

## WE DIDN'T MEAN TO GO TO HARWICH

### KINGFISHER'S SUMMER CRUISE 2020



Kingfisher anchored off East head, Chichester harbour

#### Introduction

This was to be our second summer cruise in Kingfisher, which we acquired in Falmouth in 2019. We cruised in the West Country and the Scillies during August that year to find out what we had purchased, and then had her extensively refitted by Stirling & Son at Plymouth during the winter. So badly corroded were the keelbolts on removal that Will Stirling told us that he could only assume that the laws of gravity had been in abeyance for us during August! Her launch in March this year preceded the announcement of lockdown by exactly 4 hours, so back she went into her winter shed/tent until Whitsun, when we were able to get her back to Chichester harbour, to join Mikado, our 1904 Fife racing cutter.

Kingfisher is a 1935 Clyde-built teak on oak 42ft Silver Leaf, in very original condition. She was advertised (correctly) as accommodating 2 in utter luxury, 4 in comfort and 8 at a pinch. With central heating and towel rails, hot and cold running water and all the mod cons behind the teak panelling, we went for the luxury option of two of us for cruising the rivers, lakes and canals of Europe, and the 8 berth variant for accommodating the racing crew of Mikado, which sleeps only 2 and has become just a bit too character-forming for us as a cruising platform for our advancing years. Kingfisher has modern engines and navionics, including auto pilot, radar and AIS. With twin outward-turning screws, 4 ft 2 ins draft and an easily lowered mast we can take her almost anywhere at her 8 knots cruising speed, within a 400 mile range on one fill of diesel. The huge fresh water tanks (coupled to on-deck and below-deck showers) make it feel as if you are supplied from the mains.

This year's outing was to be a sort of training cruise for navigating rivers, locks and bridges. With big uncertainties about whether the pandemic would permit us to go abroad, or even to Scotland, where she was to have been mother ship for Mikado at the (sadly cancelled) Fife Regatta, we decided to explore as much as we could of the Thames. After anxious study of the available on-line

guidance we reckoned that we could certainly make it as far as Henley and Sonning (where we planned to celebrate the anniversary of our wedding night at the French Horn there 39 years previously), and perhaps even as far as Oxford, before being stopped by the first really low bridge. September promised perhaps a little less congestion on the river than August, before getting her back into healthy salt water for the winter. As you will read (below) it didn't quite turn out that way...

### Day 1: Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> August



Sunset over Selsey Bill

We set off from Chichester *a deux* after tea, planning to get a little eastwards to within daylight striking range of the tide gate at Beachy Head the next day, and an overnight stop at Dover or Ramsgate. We had planned a non-stop passage overnight, but our passage crew sadly became unwell at short notice, so we decided not to sail at night if this could be avoided. Strong Northerly winds were forecast, but we reckoned we could stay inshore and avoid the inevitable lobster pots by sailing (motoring) only in daylight.

After weaving through the rocks off Selsey as the sun set behind us, we found a snug anchorage just north of the moorings off the lifeboat station east of Selsey Bill for a quiet night, planning to start East just before dawn as the tide turned in our favour.

Day 2 Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> August



Passing Eastbourne Pier

Alarm clocks having duly done their job, we were under way by 0500 over a smooth sea but with an increasing offshore wind, as forecast. So we literally hugged the coast, a few hundred yards off most of the time, getting a good view of the innumerable beach huts, bungalows and ribbon development of the English South coast, together with lovely Regency terraces and the occasional pier at Brighton, Eastbourne and the other famous resorts, and a good view of Lancing Chapel on its hill West of Shoreham. Not to mention some spectacular chalk cliffs including Beachy Head (below).



Things were really hotting up by the time we approached Dungeness, with the wind up to F7 plus, but the sea perfectly manageable just a cable or two off the beach. We thought we needn't worry about the Dungeness firing range on a Sunday, until radio-ed by a passing dredger asking us whether we were planning to don our tin hats. So off-shore we had to go, where it really started to get rough. Turning almost North 2 miles off the tip of Dungeness to a planned rendezvous with friends on the beach at Hythe, we started taking the spray in buckets (or baths) full, putting our ancient but much-loved Clearview screen to its first hard test (with us that is). It passed with flying colours, performing much better than the screen wipers on the other wheelhouse window. Going almost 8 knots into a really nasty wind and sea fully demonstrated the Silver Leaf's splendid qualities as a sea boat, even if slightly loose sealant in the scuttle over my bunk left me just a little damp that evening, and more than a little annoyed, before the central heating dried us out and a dose of Captain Tolleys prevented a recurrence.

Rendezvous at Hythe duly achieved on time, we reached Dover by late afternoon, being directed to a very short pontoon in the old marina area for the night. Coming alongside provided an unintended opportunity to test the shaft cutters Stirlings had installed during the winter, when the bight of a warp slipped over the side. Up came one end, very cleanly cut, but the other remained stubbornly held below water. So it was on with the skipper's home-made clearance diving kit (snorkel with hose pipe to the deck: see pic) for an impromptu swim over the side in the dusk, which soon unwrapped the rest of the warp from around the starboard prop.



The Dutch have just built a splendid new marina at Dover. Alas it's currently completely unusable (and closed off) because strong onshore winds bring in a swell which makes it uninhabitable. We were told that plans are afoot to erect barriers which will put that right but, as matters stand, we couldn't really recommend Dover for an overnight stop, let alone a longer one, even though the courteous Harbour Control makes getting in and out among all the ferries surprisingly easy. As it was, pushing on to Ramsgate would have involved another very rough passage north with wind against tide, after a long day, with arrival in the dusk.

### Day 3 Monday 31<sup>st</sup> August



A much lighter northerly wind greeted us as we left Dover, with much reduced sea, giving a pleasant trip through the historic Downs and round North Foreland, before turning West for our approach to the Thames. While passing Margate we thought it would be a good idea to book our berth in Limehouse basin for the night. A casual enquiry as to when we would need to leave the basin the following morning to catch the tide up to Teddington Lock produced the reply that, unless we could use the Grand Union Canal (the one through Islington Tunnel and Regents Park), which we couldn't, there was no way of getting to Teddington, because the river was closed to all traffic at Hammersmith Bridge until further notice. Apparently the hot summer had made it too unsafe to let people or cars over it or boats under it.

Reflecting that it was just a bit unlucky for us to have encountered the first total long-term closure of the Thames since probably the Middle Ages, and one which hadn't even been posted on the Thames Conservancy website, we were faced with a bit of fundamental cruise re-planning, or 'route re-calculation' at our car's sat nav calls it.

The skipper had always had a bit of a yearning to do the Norfolk Broads, so a sharp turn north up the East Coast became the new emergency plan, hence the title of this log, borrowed from Arthur Ransome, whose wonderful books *We Didn't Mean to Go to Sea*, *Secret Water* and *Coot Club* were quickly downloaded on Kindle, in lieu of an East Coast Pilot.

But first we kept to our plan to have a trip through the Swale, from Whitstable to Queenborough, before setting off North the following day. This was an unexpected delight (since the tide and the bridge opening times served us well) and giving a tow under the bridge to Queenborough to a yacht with engine failure ensured us preferential treatment alongside the small all-tide pontoon when we got there.

Despite it being Monday afternoon, the only good eatery being full and the church with its lovely painted ceilings closed due to the pandemic, we really liked Queenborough. The harbour-master could not have been more welcoming, and the little village (with its packed fishing boat creek behind it) is a gem among the industrial ugliness all around. And it's a great jumping-off point for destinations on almost all points of the compass.

#### Day 4 Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> September

The previous day's dalliance around Sheppey gave time for what turned out to be weeks of fabulous settled weather to get established, and so we had perfect conditions for our next longish passage to the Orwell. We had hoped to take the famous Havengore Bridge route via the Roach and the Crouch, taking advantage of perfect tides and our shallow draft but, alas, it wasn't to be. We were warned off by the bridge control on the VHF due to yet another MOD live-firing range. And it certainly turned out to be active, with bangs and puffs of black smoke as we passed peacefully by off-shore, just outside the dotted safety line on the chart.

Passage-making North from the Thames Estuary is so very different from what it used to be. In days gone by there were real navigational challenges across and around the shallows, now all made easy by GPS. Then you really felt you were out at sea, but now you're hemmed in by innumerable wind turbines to seaward of your route, apparently stretching to the far horizons.



The only worry was the fuel gauge. The light wind was heeling us slightly to port, the gauge is in the starboard tank, and there is a little balancing tube between the two. So the fuel slowly drained out of the starboard tank to the port tank, making the approach of the red reserve line seem much nearer than it really was. All part of a long learning curve, when transferring from sail to power. Otherwise it was an uneventful passage, arriving at the Royal Harwich Yacht Club after tea-time, mooring alongside the immaculate Flight of Ufford, to welcome some old friends aboard for early evening drinks.

One of the disappointing aspects of cruising in a pandemic is how eerily silent most of the yacht clubs are. The Royal Harwich was full of lovely yachts, but not a soul to be seen. Nonetheless it was a peaceful and beautiful spot to spend the evening and night. In an ordinary year the beautiful modern club house must be a very congenial place to go for supper among good company.

## Day 5 Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> September

Our friends from Tuesday evening used to live at Pin Mill, just downstream, but they had recently moved to a lovely house overlooking the Stour. So they were full of praises of the Stour's interest and beauty. It didn't take much encouragement from them for us to make a trip up the Stour our next destination, after refuelling at the MDL marina just upstream of the RHYC. It was another lovely clear, warm day, with not enough wind to create a chop against the tide. Our destination was the town of Mistley, once a major port and Thames barge destination, but now looking increasingly derelict and forlorn.



Mistley Quay

The river gets very narrow there and it was near high tide, so we didn't stop, moving back down river to a peaceful anchorage nearer Wrabness, with its little wooden holiday houses built out on stilts

over the crumbling foreshore.



Wrabness

And we passed a beautiful little schooner among the moorings.



Then it was back up the Orwell to park Kingfisher for a few days in the care of our Commodore Jonathan and his excellent team at Suffolk Yacht Harbour, just upstream from Felixtowe. We needed the intermission because Mikado was calling us to the Cowes Spring Classics (moved from spring to September to beat the pandemic) the following weekend.



## Day 6 Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> September

After an interesting morning at SYH, inspecting some of Jonathan's classic restoration projects and raiding his excellent chandlery (which includes what is probably the only classic boat chandlery anywhere), our friends of Tuesday evening took us to their home for lunch before packing us onto the train southbound to death or (as it turned out) glory at Cowes.

The Spring Classics wasn't really part of the cruise, and Kingfisher was in serious dereliction of her duty as Mikado's mother ship. But we can't just leave the event untold. Mary Scott-Jackson put on an absolutely splendid, COVID-compliant event for 22 entries, with lovely shoreside events and first class race management by the Cowes Corinthian. Almost uniquely for 2020 we had sunshine and moderate winds. The fast IRC class had a really exciting line-up in which Mikado was pitted against Firebrand, Cetewayo, Whooper, Njord, Aeolus, Matambu, A Day at the Races and Lutine. A seriously competitive class with very close racing on both days. Best of all (for us) was our first ever event win over Giovanni Belgrano's Whooper. We have taken the odd race off her over the years, but never a whole event. It's so rare we call it Whopping the Whopper!

Meanwhile Jonathan's team gave Kingfisher a haul-out, scrub and (much needed) anode change at SYH, ready for the rest of the cruise. I do wish someone could explain the mysteries of marine electrolysis to me. Of which more anon.

## Day 7 Monday 7<sup>th</sup> September

Flushed with unexpected victory we returned on Monday evening to find Kingfisher safe and sound at SYH. This wasn't really a cruise day, but we've included it so that the following days match with the remaining days of September.

## Day 8 Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> September

Since reading *Secret Water* I had always wanted, but never managed, to visit the Walton Backwaters, where you can still find that vanishing combination of peaceful unspoilt creeks, wildlife, remoteness from humanity and (lots of) mud. Now was our chance.



There is now a marina at Titchmarsh at the southern end, of which we steered well clear and which doesn't intrude seriously on the beauty of the rest of the place. We started at the anchorage at Stone Point (pic above), with its small sandy beach, where we met Andy and Jane Easdown, in their lovely Illiria. Then we moved to a completely secluded spot behind Horsey Island in Kirby Creek, just where Arthur Ransome's young explorers set up their camp, anchoring for the night just clear of the upstream end of the oyster beds. No need to go ashore. The unique atmosphere could just as well be soaked up over leisurely drinks in the cockpit. A memorable day followed by an utterly undisturbed night, with not a boat, or a soul, in sight.

### **Day 9 Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> September.**

The combination of the closure of the Thames and Cowes Spring Classics had prevented us celebrating our 39<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary on time, or in the right place. But we had promised ourselves to make amends by having supper at the most romantic place we could identify from our East Coast guides, the Ramsholt Arms in the Deben. There we went on Wednesday, again in perfect weather, arriving in time for an afternoon's walk along the river-bank and up to the local church (alas closed to visitors like so many others due to the pandemic), from a mooring just off the pub's quay.

Entering the Deben is, as my late father would say, character-forming. The shallow banks at the entrance are constantly shifting, and the flood tide positively howls up through the narrow entrance channel at Felixtowe Ferry, where we shot past another famous but deserted looking sailing club. But the local mariners keep moving the entrance buoys to adjust for the moves in the banks. All you have to remember is that, just for once, the GPS and chart plotter have to be completely ignored at the critical moment. But once you pass through the entrance, the river calms down, the scenery becomes more rural, and peace descends, albeit not as completely as at Walton.

The Ramsholt Arms fully lived up to its good reputation. Dinner of local fish, taken on the riverside terrace, was followed by a short row back to Kingfisher, glowing like a gem in the golden sunset. Sorry Sonning, perhaps another time.



### **Day 10 Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> September**

Thursday was, for Beverly at least, a bit like coming back down to earth with a bump, because she had to go for a dental appointment in London. But the trains (and taxis) are good so she could get there and back in less than a full day. For the skipper it was time for a bit of gentle single-handing (for the first time in Kingfisher), to a lunchtime anchorage off Prettyman's Point and on to a buoy near Waldringfield to pick up Beverly at teatime, the wait for her arriving taxi being much alleviated by a rich banoffee pie and ice cream at the pub there. Then it was up to Woodbridge with the tide (but not ashore again) before returning to Prettyman's Point for a night at anchor among the sea birds.

The Deben is well worth enduring the excitement of the entrance, being peaceful, mainly rural, and not too choked with boats. But it's quite small compared with the Orwell / Stour complex, even though very nearby.



Rural scene up the Deben

### **Day 11 Friday 11<sup>th</sup> September.**

A necessarily early start to Southwold (to catch the tide and avoid a roaring ebb at the Deben entrance) was initially threatened by a foggy dawn. But it soon cleared and we were off, again in perfect weather, for the long-ish haul round Orford Ness and Sizewell (see pic below), missing out the delights of the Alde and the Ore for a future occasion. Southwold is much smaller than the

Deben, but definitely not to be missed on an East Coast cruise.



Sizewell B nuclear power station

The 'harbour' consists of the very narrow mouth of the River Blyth, where the modest tide range is belied by rather strong tidal streams, and a cross current under the piles of the otherwise quite straightforward entrance. On the South side is pretty little Walberswick, with two nice gastro-pubs.



On the other is a very old-fashioned fishing dock, with superb fresh fish and chippies, and the mainly classic boatyard Harbour Marine Services, another pub and, across a mile of fields, the beautiful, fashionable seaside town of Southwold (pic above), stuffed full of swanky clothes shops, galleries and fine eateries. Yes, and crawling with tourists, even in September.

The two sides of the harbour are connected by a (still rowing) ferry and, upstream, by a footbridge which used to carry the infamous Southwold Railway, the most schlerotic, chaotic, slow, unreliable and under-resourced little narrow gauge railway in the UK, now long since demised, but its memory still fondly revered by steam enthusiasts (like me... I have something similar in my garden).

We received a royal welcome from HMS, with a rib to guide us in and no less than 3 staff to take our lines at a pontoon made ready for us, followed by a tour round their excellent classic motor yacht restorations and projects, including Magyar (Saunders Roe) Meridies (Silver Leaf) and Mira (Silverette). They have just bought Daveys who supply brass and other fittings to the classic yacht restoration industry.

Full of developing ideas about what we might yet do to beautify Kingfisher still further, (perhaps with HMS' assistance) we were rowed across to Walberswick by the energetic and charming young ferrywoman to a good lunch in the garden of the Anchor pub, followed by a stroll around the village, a well-earned siesta and excellent fish and chips in the evening. All to prepare us for the coming rigours of the Norfolk Broads.

## **Day 12 Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> September**

There are two ways into the Norfolk Broads from the sea, through Lowestoft and Great Yarmouth. At that stage we knew virtually nothing about the Broads, beyond what we could glean from Navionics and from a fold-up map which we bought at SYH and which turned out, once we got to understand its symbols and to read the tiny print, to be a mine of useful information. Lowestoft was the nearer of the two, and so there we went. It turned out that, as far as we could see while we were there, very few seagoing yachts visit the Broads. Almost all the waterborne traffic is locally owned or, more often, hired. There are some very fine classic sailing cruisers, and still a few local

wooden motor yachts.



But most of the traffic is plastic and generally thoroughly ugly.

The way in through Lowestoft takes you first to the relatively empty outer harbour, noted for the fabulous art-deco Royal Norfolk and Suffolk Yacht Club, under the town bridge, into Lake Lothing, a rather sad area full of decaying industry and support facilities for the offshore wind farms and oil and gas platforms, under a railway swing bridge (which doesn't swing, at least at the moment) under a low road bridge and into a nice little lock which, after a modest rise, opens into the very pretty Oulton Broad.



Converted warehouses at Oulton Broad

So we got our mast down in the almost deserted fish dock and motored up under all the bridges without having to wait for them to open (which would have been a very long time for the swing bridge), to a friendly reception by the lock keepers, who were obviously delighted actually to have something to do, and for a visiting yacht.

Getting the mast down on Kingfisher is now something of a fine art, and very quick when all goes well, to the obvious admiration of onlookers. It is a light, stumpy mast which just carries a radar, antennae, lights and modest steadying sails, besides serving as a launching crane for the dinghy and (hopefully) for recovering a man overboard (yet to be tried, volunteers most welcome). It is mounted on a tabernacle behind the wheelhouse. When down it hardly extends beyond the stern. All you do is fit a sort of spinnaker pole which provides a lever arm when the mast is nearly horizontal, pull out the lower tabernacle bolt, wind the long jib halyard onto the anchor winch drum, unclip the forestay and lower away. You don't even have to lower the burgee or the mainsail if hoisted. Getting it up again can be a little more exciting, if the shrouds or the mainsheet decide to get caught behind a lifebuoy or a deck fitting. Then the power of the winch can send things flying if a keen weather eye is not employed by the person (usually the skipper) at the back end. But from up to down (and vice versa) takes only about 30 seconds, now we've perfected the technique, and you don't even need to stop to do it.

It's easy to forget to mention it, but the weather remained perfect for our arrival at the Broads. Apart from an increasing east wind, it stayed perfect throughout our 10 day stay. Long, warm, sunny days. Everything that heart could desire.

Once out of the lock into Oulton Broad (for once with real dinghy activity at its sailing club) we paid for our weekly licence, and were lucky enough to meet a friendly local yachtsman (with a lovely classic sailing yacht, albeit not rigged) who told us where the best restaurants were. Then it was off into Oulton Dyke, the feeder channel between Oulton Broad and the Waveney.

All along the Broads are free public landing stages or 'staithe' where you can stop for a walk or overnight. The first was oddly named the Dutch Tea Garden, but there was nothing Dutch about it, nor was there a garden, or any tea. So we passed it by, and turned up the Waveney, which is the southern river in the Broads, navigable, by us at least, as far as Beccles, where there is a very low bridge. But the approach of evening and the beauty of the quiet countryside seduced us well below Beccles, and we spent a peaceful first evening on the North Cove staithe, with no other boats there, just a few fishermen along the bank and lots of wildlife, including our first real live kingfisher.



Sunset up the Waveney



### Day 13 Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> September

The lure of the top recommended restaurant, the Waters' Edge on the River Yare just down river from Norwich, compelled us to reverse course the following early morning, steaming back down the Waveney to the short cut across its junction with the Yare, known as the New Cut, between St Olaves and Reedham, after passing the Somerleyton railway swing bridge. No mast lowering needed this time. The bridge-keeper saw our masthead and, well before we arrived, had opened the bridge for us to pass majestically through before we needed to honk, even though it was before nine o'clock on a Sunday morning.



Somerleyton railway bridge

There were rumours that silting at the south eastern end of the New Cut might cause us problems, but we glided through without difficulty, under the railway bridge at Reedham for a short stop for early elevenses alongside the Lord Nelson pub.



Approaching the New Cut

At this point two things about the Broads need explaining. First, they are all, to differing extents tidal, with both tide ranges, currents and times which differ widely in different parts of the labyrinth. As will appear they can be a bit unpredictable. Bridges negotiable with mast down at low tide can be impassable at high tide, and opening bridges may stay stubbornly shut if the bridge keeper thinks you are low enough to pass under them, at the prevailing state of the tide, without them having to be opened.

Secondly, the Broads are, for the most part, a series of artificial watercourses built to drain the surrounding marsh land so as to make it suitable for grazing or cultivation, while at the same time providing a waterway for the transport of produce. As a result the water levels are, even at low tide, usually above the level of the surrounding land. The water is pumped up into them, originally by

windmills, then by mechanically driven pumps, originally by steam but now by electricity.



Former steam pump.

The watercourses are kept in by dykes, often overgrown, so it is easy to miss much of the surrounding scenery and wildlife unless you sit or stand quite high up in your boat. In this respect Kingfisher, with her high freeboard and on-deck steering position, made an ideal observation platform, enabling us to view beautiful scenery and wildlife which the occupants of the typically lower freeboard local boats must have missed.



Proceeding upstream from Reedham we stopped for lunch in Brundall, at the pretty Coldham Hall Tavern on the left bank.



Coldham Hall Tavern, Brundall

But the highlight of the day was, as expected, the Waters Edge restaurant, Bramerton, just below Norwich. You can moor right alongside, and the staff will serve you on your boat. But the best food is inside, and there is an excellent wine list to go with it. We were the last left standing in the restaurant (sitting really) and were joined by the owner and his mum, who had been helping out all day managing the staff, and must have been thoroughly exhausted. Not a place to be missed.



The Waters Edge, Bramerton

## Day 14 Monday 14<sup>th</sup> September

We didn't think that the essentially rural splendours of the Broads were likely to extend right into the middle of Norwich, so we about-turned and headed back down the Yare. We had been warned by John Buckley at HMS that the heat exchangers in our Nanni engines were liable to corrode and fail (and be very expensive to replace) if the little pencil anodes in the seawater exit pipes were not regularly renewed. On checking ours we discovered to our dismay that one was completely wasted and the other had its last little bit of zinc fizzing away to extinction. As luck would have it, the main UK distributor for Nanni is based in Brundall, so a midday stop there on the way down river enabled us to obtain a supply, as it were, direct from the horse's mouth.

Fortified by anodes and a good lunch, we then went to our meeting with Sammy the sheep. There is a beautifully preserved windmill on the Yare (alas closed to the public during the pandemic like almost everything else) just down river from the huge Cantley Sugar Mills, where the little grassed area around the windmill is kept 'mown' by a single sheep. She (Samantha or Sammy for short, as we called her) like most sheep the world over, is a gregarious creature, who thoroughly dislikes being left on her own, even with a bountiful supply of sweet grass. So she did her best to make friends with every visiting yacht's crew, even walking with us back down the gangway and along the pontoon. Maybe, like a lighthouse keeper, she rejoins her friends every now and again, but it's sad to think that she may still be there all alone as the winter approaches and visiting yachts become scarce.



Sammy the Sheep

Anyway we had to leave her to her own devices, for our adventure up the very narrow river to Loddon, which joins the Yare at Hardley Cross. This tiny, winding dyke is for the most part narrower than Kingfisher is long, and some of its bends required us to go astern on our inner screw to get

round. Mercifully it was too late in the day to meet anyone coming the other way. On the rising tide the stream feeds a very beautiful lake, called Hardley Floods, just below Loddon, which is absolutely crammed with marine bird life of every kind but closed to boats. Nonetheless the stream runs past it close enough for good observation.



Hardley Floods, Loddon

Loddon itself was, despite its beautiful (closed) church, a bit of a disappointment, being crammed full of plastic hire boat stations, with nowhere for us to moor. So we turned round and found a peaceful staithe below the village, just before it got dark.





Day 15 Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> September





The following day dawned foggy again, but it soon cleared into another golden morning. This was our chosen day to make the transition from the southern to the northern Broads, down the Yare, via Breydon Water and Great Yarmouth and up the Bure. This is a quite long and sometimes hairy passage. The tidal currents in the lower Yare and Bure can run very fast indeed, and they join in Great Yarmouth, requiring passage under two very low bridges, only negotiable, even with mast down, at low tide. Furthermore, at low tide the water is still storming down the Bure, and usually continues to do so for another hour. The ideal is to come down the Yare on the ebb, arriving a little after low water, and then turn up the Bure with the young flood, to carry you up the first 10 miles or so, where there are no stopping points at all, after the Yarmouth Yacht Station, just above the low bridges.

The ameliorating factor in all this is the courteous helpfulness of the staff at the Yarmouth Yacht Station, who will tell you on being phoned what the air draft is under the low bridges, and who will provide helpful advice and then take your lines when you go alongside. Most people start up the Bure before the ebb has ceased, and then pause at the Yacht Station to await the flood.

The last few miles of the passage down the Yare to Great Yarmouth is across the rather dour Breydon Water, at lowish tide a massive expanse of featureless mud with a straight narrow channel down the middle of it. It's the site of the sinking of the wicked motor yacht *Margoletta*, in *Coot Club*. Then it's under the big modern Breydon Bridge and sharp left into the mouth of the Bure, fight your way against the roaring ebb under two very low bridges and up to the Yarmouth Yacht Station, which was almost completely full of boats waiting to pass up the Bure into the Northern Broads.



The queue was caused, so we were told, by an unfortunate fatal accident further up the Bure. We were for some reason released up-river ahead of the rest of the queue (although almost last to arrive), so we had a peaceful unimpeded passage up river to the delightful Ferry Inn at Stokesby, where, in addition to the usual free staithe, you can moor alongside the pub garden for a very modest fee. Provided that is, that you can negotiate the fierce little current which swirls around the wall, without a bow thruster. With the help of the landlord to take our headrope we managed it in the end, and so spent a very pleasant first evening in the Northern Broads, surrounded by ducks,

geese and the occasional admiring tourist.



The Ferry Inn, Stokesby

## Day 16 Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> September

A slightly too leisurely start from pretty Stokesby revealed a basic difference between the Northern and the Southern Broads. After about 10.00 each day, and until the late afternoon, the intensity of water-borne traffic constituted by the huge number of hire craft of all shapes and sizes turn what we had expected to be peaceful wandering through a rural idyll into something more like the South Circular Road in London: nose to tail all the way and moving at the speed of the slowest ship in the convoy. Not that the rigorously enforced speed limits (between 4 and 6 mph) would let you go much faster. There is the additional fear that the occupants of the hire craft all around you may never have been in charge of a boat before, but on the whole their hastily learned seamanship (broadmanship?) was surprisingly effective. It also becomes a matter of pure luck whether a stopping place marked on the map has any free space alongside, although again we always seemed to find somewhere.

Anyway it was mast down under Acle bridge, a couple of miles up from Stokesby, where we were greeted by our first otter, past the mouth of the Thurne (which goes to the famous Potter Heigham) and the Ant (see below), and through Horning, on our way to a mid-week victualling and laundry session at Wroxham, which is as far as a boat of our height can get up the Bure. Both Wroxham and Horning typify what seemed to us to be the Northern Broads village model: a mainly beautiful waterfront, with pretty little riverside houses and cottages with their private docks and manicured gardens, but with not a lot to enjoy inland of them. Maybe we didn't try hard enough.





Waterside homes on the Bure

But Wroxham (or strictly its sister village of Hoveton) has excellent shops and a helpful serviced laundrette within an easy walk of our luckily vacant berth alongside the rather ugly modern hotel just below the low bridge. Better still an excellent barber to make the skipper look a little less like the Beast of Borneo, and at a ludicrously low price!

But it didn't promise a peaceful evening, or much by way of night life, so we motored back down to Wroxham Broad for the night, anchoring just astern of a passenger wherry at the South Eastern end of the Broad, to watch the evening's race from the Yacht Club, sailed in three of their fabulous big fleet of classic racing day-boats, in a rising Northerly wind.



Passenger wherry and evening race, Wroxham Broad

## Day 17 Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> September

Looking intently at the map, it appeared that the low bridge at Potter Heigham would prevent us getting up the Thurne to Hickling Broad, but that, if we waited until low tide, we could squeeze under Ludham Bridge on the Ant, and explore all the way North to Barton Broad and even further. So off we went to the mouth of the Ant on Thursday afternoon, after a leisurely stop at Horning.



The Swan Inn, Horning

When we reached Ludham Bridge Staithe the tide was still too high, so we moored up to wait for it to fall, confidently expecting to get under the bridge after tea. But it just stayed obstinately at the same level, all afternoon, all evening and all night.

The only consolation was an otter, which scampered across the tow path by the bridge, bold as brass, on his way into the river. Otters are rather like seals and dolphins. They exude such joie de vivre that they can cheer up the gloomiest day. Herons are a bit different....



But we were well and truly stymied, as were a number of hire-boaters trying to get their boats back to bases higher up the Ant. It seemed that we had explored as much of the Northern Broads as was going to be within our reach.

## Day 18 Friday 18<sup>th</sup> September

Visiting yachts have to buy weekly passes to use the Broads, and our pass was due to expire on the Friday, suggesting a run back to the sea at Great Yarmouth. But the wind had turned North Easterly and quite strong, and we didn't really fancy a rough sea passage South. So we decided to extend our stay into a second week by heading back to the Southern Broads, which by then we had decided we rather preferred.

But first, since the tide for the transit didn't serve until the afternoon, we took a quick look at Ranworth Broad, up a short dyke running South from a little up the Bure from its junction with the Ant. Quite nice but nowhere to moor.



Ranworth

So we decided to try our luck at an intriguing little staithe back towards Horning, which invited visitors up a wooded path to St Benedict's Church, near Horning.





To our surprise and delight, there was space to moor and the beautiful country church was actually open, with a choir practice going on. It was the only time we got inside a church on the whole cruise, and a real gem.



St Benedict's, Horning

From there we made a non-stop passage to the Southern Broads, pushed back up Breydon Water by a very strong NorEaster, to finish the day moored out of the wind alongside the Lord Nelson in Reedham. They weren't serving food, so we went to the nearby Ship Inn for supper: quite simple fare, but very welcoming, and a cosy inside table despite the pandemic.



**Day 19 Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> September**



We wanted to find an easy rendezvous for meeting some old friends before leaving Norfolk. Beccles seemed quite an easy place for them to get to, so we headed back up the Waveney beyond where we had tied up on our first magical Broads evening. What a good decision! Beccles is quite the nicest place we visited anywhere on the Broads. There is a big basin with lots of space for visitors, right alongside a pleasant park, unspoilt by hire boat bases or cluttered with moorings.



The Basin at Beccles

The town, just a 10 minute walk away, is a completely unspoilt Georgian market town, full of glorious architecture around a splendid church, excellent old-style food shops (rather than supermarkets) and a generally cheerful bustling centre, full of happy people enjoying yet another warm, sunny day.



Georgian splendour at Beccles

We duly took our friends for a gentle cruise back down the Waveney for lunch alongside a staithe, passing a beautiful boat house where the lucky owner had assembled a fabulous classic yacht collection: a Broads sailing cruiser, a Slipper launch and a recently acquired Dunkirk Little Ship: (see pics below).



We saw two more kingfishers on the wing, otters at lunch time and, after depositing our friends at the end of the day, found ourselves back at our original first night berth down river, made welcome by fellow cruisers who were waxing lyrical about the Beccles butcher, from who you couldn't buy a string of sausages without being treated to his life story. Perhaps another time for us.

## Day 20 Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> September

With a promised abatement in the North Easterly wind forecast for Monday, but still no let-up in the sunshine, it really was time to head back to salty waters. So we meandered back down the Waveney, taking the right turn to Oulton Broad, and stopping just short of it for lunch and a country walk at the oddly named Dutch Tea Garden Staithe, almost completely submerged by an exceptional spring tide.



St Michael's Oulton

The walk took us through the marshes and woods to St Michael's Oulton (alas closed again) before we made our way back to the lock at the Lowestoft end of Oulton Broad, down through Lake Lothing, past the splendid Lowestoft trawler *Excelsior*, to a berth in the RN&SYC marina in the outer harbour, ready for an early departure South in the morning.



Lowestoft Trawler *Excelsior*

The Royal Norfolk and Suffolk Yacht Club must be one of the finest yacht club buildings anywhere. It's a completely unspoilt art deco 1930s treasure, still in excellent condition and, rather to our surprise, it was actually open on a Sunday evening for drinks. The club was being run completely single-handed by a young lady who seemed to be able to do every relevant job at the same time. We were the only guests, apart from one crew member from a motor boat on passage to Chichester, who wanted a shower. We were almost the only occupied boat in the slightly forlorn marina, except for a German single-hander who had been serving a sentence of quarantine on his Halberg Rassy, apparently taking a large detour on his way home from the Netherlands. Poor chap, he wasn't even allowed to use the club facilities.



The Royal Norfolk and Suffolk Yacht Club, Lowestoft



## Day 21 Monday 21<sup>st</sup> September

A very early start to catch the tide saw us rocking in the wake of a flotilla of support vessels rushing out of Lowestoft, but mercifully the NorEaster had subsided, leaving no significant swell, for our passage South to the Alde and the Ore, this time to fulfil a long-standing wish to beard Rufus our Hon Secretary in his rural den at Aldeburgh.

Like the Deben, this is another fairly hairy entrance, where the constantly changing banks turn out to be nothing like what is shown on the electronic charts, followed by a long run North upriver, with the spooky Orford Ness to seaward, wildlife everywhere and the lovely village of Orford half way up, dominated by its church and castle.



Orford – Castle and Church

With a strong flood tide we weren't going to waste it by stopping at Orford, and we carried the flood all the way to the 3 visitors' moorings by the Martello tower just south of Aldeburgh Yacht Club, and a short dinghy trip away from its pontoon.



Martello Tower at Aldeburgh

By a stroke of luck one mooring was being vacated just as we arrived, so we moored next to the beautiful Leigh Bawley Bona with her low black hull and huge fidded topmast, which had apparently been loitering there most of the summer.







A magnificent sunset promised one more fine day, but it marked the end of our two-up cruise.



Work was calling Beverly back to London, and Rufus kindly drove her to Saxmundham to catch the train that evening.

## Day 22 Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup> September

This was the very last day of an extraordinary spell of fine September weather. Rufus piloted Kingfisher up the Alde inland of Aldeburgh, where it widens out into a delightful area of broad calm water, some flooded marshes and lovely countryside, before narrowing into the little winding creek that takes you past Iken all the way to the Maltings at Snape. The navigable water is, in the upper parts, marked by a rather haphazard system of withies, some hardly poking above the water on the big spring tide, with a lot of guesswork about which side of the channel they were meant to mark.



Rufus the Pilot

We decided to call it a day as we reached the picturesque Iken church (the subject of a famous case about rights of way well known to equity lawyers) but inaccessible and almost certainly closed on its little promontory overlooking the water.



Iken Church

With the tide nearly high, and Kingfisher's echo sounder going into sulk mode whenever the depth dropped below 2 metres, discretion became the better part of valour. So we went down to a nice lunch anchorage a mile or so downstream.

While we were there we were treated to a bravura display of single-handed Thames barge sailing by the owner of Cygnet. As her name might imply she was only a baby barge, but fully rigged with all the kit, lee boards and the appearance of her bigger sisters, tiller steered and most beautifully handled as she reached up and down, before coming to her anchor off Iken church. The two of us had the whole waterway to ourselves, relishing the last afternoon of the summer.



Thence it was back to our buoy off the Martello Tower, before a run ashore and dinner with Rufus and Reet.

### Day 23 Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> September

This was the day I had planned to take Kingfisher round to her winter quarters at Southwold, assisted by a colleague from work, Philip, a novice at yachting, although a powerful offshore swimmer.

The trouble was that the weather couldn't make up its mind whether it wanted to blow or not, although there was an abundance of cloud, and some rain, from the start.

So we ambled down to a lunch mooring off Orford while we waited to see what was going to happen. It looked as if there would be a not-too-windy afternoon, with just enough time to get round Orford Ness to Southwold, so we motored down towards the entrance, with me driving while Philip did the washing up. To his enquiry where he should put away the crockery I rashly replied that I would come down and do it, and then got too absorbed in preparing for the entrance and clean forgot all about it.

We rounded the entrance buoy into a nasty steep swell from the South. Kingfisher did a few sharp rolls and poor Philip found himself assailed in the galley by crockery descending from above and the contents of the fridge assaulting him at knee level. Quite a baptism of fire....

But it was plainly much windier than forecast, so that it would probably have been dangerous by the time we arrived at Southwold. So after a few more rolls back we went into the river with our tail between our legs, to the mooring at Aldeburgh, where the yacht club launch took Philip ashore without him getting too soaked, leaving me alone to look after Kingfisher in what was evidently going to be some very dirty weather.



Days 24 to 27 24<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> September



And so it proved. The wind howled, and the rain poured down, for most of the next 4 days. Dinghy work was impossible, and for quite a lot of the time the wind was over the limit of the big yacht club launch's insurance policy. So I just had to hunker down, with the central heating on, tea towels to stop the draughts in the wheelhouse, but plenty of work to do, and with a good wi-fi signal to keep me in contact with the outside world.

Mercifully for most of the time the wind was between West and North West, across rather than up and down the long reach below Aldeburgh, where it can get quite rough when the wind is over the tide. We were on a good strong mooring and Kingfisher kept me warm, dry and comfortable throughout. The only seriously exciting bit was when Bona came back in the dark, single-handed, trying to pick up the mooring upstream of me. The poor skipper just couldn't see the buoy from the helm in the pitch dark and the rain. In the end, after several abortive attempts, to my considerable relief, he took my advice to go and anchor somewhere else until the morning, and windy, wet tranquillity (of a sort) was resumed.

All in all it was the longest period I have been galebound since my first ever offshore cruise (in charge) when I was 17, getting stuck for a week in Alderney when Morning Clouds 1 and 3 were both sunk in a single night.

Beverly returned as the harbinger of a better spell of weather on 27<sup>th</sup>. So it was back to a last bit of cruising to round off nearly a month away.

## Day 28 Monday 28<sup>th</sup> September

Beverly had not been able to see the upper reaches of the Alde before her return to London, so we spent the morning on another trip up to Iken, admiring Peter Wilson's beautiful 1920s motor yacht Maudorces on the way. She shares with Kingfisher the privilege of being the founding 2 boats on the BCYC classic motor yacht list.



Maudorces

Then it was down to Orford to explore the village which we had passed by on the way in. It's a very pretty village, on a slight hill with panoramic views all round, a small sailing club (closed as usual) a tea room on the waterfront and the aforementioned splendid castle and church, both closed to visitors. Still there was enough for an afternoon's leisurely sightseeing.



We needed to make a very early getaway the next morning to get the tide right both at the entrance and at Southwold, so we motored down to an anchor in the Lower Gull, to enjoy a last evening on board, before the end of the cruise, and of the season.

This is a very special anchorage, just before the down-river end of Havergate Island, which is a bird sanctuary. We had it entirely to ourselves, apart from seals, heron, curlew, lots of migratory (and very chatty) geese, and a solitary couple walking along the dyke. And all lit by an unforgettable sunset.



Sunset at Lower Gull



## Day 29 Tuesday 29h September

This really was our last day. Very little wind to disturb a calm passage North. We picked up the fair tide as we rounded Orford Ness, went close past Aldeburgh this time on the seaward side, past the power stations at Sizewell and into Southwold, to be greeted by an even larger reception committee from Harbour Marine as we berthed alongside Magyar.



Harbour Marine Services, Southwold

Kingfisher was obviously delighted to be wintering among her sisters, cousins and aunts and hardly gave us a second glance as we left for the station. We have no doubt that she will be in good company and good hands, until the 2021 season begins. Goodness knows when that will be.