

Story 09

THE MORNA CRUISE

1953 & 1954

There were nine members in each crew 1953; Jos Pete Hall; Bill Andrews; Ken Shenton ; Murray McKie; Tony Pennall; Brian Griffiths; Barry Goodwin; Brian Longmoor; David Griffiths Dicky Reeves; Toothy Gibbs. There were two cruises and this is a comprehensive list of the two crews.



MORNA exiting Salcombe

It was a bit of a memorable start, we had taken on board the provisions and personal gear, the tide was falling and we did not want to hang about Lymington for another eight hours. So we untied and shoved off, from the town quay, straight onto the mud bank the other side of the very narrow river. The engine was not powerful enough to take us forward and meanwhile the tide was still falling. I'm not sure how we passed a line ashore, but there it was and Mr. Allen the owner pulled us off the bank with his car, He gave us a cautionary wag of his finger and wished us and his boat "Bon Voyage"

MORNA was a Thames Rated twenty two ton Gaff Ketch. To find the characteristics of our vessel we messed about in the Solent for the rest of the day, coming up to buoys, Rising and lowering sails, swinging the compass. Apart from the regular sails you would expect to find there was a very light almost clothes weight foresail, when we hoisted the thing into place we could see it was a "Lazy Bones", the clew of the sail came as far back as 4 or 5 feet past the shrouds. The boat looked very smart when rigged thus. To shorten sail you could simply wrap it up with the roller reef on the fore stay making the sail a large or as small as you needed. After all this activity, we eventually spent the evening and night in Yarmouth I.O.W.

The next morning we made sail for Poole passing the Needles; Christchurch; Muddyford; Boscombe; Bournemouth; and Sandbanks.

It was a regular Sou, Wester and we were close hauled all the way. Then we turned right though the entrance to Poole Harbour on a dead run and a flood tide. Immediately inside the entrance was a huge buoy and what seemed to be a very narrow passage between the buoy and Brown Sea Island, the problem was we needed to gybe the total rig. All hands on deck, two hands for the fore sails four of us to haul the main sail in and let it out on the other tack, one hand for the mizzen, one to steer, and the skipper stood ready to shout at us.

Morna answered well, she came up on the Starboard tack with everything taut. The Royal Yacht Club sent us a signal hoist "Well Done".

We moored to the Town Quay and sent out for the odds and ends we had discovered needed after the journey from Yarmouth.

Early the next morning on a full tide just turning we enquired at the Harbour Masters Office what papers we needed to go to France. "Just go" was the answer, "Don't forget to turn right after Sandbanks. Any where special in France?"

"Cherbourg"

We reckoned the journey would take about twenty hours or very nearly two tides, so we would be swept up the Channel and down the Channel twice about equal amounts. The reasoning worked out well, with a course due South and the "Hall Margin" of aiming a bit to one side twenty hours later we found a huge black buoy with

"LE PIERRE NOIR"

Painted around the body of the edifice we sailed all the way around it to read the titling, we made our way into the Grand Rade and from there to the Petit Rade where a small child in a tiny "pram" boat, expertly sculling over the stern showed us precisely where to place our bow anchor and moor to the Quay stern on.

There is a little aside here. Jos and I were on the Middle Watch, Four o'clock till eight, there was no moon, for it was cloudy and drizzling slightly, enough to warrant a weather proof sheet to be pulled over the open cock-pit and helm, so that we could shelter. We took it in turns to climb from under the sheet and look about the dark horizon. On one occasion early on in our trick, I spotted a single white light. Taking the hand bearing compass a bearing was taken and chalked on the black board, there for this purpose, "We'll keep an eye on that in ten minutes". Ten minutes quickly passed and a second white light had appeared, while I watched for a moment a red light came into view, slightly beneath the two white ones. A new bearing was taken and was the same as the first. That indicates a collision course according to the book or at the least a close pass.

We checked the navigation lights that they were burning rightly. Re-checked the bearing on his approaching ship, eventually shining the "Aldis" signalling light on our sails .

No answer from the vessel.

When Jos and I could see the port holes and make out the size and outline of this looming ship, we "went about". We were already close hauled so the sails settled on the other tack of their own. The ship passed us about a quarter of a mile to the south of us. We bounced over the trailing bow wave and over the stern wake. So with the vessel receding away we "went about" again, to resume our course and continued to call the ship on ALDIS LAMP.

Eventually , just as the ship was hull down on the horizon we had a reply."

Time and Position please" We didn't bother.

We spent the day and the evening in Cherbourg. I remember ordering from a family run restaurant a plate of chips. Not knowing any French to speak of, I was embarrassed to be presented with a plate of Crisps and a knife and fork. Somewhere in the comings and goings Jos had placed our orders for Custom Controlled fags and drinks. This was delivered mid-morning, and as soon as the basket of Goodies was on board the Officer cast off the stern line, with a smart salute, wished us "Bon Voyage". We wanted to make St.Malo.

The navigators indeed all of us were grossly aware that a deep depression was coming our way, we could only anticipate gales wet and windy.

So for the rough passage expected in a force "six" through the race of Alderney, the navigators had devised a course where resultant forces prevail. We were sailing a compass course of 280 degs and making an over the ground course of 190 degs.

The tide had changed and did not give us time enough to reach St. Malo.

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So we made a course for Granville and low and behold we were again too late for the basin. We were obliged to moor to the outside of the basin and anticipate drying out. A halyard was taken from the fore sail hoist and made fast to a lamppost on the mole, fenders were placed along the hull and the halyard inclined the vessel to lean against the masonry.

Thus when Morna sat on the ground that evening she looked stable.

The only way of having anything to eat during a passage was to place bread, butter, a knife, cheese, jam something to help the bread to go down in a bowl on the saloon floor and let it slide about, so you sat on the floor, waited until the bowl came within arm's reach, and ate. We could manage soup, "Swissnor" de-hydrated packet soups that need simmering for 20 minutes, then served in a milk bottle with a screw of paper in the neck, and this kept the soup in and the sea water out. Also warmed your hands.

The cooker consisted, two primus type burners they needed to be lighted with meths. The method of heating food on the stove was to a third fill a saucepan with water sprinkle in enough soup powder, place on the lid then take a lanyard from the rail surrounding the stove, a half hitch on the handle a twist around the knob on the lid, pass the lanyard through the handle on the other side of the saucepan and tie off on the rear rail of the stove. The motion of the boat kept the content agitated, no need to stir, well only once or twice.

Very early the next morning, as soon as the lock gates were open we went inside and with the absence of any bollards along the quay, we moored to a very rusty dockside crane that had grass growing from under its wheels. A couple of hours later there was a loud clanking of tortured ironwork, this heap of rust was moving towing us along the quay. Panic to free ourselves.

The whole crew wanted a day off to explore the town finding provisions, amongst other essentials we purchased a demy-kilo of coffee, more later. There is more than two pounds in a kilo, this leads to all sorts of problems when provisioning for nine.

On the quayside between the rusty crane, a railway track ran clear through the town, hot steaming railway engines and associated trucks mixing its own progress with the road traffic and traffic lights. Between the crane, railway and some warehouses is a wide cobbled area with a mobile fun fair, encamped on it. This attraction had a "ROTA". We had seen something similar on the South Bank for the Festival of Britain The circumstances were you paid to watch the ride from a high gallery, looking down into a circular drum with a floor capable of being raised and lowered, then the ride was free.

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There was no one taking money at the entrance so all nine of us trooped into the gallery and watch the contraption spin a couple of times. Then it was our turn, we stood with our backs to the wall of the drum while the floor was raised, the drum began to rotate.

It spun faster and faster pinning us against the wall, then the floor sank from beneath our feet

Well, eight of us stuck to the gyrating wall, Penall had no adhesion to the wall, and he went down with his feet firmly attached to the floor. Shenton who knew some French was encouraging the owner of the ride to spin faster. The whole machine was rocking on its foundations and still "Sid" Penell would not adhere to the wall. The ride was over, a small door opened and we exited from the drum, there stood a fellow asking for money. In Britain we argued you pay to watch; there was no one to take our money and the ride is free. Any way the ride did not work one, of our crew did not stick to the wall, So, we all walked out..

The cruise was for two weeks, we called at St. Peter Port. I thought it was the prettiest place I had ever seen, the tiny harbour individual establishments along the quay side, I made a promise to go back and have another look. I did for our honey moon. When Jan and I went back for ten days.

During one of the Cruises St. Hellier was a port where we called. The District Commissioner came to see the boat, duly impressed he invited four of us to join him for a tour of the Island. On the tour we saw the German Lookout towers, a new road built by slave Island labour. The journey took all morning. A light Lunch with a glass of the Home Brew "Mary-Anns" bought the four of us back to the Harbour. The rest of the day was spent "Make do & Mend" both the boat and personal gear. In the evening we looked for some where to eat.

There was just the place. The sign advertising "Mary Anns " was enough to endorse the quality/hospitality. After splendid meals replete and susceptible we listened to an Old Salt telling tales of his voyages,

"Five times I've been round the world". He was saying.

"Five times and there's one thing I haven't seen".

We puzzled for a polite moment "What's that?"

His wife was at his elbow verbally chastising him "Shut up, they are only boys Shut Up."

"Well its bird droppings under a Cuckoo Clock"

What an anti-climax, Well it was his tale to tell and it has lasted to be re-told fifty four years on

We made our way to St Malo in good time, when the lock gates were open.

At this Time in the early fifties austerity had only just finished. The Basin at St. Malo was very nearly empty, we could tie up where ever we wanted. Provisions were needed. It was Wednesday and the boat had to be back for Saturday morning, we had a day and a half.

On the first night we were shattered going to bed early. The next morning water and provisions were needed, a general clean up after so long a rough passage. At some time during this last passage we had broken a sky-light window in the chicken house roof. It happened to be the window over the stove which made cooking damp, wet, downright difficult. The pattern of the glass was interlocking stars, which we eventually found to be "marguerite".

With all the chores done a little rest and a quick wash and scrub up we dressed in uniform and entered the town. During hostilities the buildings of this town were totally levelled, bombed out of existence. So they re-built the town on the same street plan, with fewer houses larger inside and modern building methods, but the overall plan and aspect of the town is medieval

Having seen around the Shops, Church, Town Hall etc, we gathered together to find a sympathetic cafe or bar. This was Central Square and there, at our elbow as "The Central Cafe" just the job. All nine of us went inside, sat at the bar, and asked for a glass each. We ordered a drink from the first nine bottles on the mirrored glass shelf behind the bar. In each glass was a different drink, so we each took a sip and handed the glasses on to the crew next to you, thus we each tasted the liquors. When the glasses were empty we ordered the next nine, the barman cottoned on very quickly and called his friends to see what was going on, and the next nine drinks.

It was meal time, the barman said there as a room upstairs where we could eat privately, taking up this offer we sat around a large table and ordered crab for starters, this was a mild mistake the dish before us was crab claws, very difficult to manage with a knife and fork. Pete remembered the "Nut Cracker " suite "Cass Noiset" ordering nine nut crackers we were all happier. Particularly after three bottles "Graves Sec". I cannot recall the rest of the meal, I suppose it finished with blue cheese and black coffee. I have a long felt wish to see the place again.

In 1982 with the family and a caravan we camped at San-Lunaire, visiting Mount St. Michael and St. Malo, I would still like to return, just once more.

The journey back to Lymington was a dead run all the way, when the tide "Ebbled" we started the TVO "Fordson Major" tractor engine to maintain progress, arriving just south of the Needles when it was getting dark, carefully motoring in towards the cliff until the colour of the light house lamp changed to red .

It was time then to lower the sails. They had been in place now for nearly 20 hours and the salt of the sea water plus the constant drying, wetting had seized the running halliards solid, one of the crew was needed to ascend the main mast and free up the gear, I cannot remember who it was, but the task was accomplished by feeding the stiff ropes one at a time through the pulley sheaves of each block. There is a threefold purchase for the throat, plus the Luff blocks for the peak. The descent was easier as the throat of the main sail descended so the crew descended with it.

The film at this point narrates" With the Isle of Wight in sight we moored for the night." The narrator ought to be shot.

The next morning Saturday the tide was ebbing past Hurst Castle and the wind was still Sou-West , wind against tide makes for a very short wave pattern, so we were taking every other wave absolutely green over the bows, and the Roller reefing jammed. We took down the mizzen and what fore sail we had leaving the main in position. Big Mistake! Morna went into a series of Broaches that tested the Sheets and Deck gear. It was quite a blow. Force four/Five Pete volunteered to go out along the Bowsprit and clear the drum of the roller reefing. This he did dressed in oilskins and a towel around his neck tucked in firmly he climbed along the spar, each time the boat dipped the wave totally emerged him, until eventually he as sitting on the end of the bow sprit facing aft, with his feet braced against the Cats whisker stays. Every other wave still washing over him green and heavy, the jam was quickly cleared and the fore sail roller reefed, Mora broached a couple of times again, one of which tore the runner of the hatch to the after cabin, to be repaired later.

Nothing lasts forever once past Hurst Castle we could alter course and put a stop to the rough passage. We re-rigged the inner foresail and mizzen. Repaired the hatch runner with a few cross grained plugs to hide the new screws fixing the hatch runner a little quick drying "Rylard" varnish hid the damage to the hatch runner.

We moored at Lymington Town Warf with a little time to spare. Dr Allen came down to examine his boat and approved of it's condition. Once the boat was cleared of all our gear and the Carver lorry loaded, we forged our way home. The rest is on film.

Oh! yes we had a letter from Dr. Allen commending the general condition of the boat , gear, hatch repair, but his last remark was about the Galley ceiling. I did mention that the cooker consisted, two primus type burners they needed to be lighted with meths , well sometimes they don't vaporise and flared making sooty smoke. His comment was all was well except the galley ceiling "Which was a black as your hat"

The story has two ends for we Cruised in "53" & "54"

1953. After spend in night in Freshwater Bay lurking by the Needles we called at Yarmouth to clear Customs. The Officer came on board and after a swift glance at the mound of cigarettes and bottles on the Saloon table , a perfunctory look at the passports ,counting heads and books, he said he could see nothing chargeable and left..

1954. The land fall was Salcombe, we spent the night moored to the customs buoy. The next morning an Officer rowed out to us. Jos placed a few glasses on the Chart Table and a bottle of gin. He filled six or so glasses and placed our Pass Ports alongside the drinks. The C.O. glanced at the log book and downed the first gin, he called us in one by one looking at each photo in the pass ports. Asking, if I had enjoyed the last couple of weeks. Confirming that I had, and the year before. Cruising like this is a way of losing a couple of stone in weight and leaves you so much more fit. It had been a happy crew with whom to share the experience.

Sometimes he took another gin, he then examined our stash of booze and cigarettes, commenting that we had been quite meagre in our purchases. There was nothing to pay. He rowed away a happy fellow with half a bottle of "Plymouth Gin" inside him.