

# LIVERPOOL SAILING CLUB

## NEWSLETTER

### EASTER 2020

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## Hove-To

EASTER 2020

My grovelling apologies for the omission of the usual January Newsletter, which was entirely due to muddle on my part.

When I came to start preparing it I mistakenly thought that I had slipped up in not passing the Autumn one across for publication, so I then combined the Autumn and January ones into a single issue. It was only when I sent that across to Mike for publication that he alerted me that he had already received the Autumn one and that we had duly published it; so of course there was now an immense amount of duplication. In the circumstances I decided to withdraw it.

At the time of writing, the dominant thing in most people's minds is the coronavirus emergency. Members were notified first that the Tom Cunliffe evening was cancelled, a week ago at the time of writing, and then the following day you were notified that the clubhouse is closed for the time being, and all club activities cancelled until further notice. Most other clubs nationally took similar action at about the same date. Like most clubs, we will keep matters under review, and we hope to resume normality when the situation eases, but no-one is making any guesses as to how long that will take. However we have the skeleton of a programme in place and we are all ready to go once the emergency is

over; but it seems that no-one in any club is placing any bets on whether we will get any sailing this season.

In the week since then since then we have had the announcement of the compulsory closure of pubs, restaurants, leisure centres, gyms, etc., along with other restrictions, and the reduction of scheduled rail and bus services from 23<sup>rd</sup> March, followed by Boris's announcement the following day effectively shutting down the entire country in respect of everything except the absolute essentials.

In the absence of any real sailing news, and little prospect of any sailing in the near term, this issue is somewhat different from usual, with some regular features suspended *pro tem*, and some rather different ones included which are specifically designed to provide some nautical and club-related entertainment in difficult non-sailing times.

Included amongst those are some articles from our archives, which we hope will be of interest, both to those few long-standing members who were around at the time and also to those many members who have joined since and are perhaps learning for the first time about the earlier years of the club.

Depending on developments we may well do similarly for the Summer issue.

So all that remains for me at this stage is to wish you all well; keep safe, look after each other and look after your neighbours, and we hope to see you on the water when circumstance permit.



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## ANNUAL DINNER

As always a thoroughly convivial evening was greatly enjoyed by all present, both members and their personal guests, and official guests of the club



## TOM CUNLIFFE

With great reluctance, this event had to be cancelled because of the coronavirus pandemic.

This was the first club event to be cancelled for this reason, but of course only two days later all subsequent events also had to be cancelled for the same reason, with the Clubhouse now closed and our entire programme being put on hold. Then a week after that the entire country was largely shut down.

However we do hope to be able to re-arrange at a future date.

So watch this space ...



## THE REGATTA

In the dismal circumstances of the coronavirus restrictions I thought that resurrecting a story from the early years of the club might provide some passing cheer.

The occasion was the famous (or infamous?) Gresford Regatta of 1968.

No, this is not a disgracefully late report of an event; rather it is a fond recollection of a day fifty-two years ago that others have described as epic. It is an event which is still both fondly and vividly remembered by the few surviving older members of at least the host club and ourselves, and quite possibly also of other visiting clubs, and which has gone into the folklore of both this club and Gresford.

This was one of Gresford Sailing Club's early Regattas, when they were still a fairly new club, as indeed were we ourselves at that date, both clubs then being less than ten years old. They were of course very welcoming and hospitable, but the dominant memory is of what happened on the water, largely as a result of the weather.

At the time of the infamous Regatta I was one of the younger adult members of LSC. We were at that time very much a dinghy racing club, and we had developed a very strong GP14 fleet, as well as other classes. I think this was about the time that I served as Sailing Secretary.

Gresford SC had, as usual, invited all kindred clubs in the area, but at first the event had not attracted any of our members. However when the weekend came it was clear that it was blowing a hooligan, and our own racing was cancelled on the Saturday and was almost certain to be cancelled for the Sunday as well. Then someone remembered that Gresford SC were holding their Regatta on the Sunday, so most of our GP14 fleet plus several other classes descended *en masse* on Gresford, as did numerous other visitors. I think this sudden influx probably somewhat embarrassed the club, although I am sure that they were also delighted, and they certainly went out of their way to make us all welcome.

They sail on a fairly small lake, about the size of a gravel pit but actually a remnant of the last ice age. Because the lake is so small, in order to get laps of reasonable length the course has to cross the lake several times, and in order to get a reasonable total length for the course they also needed to set several laps. They chose 6 laps. With a large fleet in (I think) four separate classes this meant that boats at different stages of their respective races were continually criss-crossing in all directions - which made it more than usually entertaining, to put it mildly!

If I remember correctly the place is surrounded by small hills, so with a gale blowing the wind was funnelling between the hills; certainly on the lake it was gusting absolutely viciously and from every direction under the sun. It was so extreme that I decided to take a leaf out of my onetime mentor Bill Skutil's book for such situations, and settle for concentrating only on getting round the course without capsizing. Never mind our position in the race; if we could complete the course without capsizing that in itself might well prove to be a winning strategy.

We sailed our race, and by the time we crossed the line we were the only boat still sailing. All the others had either capsized or retired or both, and we ourselves had suffered damage; a broken floorboard and two broken sail battens. This speaks volumes; at that time the floorboards were of course the original slatted design, but in a reasonably recent and well-found boat from the country's top builder of the time how on earth do you break a floorboard during a race, unless the action is quite exceptionally violent? And how on earth do you break sail battens, albeit wooden, without capsizing first? Perhaps in a particularly violent gybe?? But nonetheless we had done both.

Having crossed the line I decided that discretion was the better part of valour, so we immediately dropped sail and paddled straight downwind until we reached the shore, and then walked the boat home round the edge of the lake. Only when I went to sign off did I discover, too late, that we had just disqualified ourselves; we had miscounted and we still had another lap to go!

On the second of the four races of the day there were only three boats sailing; everyone else (ourselves included) was either licking their wounds and/or repairing damage.

For the third race my crew expressed a wish to stand down if I could find a replacement, and I then found that fellow LSC member Brian Graham was in a similar position with his crew, so the two of us decided to team up for the remaining two races, sailing my boat and helming a race each. Brian had recently taken a season out from Liverpool in order to do a lot of inland sailing, and this had considerably honed up his skills of anticipating windshifts. For the first of these two remaining races I helmed, and concentrated entirely upon tactics and boat speed and the position of the other boats, while Brian both crewed and fed me with almost non-stop and always accurate information as to what the wind was about to do next. We soon found that this was a winning combination, so despite our earlier agreement he elected to stay that way round for the final race.

Overall, considering we had thrown away the first race (which we might so easily have won by a sail-over) and not entered the second, we were very highly placed, I think third overall. However the ultimate honours inevitably went to two of the few boats that had sailed the second race as well as the two final ones, and deservedly so; the mere fact of having sailed the second race after the battering of the first one was a very considerable achievement, and they well deserved their points.

Nearly forty years later I wrote about this event in the Newsletter, and this elicited a letter from one of our older members, John Byron. Some extracts from his letter are worth repeating here:

*"I remember it well!! On reading your Easter edition of the LSC newsletter I was taken back to that epic day at Gresford. I cannot remember which year it was, but I vividly remember the day.*

*Stan Dobby and I decided we would head off to Gresford to sail our Mark single-handed dinghies ... .... We rigged and set out on the water but, if my memory serves me right, we both found the Marks such a handful that we spent more time trying to stay upright than we did actually racing. I think I gave up after a couple of laps and Stan followed suit a couple of laps later. There was a Hornet from the club - was it Paul Cove? - and that turned over near one of the buoys, buried the masthead in the bottom, and remained there till after the last race had finished.*

*I well remember that the majority of LSC members spent most of the rest of the afternoon standing outside the Clubhouse, probably with pints in hand, except for Dave Bell who probably had a G&T!!, calling out a lot of ribald advice to yourself in the ensuing races.*

*I do remember that the Gresford members thought that we were rather a strange crowd having so much entertainment at the expense of one of our own clubmates, but I think they eventually realised that it was all good-hearted. ...*

*Yes - Gresford was a tough day, I remember it well !!!"*

I feel that it is just as well that I didn't know about that ribald advice until nearly forty years later!

Although with greater maturity now, I realise that all the named members of the club were a generation or so older than myself, so as a young twenty-something it was perhaps fitting that I was still racing hard when the (slightly) older generation were standing ashore quaffing pints or G&Ts and watching. These days, in such extreme conditions I am more than happy to admit to belonging to the G&T brigade myself. So far as whether I still wish to sail in such conditions, it is a case of "Been there, done that, nothing left to prove!"



*Tantrum, 1968(?)  
My Sills-built GP14, built 1961*

## FROM THE ARCHIVES

Two articles from the Autumn 2004 Issue

### WOOLLEN SAILS !!

No, the Editor is not off his rocker, or at least not for that reason.

An article in *New Scientist* just before the Editor's holiday (24th July issue), gave a fascinating report of an archeological and scientific investigation into Viking sails, following the first ever discovery of a surviving fragment.

Although there have been several discoveries of Viking ships, usually buried in mud, none of their sails had survived; the conditions that help to preserve wood are not good at preserving textile materials. For a Viking community their sail was an immensely valuable and prized possession, vital for fishing and exploration and defense against marauding tribes. The latest research indicates just how valuable and how prized a possession it must have been, both because it confirms our knowledge of the lengths they went to to look after it and because we also now have an insight into the immense labour involved in creating it. The latter is quite mind-boggling to modern sailors, conditioned as we are to being able to acquire textile materials reasonably readily.

It seems that it was so valuable that a Viking law, from around 1000 AD, stipulated that the man who was charged with the responsibility and who lived near the coast should store the sail in the church. In our own day this has prompted archaeologists to deliberately search in quite different places from the ship discoveries, the ancient churches of Norway. It is in one of these that a fragment of ancient cloth was discovered, stuffed into a crack between a wall and the roof, and in one corner a cringle is laced in, which confirms its identity as a part of a sail. Although it was undoubtedly once a prized possession, stored for safety in the church, when long past its use for its original purpose it seems to have been pressed into service as a draught excluder.

Both space and copyright considerations preclude my recounting the full content of the article, but suffice it to say that microscopic analysis has been able to not only date the material but also identify its composition, in considerable detail. It turns out that it is woven wool, and that the main strength is provided by the long outer hairs of one particular ancient breed of hardy Norwegian sheep, and there are a few of this breed still surviving today, mainly in deliberately conserved flocks. Replica sails have now been made for two separate replica ships, the smaller one of them by using strictly original techniques and taking the wool exclusively from this breed of sheep. The wool has to be worked entirely by hand in order to preserve its lanolin, and traditionally the first stage is to "roo" (or pull) the wool from the sheep in mid-summer. Starting with the wool still on the backs of the sheep, this sail took a team of four people six months of full time work to make.

For the larger sail they took a short cut by shearing the wool instead of rooing it, and supplemented the wool from the original breed with that of a similar modern descendant breed. Despite the shortcut this larger sail took a whopping two and a half years to make. Both sails used prodigious amounts of wool,

Yet another recent replica Viking ship is however being fitted with a sail made from modern material; understandably, they have decided that the authentic material is just far too expensive.

This research also indicates the extent to which the Vikings were dependent upon their sheep husbandry for the supply of raw material, and upon their women for the vast labour in making the sails. Without both a very well developed sheep farming infrastructure and an absolute army of women labouring at the manufacture of sails, no Viking warrior would ever have been able to put to sea.

I was very forcibly struck by the part of the article that discusses the structural requirements of any form of sailcloth, as it seems from that (well informed) discussion that even 1000 years ago at least some benefit was obtained from a low pressure region in front of a sail caused by wind flowing across a suitably curved surface, something that only in much more recent times we have started to properly understand, and it seems that Viking ships could make at least some progress to windward. I had had no idea that they were that advanced.

Incredibly, when the performance was tested it was found that these woollen sails would drive a Viking ship faster and closer to the wind than would their modern equivalents. Modern racing helmsmen take note!

The full article is very well worth a read. Archive copies are obtainable in the usual way, and may well be available in libraries, and are also available on the internet (on a limited trial basis for non-subscribers to the publication).



## Follow My Leader

Older members (from the sixties) will of course remember both Bill Skutil and Herbert Jones, both of them retired professional mariners. Herbert raced a Wayfarer dinghy, and as a retired master mariner he took a bit of good-natured stick because he seemed to have a propensity for running her aground on the local sandbanks. Mind you, that was nothing to the war-time (WWII) achievement of His Majesty's Trawler *Quadrille*, of the Royal Naval Patrol Service, an escapade which admittedly occurred in thick fog. Returning from patrol to her base in Liverpool she picked up about ten official Mersey pilots on her way into the river, and then once safely in the Mersey she managed to touch bottom and lose her asdic dome. Reportedly all ten or so pilots were on the bridge at the time!

Bill used to tell a lovely story of the yachtsman, lost in the Thames estuary on a falling tide and understandably anxious, who saw a barge that appeared to draw more than he did and that was presumably local, so he decided that his best bet was to follow the barge; that way he would at least stay in safe water. When in due course both vessels ran aground, and eventually dried out altogether, he walked across to give the barge skipper a piece of his mind for sheer incompetence on his home patch.

"What do you mean, getting lost?" said the bargee; "I've come here to load sand!"

I was reminded of that story in the seventies and eighties when I was sailing *Tarka* (featured last issue) on the Taw Estuary, in North Devon, because we did indeed have a couple of local sand barges, very old and battered, that every day motored from Barnstaple down to Crow Beach near the mouth of the estuary, where they dried out and then loaded sand to take up to Barnstaple on the next tide. Presumably these served the local building trade.

Usually they judged the loading to a nicety, and these barges would almost invariably come home with the deck just below water, the raised hatch covers just awash, and only the fo'c'sle and the aft cabin clear above the water. On at least one occasion however, the bargemaster put in just that little too much sand, and his barge failed to lift off and instead flooded.

Thirty years later, when I was there only two years ago, at least one of them - even older and still more battered than in the seventies - appeared to be still operating, although it is very questionable indeed whether she was still seaworthy. However the owner died last year, and since then this barge and one other have lain untouched alongside the quay, rusting and derelict, and condemned at survey, and local people would dearly like to be rid of the eyesore.

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The incident above was not the only wartime misfortune to befall His Majesty's Trawler *Quadrille*. She became notorious during her working up in the battle school at Tobermory, where the Commodore, "Monkey Brand" Stephenson - also known as "Electric Whiskers" or more simply as just "The Terror of Tobermory", drove his ships and his men absolutely mercilessly in his quest for the ultimate in battle efficiency, and where he was notorious for having little tolerance of mistakes. In that demanding environment *Quadrille* managed to score a damaging "own goal" by firing both depth charge throwers while still moored to a buoy, and with a second trawler moored alongside.

The charges were set to 150 feet, and besides causing interior damage to both vessels the explosions were felt in the church ashore, where the Commodore happened to be reading the lesson at the time. His comments are not recorded.

*The two incidents concerning H.M. Trawler Quadrille are both described in a fascinating history of the Royal Naval Patrol Service "Trawlers Go To War" by Paul Lund and Harry Ludlam, published by Foulsham in 1971 and by New English Library in 1972. The same pair of authors are perhaps best known for another WWII historical book; "PQ17 - Convoy to Hell".*

## An extract from the official history of the early years of the Club

1962

The year started on an original note. Due to war time operations nobody knew just where the Airport water main lay, and the nearest hydrants were too far away from our premises for George Haslam (*the Commodore – Ed.*), who was concerned about the cost of piping and trenching which would be required. Many digging operations failed to locate the main, which being made of asbestos, did not reveal itself to the latest electrical gadget either. When George said that he had secured the gratuitous services of a water diviner we looked at each other with knowing looks and began to wonder if the strain had started to tell. But George was serious and we consoled ourselves with the thought that it would only cost the price of another hole or two.

The following Saturday afternoon the regular working party was there to receive Mr Charles L. Warren of West Kirkby Sailing Club when he arrived. We were all anxious to see what equipment he had brought with him, but he had brought none. He explained that he could not divine water as such, but he could indicate the presence of a cavity underground and so was confident that he would find the water main for us.

He then gave us a demonstration. Picking up a piece of reinforcing steel which was lying on the ground he bent one end to form a small handle. Holding this by the handle he was then guided over a field drain, the position of which was known to us but not to him. As soon as he was over the drain the rod twisted violently in his hand and he not only told us where it was but also how deeply it was buried. After several of these demonstrations some of our members tried it out and found that they too could get results, but being inexperienced they had no precise idea as to the depth of the cavity.

Then Mr Warren was taken to the known vicinity of the water main, and casting around he was able to stake out its path for us. Selecting the point nearest to the Club House, he told us that the main was four feet six inches deep. Digging started immediately but had to stop when a layer of tarmac was reached at about three feet. On Monday morning workmen with picks and shovels soon got through this layer and found the main, about three inches deeper than we had been told to expect.

This Editor, as a scientist by profession, admits to being absolutely staggered by this account, - but there are plenty of examples in his own field of physics where scientists have had to accept experimental evidence that at first appears to fly in the face of all one's understanding up to that point, and sometimes have accepted it only with very great reluctance. This applies particularly with twentieth-century physics, and the one general lesson is that the understanding that we think we possess is probably never complete; there are nearly always things that we don't fully understand just waiting to be researched, and it is a very brave man (or a very foolish one) who will rule something out as impossible when presented with the evidence for its occurrence.

Be that as it may, the Club is immensely grateful to Mr Warren for giving us his time and saving us so much money and effort.

# SOD'S LAW

## Or the Nautical Cock-Up

Another off-the-wall article to provide some light relief during our period of enforced closure.

I suppose the rot started when I read the late Des Sleightholme's autobiography, and then by pure coincidence about two days later Phil asked me to speak at the Past Commodores' Dinner. Amongst many other things Des was the erstwhile long-term Editor of *Yachting Monthly*, and he had a fine mastery of writing entertainingly about the nautical cock-up, his own ones included. He also, during his tenure at YM, introduced a feature (still running today) called The Confessional, in which readers admit to their own various *faux pas*. So I decided that I had a subject.

There is a well established principle which pervades all walks of life:

To the physicist, and professionally I am one, it is sometimes known as the Law of Universal Cussedness

To the churchman, and again I am one, it is sometimes known as The Gospel according to St. Sod

To the layman, it is variously known as Finnegan's Law, Murphy's Law, or just plain old Sod's Law

In its simplest form: if it is possible for something to go disastrously wrong, as sure as eggs are eggs, sooner or later it will. And that is actually a very sound mathematical truth about the nature of probability, but we won't explore that here.

There is in fact a distinction between true Sod's Law, in which no-one is necessarily to blame, and the cock-up, which latter arises from someone's gross errors, usually one's own; but for the purposes of this piece I am lumping the two together.

There are of course numerous incidents involving professional mariners, who because they are all professionally qualified are perhaps fair game.

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In 1956 the *Andrea Doria* was a fairly new Italian luxury liner, and she was steaming east to west on the Transatlantic route. Off Nantucket Island she collided with the *Stockholm*, a smaller and less luxurious liner steaming west to east. They were initially approaching head-on, and the Stockholm correctly turned to starboard while the Andrea Doria incorrectly turned to port, contrary to Colregs, attempting a starboard-to-starboard passing. After last-minute evasive manoeuvres by both ships, by which time they were more nearly at right-angles, the *Stockholm* rammed the *Andrea Doria* amidships and sank her.

You might well wonder how it is possible, in the vastness of the Atlantic Ocean, for two ships to be in exactly the same spot at exactly the same time, and unable to avoid each other.

This was in fact a “radar-assisted collision”, possibly the first ever; and it was in fog, with the *Andrea Doria* nonetheless steaming at almost full sea speed, 21.8 knots. Each ship had the other on radar, and each misconstrued the other’s actions when they started what were intended as avoidance manoeuvres.



[Andrea Doria the morning after the collision,  
clearly showing the hole on the starboard side](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?curid=1376587)

<https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?curid=1376587>

Then we have the *Torrey Canyon*, which in 1967 ran aground on the Seven Stones Reef between the Scillies and the Cornish mainland, and broke up. This was the world’s first supertanker shipwreck, the world’s largest ship to be wrecked to date, and the first supertanker oil spill. Much has been written about the causes of the disaster, and - as so often - there were a multiplicity of causes rather than just one single cause. These causes included a navigational error; the ship was not where she was thought to be. One factor that has received surprisingly little publicity, but I did see it in print shortly after the event, in *Yachting Monthly* as it happens, and I have very recently again found it documented (but cannot now trace the reference a second time), is that the navigation was entrusted to a junior officer, who fixed the ship’s position by means of only a single bearing and range, with no means of checking that.

I don’t have an issue with entrusting the navigation to a junior officer; they have to learn, but while learning they need adequate supervision. However it is a fundamental rule of navigation, now enshrined in law, that all available methods are required to be used to fix the ship’s position; never just a single set of data with no checks.



*Torrey Canyon Ölpest 1967* (picture-alliance/United Archives/TopFoto)

<https://www.dw.com/en/50-years-on-the-oily-legacy-of-the-torrey-canyon/a-37993960>

The saga of the *Herald of Free Enterprise*, the ro-ro car ferry which in 1987 capsized in Zeebrugge harbour with her bow doors open, is well known. The Assistant boatswain was asleep in his cabin when he should have been closing the bow doors; however the official enquiry placed more blame on his supervisors, and on a culture of poor communication

Then we have the case of the *MV Antari*, outward bound south from Corpach, Scotland, in 2008. The single Officer of the Watch took over at midnight, when the vessel was passing the Mull of Kintyre, and set the autopilot. Then, with no lookout on duty, he sat down in his chair - and subsequently fell asleep. With no one awake on the bridge she continued her southerly course until she hit Northern Ireland head-on, near Larne.



A similar fate met the *MV Danio* in 2013. She was on passage from Perth (Scotland) to Antwerp when she woke up the sleeping Officer of the Watch as she ploughed ashore on the Farne Islands.



There is actually a very real problem of serious under-manning in the Home Trade cargo fleet, where there is normally only a single person on watch, and where that person has all too often been working “watch and watch”, six hours on and six hours off, for months on end, and has also been doing harbour duties (e.g. supervising loading, etc.) during his off-watch periods in the ship’s very frequent spells in port. It is no wonder that all too many such officers suffer unacceptable levels of fatigue; they are regularly working very much longer hours than legally permitted for lorry drivers or train drivers, and incomparably longer hours than are permitted for aircraft pilots. At the last I heard, MAIB were very much concerned about the problem.

Then dare I mention the *Costa Concordia* (2012)? Although I suspect that there are other isolated examples, this is the only one I can think of where a captain not only put his ship ashore, but then deserted his ship and his passengers, and was subsequently prosecuted (and convicted) for doing so.

Warships are a special case, because by the very nature of their work they are sometimes required to operate at high speed in very close proximity to other vessels; and so they need to practice those skills. The United States Navy is by far the largest navy in the world, with far more ships than any other; indeed Wikipedia estimates that in terms of tonnage they are larger than the next 13 navies combined. So it may well be only a matter of numbers that they have more collisions than any other navy; I am not for one moment picking on them.

One such collision occurred in 1956, during the Cold War, in the South China Sea. A fleet of eight ships of Task Force 77 were conducting night exercises under "darkened ship" regime; darkened in terms of both visible lights and electronics. So no lights, no radar, and they were observing radio silence. They were relying on visual signaling alone, I think by shaded light signals. Not all ships saw all the signals, with the result that what was intended as a coordinated turn ended up with different ships executing their turns at different times. In the resulting melee the heavy cruiser *USS Columbus* rammed the destroyer *Floyd B. Parks*, and sheared off a fifty-foot section of her bow.

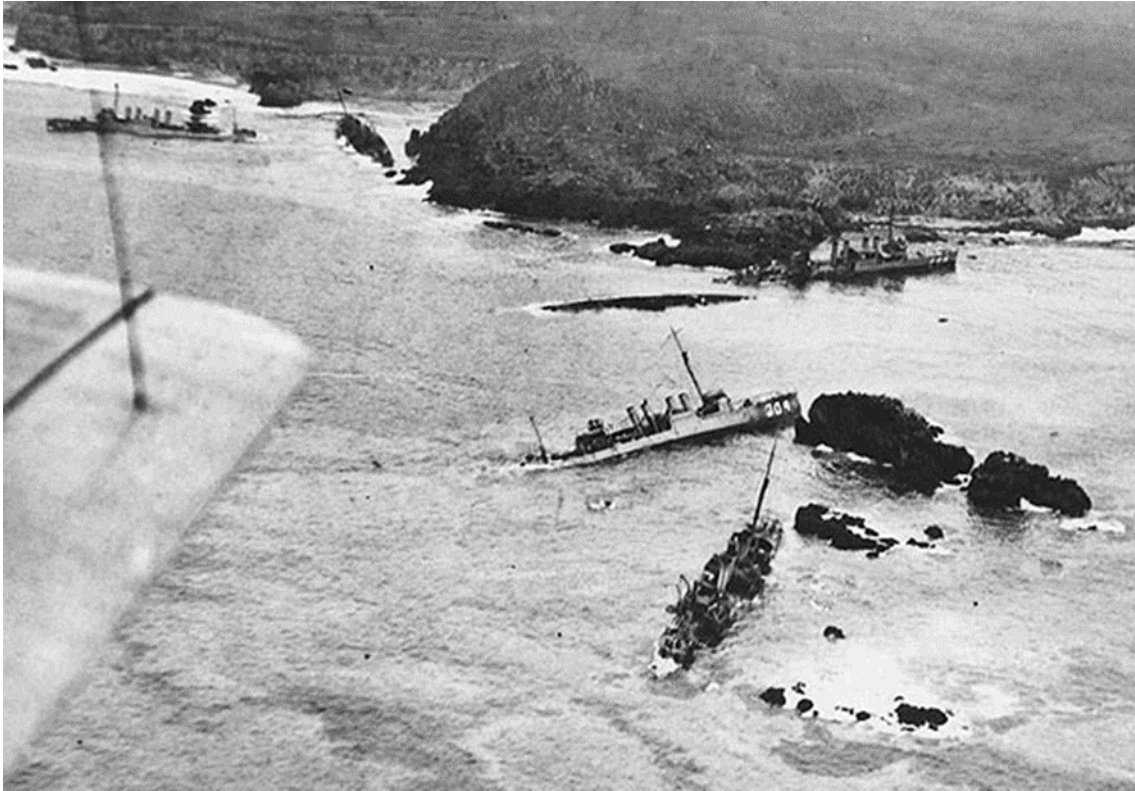


The worst ever peacetime disaster in the history of the US Navy occurred over thirty years earlier. On 8<sup>th</sup> September 1923, 14 US destroyers were steaming in column - a.k.a. "in line ahead" - down the west coast of the United States, intending to each successively turn east in order to enter the Santa Barbara Channel. This was an exercise in simulated wartime conditions, and in heavy fog, and they were navigating on dead reckoning only. Radio direction finding had recently been invented, but the technology was still very new and untrusted, so they ignored radio beacon signals which appeared inconsistent with where they thought they were; unfortunately it was the RDF signals which were correct, and not their estimated positions ...



They did not take account of strong currents and heavy swells, and they failed to check depth because with the technology of the day that would require them to slow down.

The lead ship turned too early, and the following ships all turned in her wake, as instructed; and the first seven of them all ran aground, one after the other, just like lemmings, at Honda Point.



By U.S. Navy, photographed from a plane assigned to USS Aroostook (CM-3). - US Navy, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=7257969>

So much for the professionals ....

Then there are those involving amateurs .... ...

To avoid embarrassing anyone else, I shall mention only those that I myself have perpetrated, and this is only a very small selection.

In late August 1972 I bought my first yacht, *Quest*, a delightful 1930-ish 29-ft Morecambe Bay Prawner, which a previous owner had re-rigged as a bermudian sloop. She sailed absolutely superbly, although she was in many ways “an old tore-out”.



At the time I was a highly experienced dinghy sailor, but utterly green when it came to seagoing yachts. During the Easter school holidays the following year I started a substantial refit, and in my inexperience I made two fundamental errors.

First, I entirely rightly condemned the two very decrepit manual bilge pumps, and I was well aware that if a bilge pump is needed it could on occasion be a matter of safety, so it should be as good a pump as possible. I then made the fundamental error of replacing the two derelicts with a single brand new electric pump. I later learned the hard way that electric pumps are all very well until the battery goes flat ...

...

My second error was to remove the badly peeling Trakmark from the decks, which revealed a beautiful laid deck; and I decided to make this a feature of the boat. Once again this decision displayed my inexperience; it never occurred to me to ask why a previous owner had covered this beautiful laid deck with Trakmark ... ..

All went well until late July the next year, 1974, and an exacerbating factor in what happened was that we were having serious engine problems, which I did not manage to diagnose and put right until the year after that. Two of us aboard had been sitting out the gale warnings in Tenby, awaiting a weather

window for a passage to North Devon. The log records that after about three days the 1755 Shipping Forecast offered W 4-5, occasionally 6, moderating 3-4. I remember to this day saying "This is it. There's nothing worse than a 6. We're going!"

We set off reefed to beyond the second batten, and changed our destination to Clovelly, where I knew that in westerlies the anchorage would be well sheltered; there was no way that I was going to attempt Bideford Bar, gateway to our original destination, in those conditions. However, far from the ostensibly promised "moderating 3-4", off Lundy we got southwest 6-7, and with unlimited fetch all the way from the Atlantic. Green seas were continually breaking over the deck, and thence percolating down below through the leaks between the planks of that beautiful laid deck! It was not long before the combination of the navigation lights and the bilge pump had flattened the battery, and the engine was unable to recharge it.

The sailing was fine; throughout the mini-gale we were sailing for speed rather than for survival, because we did not feel at any particular risk and we both wanted to get into the shelter of Clovelly as quickly as we could. However we now had a seriously leaking boat, we were many miles offshore, and effectively we had no bilge pump. The latter problem was solved by Richard, my crew, still to this day my oldest sailing friend, who very nobly ensconced himself down below in the cabin throughout, using a saucepan continually to bail the water into the loo, from where he could pump it out!

Later that same season we were sailing up Milford Haven, beating to windward and with a flood tide under us, and towing the tender on a modest length of painter. We were approaching a cluster of moored boats, and I was also matching ourselves against a yacht on a similar course a short distance in front. There is a classic definition of a yacht race; any two sailing boats in sight of each other. I was informally racing the other yacht, and with my then still recent racing background I took due account of the moored boats, judging to a nicety whether I could clear one particular one to windward - but I failed to allow for the tender. We on the yacht passed her to windward, while the tender was blown to leeward and so passed down the lee side of the moored yacht, - and so with yacht and tender passing on opposite sides of the moored boat and still joined together by the painter the three craft were immediately wrapped together.

We had a collision, which amongst other things pulled off one of my chainplates; for the powerboat members, they are the fittings on the hull to which the standing rigging wires are attached, and which ultimately are responsible for holding the mast up. On subsequent inspection the problem turned out to be severe corrosion of the securing bolts; the heads of the bolts were fine, as were the nuts and the visible parts of the inboard ends, but in between - and hidden within the wood - they were wasted away to almost nothing. Nowadays of course I know this as a bog standard problem, as per the photo, but at that stage it was new to me.



If those corroded bolts had failed during the gale off Lundy, as they could so easily have done, we would have lost the mast, and we would then have been in real trouble.

Another pair of occasions with that boat involved the cooker. I had decided that I was not prepared to have calor gas onboard, for reasons of safety, so I bought a brand new and fairly luxurious pressurised meths cooker. This operated on the same principle as a primus stove; totally reliable, and a joy to use, provided it was always operated correctly, but potentially hazardous if one did not know how to operate it. The lighting sequence in particular would simply not tolerate “operator error”.

The technique for lighting it from cold was to pump up the pressure in the tank, then open the burner valve to allow liquid fuel to flow out of the burner into the drip tray, and then shut the valve again. This last step - closing the valve - was most vitally important, and it is blindingly obvious if one understands the principle on which the stove works; but it is not at all obvious if one doesn't. Then you light the fuel in the drip tray, wait until the burner has heated up sufficiently, and open the valve again. Now, with the burner hot, what emerges from the burner is vapourised fuel, and the stove burns as intended, very like a gas stove.

On the first occasion another friend and I arrived at the yacht for the start of the summer, after a long car journey, and started transferring stores between car and yacht. Dave happened to be onboard and I happened to be ashore when we decided to put the kettle on for a cuppa, which Dave duly attempted to do while I continued ferrying kit from the car. On my next trip back from the car he asked “By the way, do we happen to have such a thing as a fire extinguisher onboard?” Somehow he managed to convey in that innocent query that it was not a merely academic question, and that said fire extinguisher was required immediately!

The problem was that he had not realised the need to shut the valve again after flooding the drip tray, so liquid fuel continued to pour out of the burner, feeding the flames.

Knowing how easily meths fires can be extinguished I actually put the fire out by means of a Mole wrench, using it to reach in through the flames to release the pressure. Then we were left with a stove which was still perfectly functional in all respects except that it no longer had any control knobs; these had been destroyed in the fire.

However the spindles were the standard diameter which in those days was fairly universal for radio control knobs, and almost every town back then had its radio repair shop. So after our cuppa we went in search of a set of radio control knobs, which worked perfectly.

Later in the season my parents plus Bill Skutil were alone on board, while I was doing duties ashore at the sailing school where I was still on the staff. Father had “an alarm clock in his stomach”, as Thomas Firbank (author of “I bought a mountain”) memorably wrote of one of his employees, and insisted that Mother produce lunch; he would not be dissuaded when she said that she didn't know how to operate this stove.

The inevitable happened, and there was another fire. Bill Skutil, being the consummate seaman that he was, had already - despite it being his very first visit onboard - sized up where all the safety equipment was stowed, and he used a fire extinguisher to put out the fire.

But I had to have some sympathy for my mother, when she asked afterwards “**How was I to know how to operate a cooker when one knob said VOLUME and the other said LONG MEDIUM GRAM?**”

I could recount another one with that boat, plus many more covering most of my various other boats, but that is enough for the time being.

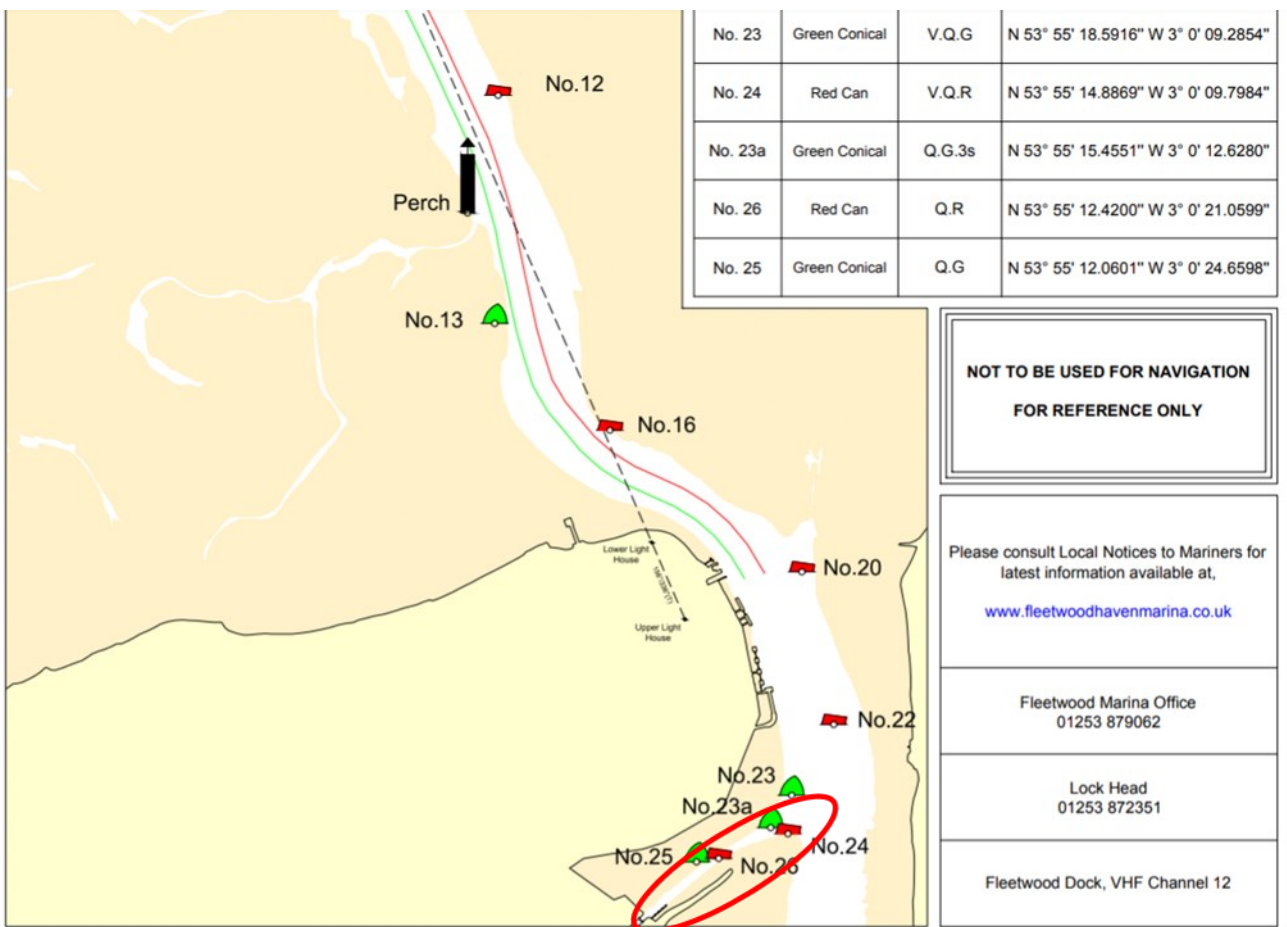
**So: Sod's Law.**

**If it is even remotely possible for something to go disastrously wrong,  
sooner or later it will!**

# BAR CHAT

## Fleetwood Dredging

Any other members whose cruising may take them into the Morecambe Bay ports - if indeed we are allowed to do any this year - may be interested to learn that a Notice to Mariners issued at the beginning of February indicated that dredging work was to be carried out in the Fleetwood entrance channel, from No. 23A buoy to the dock entrance. That is the dock channel only.



Separately, there is an issue with channel depths in the main River Wyre channel. The last information that I heard, in 2016, was that dredging there had been discontinued a few years previously, and all that is done now is to monitor the depth and (frequently) update the local chart. However the marina website still (February 2020) confirms that an approach in the second half of a rising tide should present no problems to yachts and small boats; indeed one of my three approaches during 2016 was 4 hours before High Water, on a rising tide, under sail and beating to windward, in company with a couple of other boats. Tide was between springs and neaps (8.0 m at Eastham), and that was probably about the earliest possible entrance time for getting up the river under sail, and far too early for the tide into the marina; on arrival in the vicinity of the dock entrance I then anchored off for perhaps a couple of hours to await sufficient height of tide to enter the marina.

### Weather Lore

A glorious red sky at sunrise a couple of mornings ago reminded me of the old couplet:

Red sky at night, sailor's delight.

Red sky in the morning, sailor's warning.

Despite the "sailor's warning" we actually then enjoyed a glorious day, but there you go ...

The saying is over two thousand years old, and is referenced in the New Testament (Matthew 16: 2-3) as something that was already established wisdom at that time.

The saying is a rule of thumb which is based on sound reality, if only for the mid-latitudes, i.e. the sub-tropical and temperate latitudes, where the prevailing winds are westerlies. The cause of the red glow is the partial scattering of light from the sun, due to trapped dust particles, in particular in a stable air mass. As a matter of physics, white light comprises a range of wavelengths, and the shorter wavelengths (blue light) are scattered more than the longer wavelengths (red). At both dawn and sunset, with the sun low in the sky, the light which reaches us has travelled through air for the maximum possible air path length, and so has undergone the maximum possible scattering. Our eyes and brain system is used to light of the "normal" or "full" spectrum, which we regard as white; so if some of the blue light is removed by dispersing it elsewhere by scattering before it reaches us what is left has a preponderance of longer wavelength red, so what eventually reaches our eyes therefore looks red.

The stable air mass, which is crucial to the phenomenon, is associated with a high pressure system, which in turn is associated with fine weather.

So if the high pressure system is to our west, thus "red sky at night", it is moving towards us, because weather systems in temperate latitudes generally move west to east. So as a broad rule of thumb we have fine weather moving towards us, and the pressure is rising.

Conversely if the high pressure system is to our east, thus "red sky in the morning", it has already passed us and is now moving away; we can then often expect a low to follow, with all that that entails.

The same scattering phenomenon also applies during the main part of the day, when some of the light passing more or less tangentially to the earth, through the upper atmosphere well above our heads, also undergoes scattering. In this case, again it is the blue light which is scattered most, and some of that scattered blue light travels downwards, to reach us at ground level (or sea level); that is why the daytime sky often looks blue.

In more modern times humourists sometimes add a third line:

Red sky at night, sailor's delight.

Red sky in the morning, sailor's warning.

Sky in red mist, sailor pissed.



Sunset approaching Lundy, aboard *Quest*, 1974.  
The return passage a few days after the gale recounted previously.  
We had light winds and fine weather, giving an idyllic (if slow)  
night passage all the way to Milford Haven.



Sunset, Braunton Pill, my home moorings at the time, 1984  
I confess that I don't remember what the weather did afterwards; I was ashore by then.





Sunrise over Gower Peninsula,  
from Priory Bay, Caldy Island,  
aboard *Tarka II*, 2017.

Red sky in the morning  
And we did indeed have a full gale 12 hours later ...

### New BUPA Programme

While looking for something else recently I found this old email from Phil, forwarded a few years ago:

*You're a sick senior citizen, and the government says they are going to sell your house to pay for your nursing care.*

*So what do you do?*

*Our plan gives anyone 65 years or older a gun and 4 bullets. You are allowed to shoot four Politicians.*

*Of course, this means you will be sent to prison ... .. where you will get three meals a day, a roof over your head, central heating, air conditioning and all the health care you need!*

*Need new teeth? No problem. Need glasses? That's great. Need a new hip, knees, kidney, lungs or heart? They're all covered.*

*As an added bonus, your kids can come and visit you as often as they do now.*

*And who will be paying for all of this? It's the same government that just told you that they cannot afford to pay for your nursing care.*

*And you can get rid of four useless politicians while you are at it.*

*Plus, because you are a prisoner you don't have to pay income tax.*

*Is this a great country or what?*



And the following is what I was looking for when I unearthed the above piece, just lightly adapted for the current situation:

During the coronavirus situation we would remind all our members that we are **British**, and that it is an integral part of our tradition that we never over-react. However we can now advise Members that the government has now raised our threat level from "Miffed" to "Peeved."

The scale of threat levels is the same as that used for terrorism, war, and the like. There are two further escalation levels, and there remains a risk that the level may be raised yet again, to "Irritated" or even "A Bit Cross." The English have not been "A Bit Cross" since the Blitz in 1940 and '41, when tea supplies nearly ran out.

The coronavirus has been re-categorized from "Tiresome" to "A Bloody Nuisance." The last time the British issued a "Bloody Nuisance" warning was in 1588, when Drake had to see off the Spanish Armada.

### **Sailing Simulators**

In the context of the coronavirus lockdown a number of sailing people have been talking about PC- or Mac-based sailing simulators.

My own, admittedly limited, experience of one such was disappointing, but in fairness it was rather more than 15 years ago. The circumstances don't matter, but I would rate it as 98% computer games, 2% sailing skill, and 0% experience of being on the water.

But your assessment may be different from mine, and they may perhaps have improved substantially over the last 15 or more years.

The following URLs are the result of a brief internet search, and are offered without any assessment and without any guarantees. I think they are all different; at any rate they all appear to open on different home pages! Investigate them if you are interested, and make your own assessments.

<https://sailawaysimulator.com>

<https://sailaway.world>

<https://www.sailsimulator.com>

[https://store.steampowered.com/app/552920/Sailaway\\_The\\_Sailing\\_Simulator/](https://store.steampowered.com/app/552920/Sailaway_The_Sailing_Simulator/)

<https://www.esailyachtsimulator.com>

<https://www.nauticed.org/sailing-simulator>

## UNUSUAL BOATS – 19

I saw this amphibious RIB parked in Tenby last summer, along with the cars:





Note the central ventilated box, which I think houses an inboard engine to drive the road wheels



*Looks like standard combined outboard throttle and F-N-R gear selector, separate road throttle, separate road F-N-R gear selector, switches to raise or lower the road wheels, plus all the expected instrumentation.*



“SEALEGS Amphibious Marine Craft” <https://www.sealegs.com>

I have no further information about it, beyond what is already on their website.

I wonder whether it is road legal?

NB—a similar one is now stored in the LSC Boat park (MCH)

**NEXT ISSUE**

**Press Date will be 15<sup>th</sup> June, please**