Robin*. But the award deservedly went to a young man who has only just completed his RYA Start Race qualification on Wednesday Youth nights, but who competed in all three races with a massive grin and came a very impressive 33rd out of 124 boats at the Friday Regatta event, beating many more experienced racers. So a massive congratulations goes to a well deserving winner; Alex Pluck (pictured above receiving his trophy from Tim Edom) in his Topper.

Thanks to:

This event would not have been possible to run without the input from many members who helped both on the water and off. I can't name them all here or Soundings will run out of room but, in particular, Simon Lawson and Bill Frewing for being RO & Assistant RO. Thanks too to the safety crews many of whom did all three races and were last back to the Haven after making sure everyone had got in safely. Robert Holdway for compiling the results, AJ for much of the organisation and generally smoothing things over. Thanks to our Commodore, Tim Edom, for taking care of the MC duties at the awards and Claire Eyre and Bernie Davis for organising the registration and trolleys like a military operation. Can I also thank everyone on the Sailing Committee who agreed to support this series and covering the cost of the trophies and prizes.



The concept and Richard Sherwood

During my time on Sailing Committee I was very keen to increase participation in dinghy racing, particularly with sailors that sailed socially or who were still learning. A few years ago we replaced the Friendly Fridays event, that usually ran the evening before the Regatta with a Pursuit Race, open to all members. This proved popular and afterwards a few competitors asked if we could run a series as they had enjoyed it so much.

A few months later, one of my friends, Rich Sherwood, who was a member of Poole Yacht Club for many years, passed away after a long battle with cancer. Rich loved sailing and, as well as campaigning his own cruiser in the Solent, raced regularly out of Poole on *Blues* (a Sigma 33) then *Saska* (a First 31.7) both skippered by Will Dennis, a long time Poole member. Rich had an infectious personality and it was impossible not to love him. He had a joke for every occasion and faced his own challenges uncomplaining with a smile. Until the end, unless you knew, you wouldn't think he had a care in the world.

I wanted to remember Rich and his attitude towards sailing so an idea formed for the Sherwood Cup - a series of races but with an emphasis on participation as well as competitive racing.

The Sherwood Cup Endeavour Award embraces all of the characteristics that Rich Sherwood personified and, to me, is the most important award in the event.

Rich McAvoey

Ugly Duckling and the.....

2023 Rolex Fastnet

In the next few weeks, the campaign will get underway for the X412 Delta X for the 2027 Fastnet with the first qualifier falling at the end of the forthcoming season. With that horizon getting closer, George Beevor took the time to look back on his last go in 2023.

A skipper's account of a campaign years in the making....

"It was a dark and stormy night..." is how the best childhood stories began and, fittingly, that's how ours began too – on a foul July night in Studland Bay, battered, bruised and wondering what on earth we were doing. Six days later we would sail into Cherbourg, exhausted but elated, finishing third in class in one of the toughest Fastnet's in living memory. This is the story of how *Ugly Duckling*, a 1972 Sagitta 35 and a crew of five, ended up there.

Finding the Boat That Wanted a Fastnet

The roots of this campaign stretch back to a hot day on the River Dart in 2018. Olly and I were racing our Impala 28, *Magic*, and had reached the limits of what she could offer off-shore. A brokerage listing led us to a Sagitta 35 – solid, elegant, unmistakably Sparkman & Stephens. We stepped aboard and immediately felt she was "right": over engineered fittings, powerful lines, and the sense of a boat built for weather.

Within a year we were winning JOG races and Hamble Classics. On the beat home from a Cowes – Alderney win, Olly wondered aloud whether Duckling was hinting she wanted something bigger – perhaps even a Fastnet. A seed was planted.

Why Take on a Fastnet?

People always ask "why?". For me it came down to privilege and time. Owning a boat like this, with the support of Olly's father, Hedley, – Hamble boatbuilding royalty – is a gift that won't last forever. I didn't want to be one of those sailors who retires and spends the rest of their life wishing they'd done the big one. Let us not die wondering.

Soundings 2026

Building the Crew

I've always believed the greatest joy in sailing is the crew. The sunsets, dolphins and trophies are all better when shared with the right people. For a Fastnet we needed sailors I trusted enough to sleep off watch – an honour skippers rarely grant. The crew almost picked itself:

- Olly, my long time co-owner and shipmate.
- Tom Chicken, calm under pressure, an engineer whose hydrogen fuel cell company would later save our electrical system.
- Matt Thornton, paramedic, natural helm, and a sailor who can crack a joke when everyone else is clinging on.
- Lisa McCrindle, experienced, unflappable and a brilliant communicator.
- Daryl Reis-Day, electronics engineer and navigator, who simply walked up to me at Cowes Week and said, *"I hear you're doing a Fastnet – I want in."*

We planned to race with six. Fate had other ideas.

Qualifying, Refitting, Preparing

The qualifiers went well—third in the Cervantes Trophy, a frustrating retirement in the de Guingand, and a gritty third in the Morgan Cup after kedging in 60 metres off Portland. We learned how to suffer together, how to keep going, and how to trust each other.

Over winter, Hedley led a major refit: new engine, new safety kit, hull taken back to glass. Tom's company loaned us a methanol fuel cell that kept our batteries above 12.3 volts



throughout the race—transformational for comfort and safety.

We trained, we did sea survival courses together, we stowed food and water with military precision.

Then, a week before the start, Lisa broke her foot. We were 5!

The Start: Into the Teeth of It

The 2023 Fastnet was forecast to be brutal and it lived up to every word. Visibility was poor, the Solent was blowing hard, and our start – delayed, with a wrapped batten in the blade – felt anticlimactic with note of the helicopters and press boats that normally mark this occasion out as a bit special. But once sorted, we tore through the fleet under #3 and two reefs.

Then the sea state built.

Between Yarmouth and Hurst we got a riding turn on the genoa winch, fully loaded. We narrowly avoided a collision with *Scherzo*. I knew then we’d need the storm jib – but, with a big class behind us and chaos all around, finding sea room was to be a challenge.

Out past Hurst the waves turned vicious. When Tom and Matt went forward to secure the blade and set the storm jib, a breaking sea submerged the entire foredeck. For a few seconds I couldn’t see either of them. Those were the longest seconds of my life. When the bow rose again, they were still there—soaked, battered, but aboard.

We limped into Studland Bay and picked up a mooring. Everything was wet. The storm jib was wrecked. The blade had a hole. Guardrails were bent. Matt had a bruise on his back from a stanchion that had literally kept him on the boat.

We ate lasagne, drank our alcohol free ration, and talked. I told the crew: “I don’t believe we’re going to finish. But I’m not done yet.”



Sea Survival Course

Everyone chose to continue. The Long Road West

Sunday became a day of small victories: sewing sails, drying clothes, fixing what we could. We set off with the modest goal of “just getting round St Aldhelm’s Head”. Then Portland. Then Start Point. Each time we said we’d stop if it looked bad. Each time we carried on.

By Monday we were in sunshine near the Scillies, dodging Clipper 70s struggling in the light airs. Realising we had more water than we needed, we did laundry in a bucket while dolphins played around us. Clean socks in the Celtic Sea is a joy I’ll never forget.

On Tuesday we were reaching towards the Fastnet in building breeze. Spirits rose as Daryl downloaded weather via sat phone. We might round the rock by Wednesday lunchtime.

The Rock: A Battle of Attrition

The forecast was right. By Wednesday morning we were in a full gale. We dropped the main entirely and battled on under blade alone. The seas were enormous – well above the spreaders, sometimes seemingly at masthead height. The boat shuddered, bulkheads groaning under load.

A whale surfaced directly in front of us. For a moment I thought we’d hit it. Somehow it slid away into the depths.

By the time we reached the waypoint south of the rock, we were exhausted. The Fastnet itself appeared through the murk – less a romantic symbol, more a milestone we desperately needed to round so we could bear away and stop being beaten up.

When we finally turned downwind, I re-hoisted the triple-reefed main and collapsed into my bunk, sleeping like the dead.



George in the companionway looking tired

The Run Home

Thursday brought sunshine, spinnakers, and the first real smiles in days. Matt slept for ten hours straight with me standing his watches.

Then came the sat phone incident: the bag slipped off the halyard on which we'd hoisted it to get a clear signal, and fell overboard. We executed our first real man overboard drill perfectly, recovering it on the first pass. Spirits soared.

But the sea wasn't done with us. That night the mainsheet block parted, leaving the boom uncontrolled. In pitch darkness we rigged a preventer and replaced the shackle. It was our third "incident" of the day—superstition satisfied.

By dawn we were running fast again, switching between spinnakers as repairs failed and winds built.

The Cherbourg Problem

For the whole of Thursday we reached up the Channel, covering the distance from the Bishop's Rock to Alderney between dawn and dusk. We surfed at double digit speeds—astonishing for a 50 year old 0.898 rating cruiser racer. The hull sang. The crew whooped. *Ugly Duckling*: heavy and over-built, was suddenly flying, all in glorious sunshine.

As we approached the Channel Islands, the wind filled from the south and we surfed at up to 14 knots. But the Cherbourg finish has a flaw: a 15 mile tidal gate, 25 miles from the line, with streams up to six knots. Arrive at the wrong time and you can lose hours – or the race. Whilst Cherbourg is a wonderful host, putting this tidal gate in the last throws of such a long race does rather undermine the event as a sporting contest. We arrived at the wrong time!

We clawed our way along the edge of the TSS, adding seven miles to our course. It was frustrating, but we kept pushing.

The Finish

Just before 04:00 ship's time, in the dark and under full pressure, we crossed the line and entered Cherbourg. We were emotional, exhausted, and utterly spent.

Our elapsed time: 6 days, 13 hours, 1 minute, 12 seconds.

Our result: 3rd in IRC4B.

Our season: 5th of 56 in IRC4, and – unexpectedly – IRC3 Champions of the YC de France Manche Atlantique Series.

Reflections

Ugly Duckling was magnificent. She looked after us when the sea tried its best to break us. She is heavy, over built, and stubborn – but in a storm, I'd choose her over anything modern. Olin Stephens once said: "I don't like to be retrograde, but I'd rather be on one of the old boats in a storm." He was right. And as for me? I can't wait for the next one.



Safely tied up in Cherbourg



The Good Ship Lollipop &

The ISW 2025

by Richard & Jenny Marshall

Approaching Cresswell Quay

Looking out on a wet and windy day in November the thought of sunny days with gentle winds sailing the Pembrokeshire coast in June seemed very enticing. Reality struck in early June when we received the arrival and launching information. What had we let ourselves in for?

As recent owners of a Shrimper we had much to learn about launching and trailing. We read the comprehensive information and Jenny put red rings around things like ‘narrow road,’ not ideal for launching unless good weather and plenty of help’ We had spent a few nights on *Lollipop* (1083) previously but not ten days, so preparation was key and careful packing essential.

We set off early with Karen Macey’s forecast of sunny days and favourable winds ringing in our ears. Not only was the boat stuffed with every provision, but the bikes, beds and hanging wardrobe were in the van for Jenny’s ‘just in case.’ Pinging from the WhatsApp group alerted us to the fact that a competition had already started as to who had the longest journey. Jenny tracked progress and was sorry to hear of *Coffee Bean*’s transport failure on route. Crossing the impressive Cleddau Bridge gave us a bird’s eye view of Neyland Marina and entering the town they had even put the flags out for us!

Driving towards the shore we were met by the sight of fellow Poole YC Shrimpers Cameron (940), Moonfleet(920) and Alice Rose(417) already sailing in sunshine with a stiff breeze. Many Shrimpers had arrived and were busy rigging in preparation for hoisting in on Friday. Building works in the marina had not

Neyland Marina with Milford Haven beyond

gone to plan and so the new facilities were not as described online. “A good job I packed all those extra clothes,” said Jenny.

I decided to launch on the rough slipway near Neyland Yacht Club, ‘not ideal for launching unless good weather’, but Jenny was less than enthusiastic. Rigging and raising the mast went well but we were aware that we were being watched with some amusement from the clubhouse. One NYC member, a fellow Shrimper owner, volunteered his help. It wasn’t a graceful launch, more akin to that of a lifeboat! Jenny towed our trailer back to the marina saying “I can’t turn round if I get stuck, I’ll just leave it.” I motored *Lollipop* up to the marina in desperate need of a stiff drink and a pleasant evening was spent meeting fellow Shrimpers.

Friday 20th June dawned with grey skies and a stiff breeze. We found our new berth and the marina facilities, but the only shower blocks were quite a stretch of the legs away. Cat, from Parkstone on *Samphire*, came prepared with a folding bike! Apparently, there was singing accompaniment in the ladies’ showers courtesy of Chris! Morning has broken being the favourite.

Breakfast enjoyed and weather improving we ventured up-river with *Alice Rose*, *Moonfleet*, and *Cameron* with one reef in 23 knots of gusty breeze. Returning to our new berth proved somewhat of a challenge due to most of them being occupied by motor cruisers with large protruding outboard propellers. The day improved and we enjoyed the sunshine whilst watching



Martin Blake, SOA National Hon.Sec., welcoming the fleet members at Neyland Yacht Club

the hoisting proceedings. *Coffee Bean's* crew arrived undeterred and went to Aldi to stock up. Thanks to the camaraderie of the Shrimper fleet, they enjoyed the week in other boats. The day ended with the Welcome Dinner at Neyland Yacht Club (above). Old friends reunited and new friends welcomed.

Saturday 21st June – Up the Cleddau

Briefing prompt at 0900 gave us sailing instructions for the day: To explore the upper reaches of the Cleddau. In a light breeze we set off. A few were enticed to the Lawrenny Arms for an early lunch, others continued up to Haverfordwest, while *Cameron*, *Moonfleet* and *Lollipop* ventured up the Cresswell River (pic below) hoping to make it to the Tide Mill.

Admiring the rural landscape and varied wildlife we didn't notice '0' on the depth gauge! We almost took to the footpath at Ford Point and walking was nearly an option as *Lollipop* became firmly stuck in the mud. Lots of reverse engine and swinging on the whisker pole thankfully did the trick. *Cameron* tacked round but *Moonfleet* headed further upriver, almost making the mill, but she also ran aground and Robin had to war dance on the bow! We all beat a hasty retreat to Neyland on the ebbing tide, including most of the fleet tied up at the Lawrenny Arms.

The fleet tying up at Lawrenny Arms



Sunday 22nd June awakened to angry winds and rushing tide. Even morning prayers on the pontoon were to no avail. Trips were made by car to local attractions and hostleries, including St. David's Head and St. David's Cathedral, and many limericks were penned. Another ISW competition!

*There was an old boy with a Shrimper,
Who remarked with a moan and a whimper.
"It's too windy for me.
To go out to sea
To sit in the pub will be simpler"*

And on that note supper was enjoyed at the Ferryboat Inn to round off a wet and windy day on the Pembrokeshire coast.

Monday 23rd June

The great expedition to Pembroke Castle Pool

A forecast of a 4-6 south-westerly in our direction of travel with a two knot tide against us. Challenging but most of us motored the two nautical miles to Wear Spit then reached into Crow Pool. Anchors dropped we awaited instructions to make our way up river to the tidal barrier. Timing was critical as the



Jenny anchor away



Follow the Leader into Pembroke Moat



barrier only opened for 15 minutes. The plan: follow the leader up the tortuous narrow creek. Jenny is particularly good on anchor duty but chose the muddiest part of Crow Pool. At least it kept her busy cleaning herself and the anchor instead of worrying about the depth.

Pembroke Castle Pool is a tranquil haven for wildlife and locals were excited to see the appearance of a flotilla of Shrimpers decorating their dock. Mooring at the quay appeared most favourable, but with limited space we took the decision to tie up against the wall. The 10-foot ladder did not impress Jenny however mutiny is not acceptable.

As there were no dockside facilities, we played hunt the public loo! Evening culinary options centred around fish and chips, while some of us had other ideas – ours was almost romantic at the Coach House. At least there was a loo! Later most met up for drinks in the Waterman Arms.

We awoke to a chilly Tuesday morning, ready for our visit to Pembroke Castle (below), a short walk from the dock. The



Lollipop dressed at Pembroke dock



enthusiasm and knowledge of our guide was exceptional and he kept us enthralled with the castle's history and its importance throughout the ages. Established by the Normans in 1093 it is one of the most impressive and formidable castles in Wales.



In the grounds I found a statue (pic below left) of one of my ancestors. William Marshall 'Europe's greatest Knight'. His son Richard Marshall (my namesake) recorded as 'a popular and unusually cultured figure.' Such fame! Lunches consumed and souvenirs purchased we prepared to depart the Castle Pool at 16.15. Again we only had 15 minutes to navigate our way out, with a few scary moments at the barrier as the incoming water pushed us all backwards. With careful manoeuvring we all made it into the creek and returned to Neyland in a brisk force 4-5 downwind.

Our passage plan was to head west and circumnavigate Thorne Island, anchor for lunch in Angle Bay, and return on the flood. **WARNING!** We are likely to encounter large shipping. Monitor channels 16,77 and 12. We were only able to lock onto two channels resulting in a close shave with a large pilot boat who gave five hoots and megaphone requests to keep clear of tanker about to leave!

Anchorage at Angle Bay was grey and overcast but calm. Most of fleet returned to base but, as we hadn't had enough excitement that day, we decided to sail to Dale cardinal followed by a broad reach back with a good breeze. *Lollipop* logging 7.8 knots with tide! Didn't take long.

The next day, whilst others visited West Wales Heritage Museum and other places of interest, we took a bike ride upstream to Westfield Pill Nature reserve. Managed by the Wildlife Trust it boasts 150 different species of birds. Not being seasoned twitchers we only saw seven.

The evening venue at the Cresswell Arms was situated at the upper reaches of the Cresswell River. Due to our earlier encounters upstream we decided to go by car. Four intrepid boats made the journey with Poole YC's *Money Penny* employing a crew member sitting on the bow with a physical depth log on a piece of string. They still touched bottom but this time the tide was rising. Great barbecue and cake enjoyed by all, then a quick exit by the boats to catch the last of the tide!

BBQ at Cresswell Quay



Friday 27th June

Wind gods angry again so no passage to Skommer or Dale. Jenny was insistent on seeing puffins, so we made our way to Martins Haven to take a tourist trip around Skommer Island. The boat was about half full due to the sea state and we would be only able to see some of the island as it had to keep to the sheltered north side.

On board entertainment was supplied by Skipper Jim and 'Tonto' the herring gull. Tonto's fame has spread throughout out Wales. Tonto has accompanied Jim for the last 10 years. Lured by special treats he perches on Jim's shoulder. Tonto decided that because of the similarity of her coat, Jenny also must have treats and became extremely interested in her pockets. (pictured above right). Jim waxed lyrical about the Skommer wildlife and the tracking of puffins on the island.

The passage on Saturday was a sail down Milford Haven to Dale. Slightly grey with 3-5 south-westerly. We sheltered in the bay for lunch and some made it onto the pontoon to eat at the Griffin. Picking up a spare mooring buoy, a first for us, we became the target for swimmers. Much to their surprise they



could stand when they reached us. We shared our beers and chatted in the sunshine, and then more arrived! I was curious to see the sea state off St Ann's Head, so we took a sail out. It was calming down so returned to base on a lovely broad reach. A wonderful day finished by supper, whisky and nostalgic music courtesy of fellow Poole YC Shrimpers Cathy, Peter, Jeff, Geri and Mike in their cosy Air BnB a stones's throw from the marina.

Sunday 30th June – Homeward Bound

I motored Lollipop across the estuary and under the bridge to East Llanion Boatyard. Vance the owner had agreed to lift out boats early if it did not interfere with his round of golf!! De-rigging went well and we all managed to make the end of rally lunch and prize giving at the Yacht Club. Tales were told, thank yous said, prizes given and meal enjoyed. So off we travelled back home all in one piece. New things learned and new friends made.





Gannets & Gowns

by Jo Macgregor

Author's note: The cruise was completed single handed (except for the leg from Portbail to Dielette), though I often use the plural pronoun 'we' to refer to me and my boat *Primrose*. I also often abbreviate *Primrose* to *Prim*.

My two weeks of summer holiday 'boatpacking' began on the evening of Sunday 3rd August, with the rough plan of sailing to Dinan and back. The first hurdle of crossing the channel came with the added spice of a summer gale, Storm Floris, spinning across the North Atlantic and threatening to block the English Channel for a day or two. So instead of my preferred evening trip out to Swanage and then an early morning departure across the channel the next day, I decided to leave on the Sunday evening direct to Alderney or Cherbourg. An overnight dash racing the storm across the channel. The 1800 shipping forecast read:

Wight, Portland, Plymouth. West or South West 4 – 6, occasionally 3 at first and 7 later. Slight or moderate, becoming moderate or rough later. Rain or showers. Good, occasionally poor.



As darkness fell we were punching south at six knots on a beam reach into a steep head sea, as if *Prim* was aware of the urgency to get south before the wind backed. I was seasick after a few hours despite loud repetitions of my favourite sea shanties. The wind dropped overnight and I struggled to stay awake as we wallowed in the pitchy blackness with no stars or moon. The intensely grey dawn came almost suddenly and was a huge relief. Shortly afterwards the wind backed into the SW and it was instantly obvious that we wouldn't fetch Alderney, so altered course for Cherbourg adding 2~3 hours to the voyage.

Fog settled in and the wind rose as we crossed the east bound shipping lane, with visibility down to 500m. Alarmingly I didn't see a single ship whilst we were in the shipping lane! As a precaution I broadcast our position every 15 minutes to 'All Ships' on VHF channel 16.

Out of the shipping lanes the wind rose further and I dropped the mainsail and fitted the washboards. The cockpit started to feel very exposed, lonely and cut-off without being able to see *Prim*'s tiny but homely cabin. *Primrose* sailed it like a 'queen' though and I didn't doubt her for a second.

We passed the Cherbourg breakwater at 1320 local time, 16 hours and 15 minutes after setting off from Poole YC. I spent a frustrating 15 minutes in the outer harbour trying to get the outboard started, till my sleep deprived brain remembered to put fuel in it (!) we then slipped quietly and proudly into Port





Chanterayne. We moored next to a 26ft Polish yacht, who seemed a little put out that we'd just assumed the 'honour' of smallest visiting boat in the harbour from him! The professional crew of the classic maxi yacht *Storm Vogel*, who had just finished the Fastnet Race, also stopped for a chat and to give *Primrose* and I 'kudos' for crossing the channel!

After a day of drying out (pic below), catching up on sleep, stretching my legs and sampling the café culture, we set off again on the evening of 5th August bound for Alderney. A majestic evening sail in the pinky dusk with *Prim* sliding to windward and Chappel Roan blasting out the little Bluetooth speaker. As darkness fell Cap de la Hague and Alderney light-houses blinked their messages across the black heaving sea. However, I realised too late that I must have entered my way-point for Alderney incorrectly into the GPS unit and we had been sucked into the Alderney Race. As I considered what to do, a large, steep, over head height breaking wave appeared from leeward and broke into the cockpit. I fitted the washboards in an instant and tacked to put *Prim's* stern to the waves to ease her passage through. A check of the tidal atlas showed a back

eddy along the island shore which I hoped would be enough to allow us to edge our way into Longis Bay. It worked out and we felt our way into the unlit anchorage of Longis Bay, relying heavily on the chart app on my tablet. Though the primitive navigators tools came to play too ... I knew we were getting too close to the rocky shore when I could hear grasshoppers!

Perhaps fate, or just coming full circle, it seemed somewhat appropriate as Longis Bay was where the RNLI had towed the wreckage of my previous boat *Bluebell* almost a year before.

In contrast to the opening verses of the cruise the next few days were uneventful, enjoyable, sunny cruising, as *Prim* and I caught up with friends on Alderney and made our way south, via St Catherine's Bay on Jersey, to St Malo (arriving on the 8th August). In St Malo I walked round to the ferry port to 'clear in' and get my passport stamped by the PAF (Police Aux Frontiers). The PAF officer started asking questions about *Primrose* and where we had come from, and I was instantly anxious that we'd done something wrong. But it turned out he was also a small boat sailor who was just impressed with how far we'd sailed. He wrote down some Youtube accounts on the back of my form to look up when I got Internet.

In St Malo I had the best Croissant Almande of my life, that one patisserie made EVERYTHING so far instantly worthwhile!



St Malo is famously pretty, but I had my heart set on reaching Dinan and exploring the River Rance. So once I had completed the customs and immigrations formalities, *Prim* and I set off up the river, which entails passing through a lock in the tidal barrage. Once through the barrage, mile upon mile of picturesque Breton countryside slipped past the gunwhales, interspersed with little village and chateaus.

We arrived at the top end of the river a little early and the last couple of miles were a little too exciting with very shallow water and a fierce incoming tide. But *Prim* and I shared the adventure with a little French motor boat and we cheered each



other on. Arriving at the Chatelier lock at the head of the tidal Rance, I was instantly invited onboard this little motor boat and offered a drink: pastis, biere, vin blanc, vin rouge, rose.... Actually not vin blanc, the vin blanc is 'fini'! In five minutes I learnt three things from the group of friends onboard:

1. It was one of their birthdays, I wasn't sure which one...
2. In Brittany everyone is drunk
3. Bretons have the best sense of humour!

Through the Chatelier lock I parted ways with my new friends (who steered their boat in a wobbly line up the river) and found a peaceful mooring on the river bank, where we swapped the cry of the sea birds for the gentle hoot of owls and swooping bats as the dusk turned to night.

The next day though, I felt distinctly uneasy. I felt 'trapped' by the two locks separating *Prim* and I from the open sea and the water surrounding us didn't move with the tide or swell, it seemed 'dead'. More tangible though, the seven-day forecast now reached across our intended return to Poole, which was predicting the chance of more strong winds for the return trip.

My initial instinct was to turn back to the sea and head north, to be able to get home in reasonable weather. But, after coming within five miles of Dinan, it would be such a shame not to see the place. I worked through in detail a day by day plan of where we could be and when. This put my mind at ease that, if needs be, we could sail some long passages north and miss any foul weather if we needed to. I also spent a couple of hours giving *Prim* some love which gave me even more confidence in her.

Dinan is an intensely beautiful and historic walled medieval town. What a privilege it was to moor little *Primrose* on the ancient quay and explore the old cobbled streets, as centuries of mariners have done before us. Also couldn't resist buying a stripey Breton top, it might be cliched but everyone was wearing one and they looked so good!

The trip back down the river was idyllic, as was the downwind dawn sail back up the coast to Granville. I prefer to visit quiet anchorages, wild spots and villages, but I had a special desire to visit the Christian Dior museum in Granville. It was

