



The Association of Dunkirk Little Ships



Dunkirk Evacuation 75th Anniversary

SBC trip 16th -25th May 2015 dedicated to SBC Member: Gus Wilde
and
Those who served

Billie, Billie, this is Spike!

Skipper: Greg Waugh, Crew: Jeff Lee, Ray Holmes, Keith Robertson

Spike, Spike, this is Billie!

Skipper: Dominic Evans. 1st leg Crew: Andrew Barwick, Trevor Powers (2nd leg crew team Spike)

The passage plan demanded we hit the Richmond sluice gates as they were rising – we arrived just early enough for Greg to lift his engine bay hatch – to spot a gushing cooling system. A few minutes tied up, some gum-gum and a deep breath later, we set off – the adventure had started.

Chiswick Pier arrived soon enough and with Keith now safely on board Spike, Greg fired his repaired engine. Serenity and a little punching against the last minutes of tide was as planned, thus thoughts turned to the hectic build up and what had been left unattended!

On Billie, the two experienced flappy people - Trevor & Andrew - were familiarising themselves with their unique yet unnervingly similar sense of humour. The skipper meanwhile was wondering if that little lack of power steering fluid spotted a few days before the off was going to prove an issue – surely not as he had a full tube in reserve... Meanwhile on Spike thoughts were turning to refreshments...

1st stop Gillingham to re-fuel but how long would this leg take? The counters had been set, London Bridge in 3hours would it was hoped, give us the tide all the way out to the Estuary – but at what speed past the barrier? Nowadays one cannot have a plan without some jeopardy in the mix! Why indeed were there so many Dunkirk “Little Ships” at Teddington? Why had they not followed us? Was Linda’s farewell wave from the bridge a signal? Why was there no VHF traffic on 14 (or 6)?

Thoughts turned to the day out, cameras clicked, the water in the Pool of London was its usual barmy self yet the sun was shining. With routes & waypoints loaded the countdown Greenwich test (where West turns East) proved the GPS and a fun trial call (VHF 14) to the barrier made. The rest, as they say, was plain sailing.



Billie : last minute engine checks & loading!



From the Millennium Bridge : Crowds wave “Bon Voyage SBC”

Tide was helping; Billie was on 1200 RMP and doing a strong 9-10knots, meanwhile on Spike 1,200 and 1,400 respectively held the convoy together. Andrew produced his gismo and this appeared to confirm we were in the river, yet the conditions were more backwater calm than Estuary exciting!

Look for Nore Sand and hang a right was not an instruction Andrew quite understood, thus more consultation of gismos followed (I made myself a note, that this device might have been useful a little earlier in the trip, just pre Eel Pie island, but then I just dismissed it – Pilotage is a skill that needs honing!)

The turn into the Medway duly made gave us about an hour to hit Gillingham Lock inside our tidal window – Achieved, 8:30 and all tied up by 9PM. The wonders of Gillingham awaited! However, we were all disappointed (log entry: Memo to Medway tourist board required.)



Medway



Ramsgate

Sunday 17th May

Just outside Gillingham Marina lock gates is the fuel pontoon and as we arrived the Medway Queen passed pulled by a tug. It was bound for Ramsgate, our next destination (quite reassuring). Spike & Billie took on the necessary ether and two very self-satisfied faces started the nautical miles calculations, the result was good! Log Entry: 12:30, just ½ hour or so later than intended, thanks to a full English, shared with a few Dutch!

Both up the Medway and along the coast, it was another beautiful day and journey. It was reassuring to see the Medway Queen inside our starboard side, an obvious testament to another excellent passage plan – yet the Gore Channel proved elusive. A function of old charts and some inconsiderates moving and re-naming the channel markers – we chose to follow the “big boys” – which proved that Andrew’s gismo did indeed have a purpose!

On board Spike there appeared some activity! We on Billie had decided that we have missed their earlier signal 4 reds (faces) flashing so we called VHF 06 – to find that it was a fan belt break that had slowed their progress, and that our “missed signal” was indeed just a function of not sufficient sun tan jollop applied in the previous day & last 3 hours!

Trevor spotted an interesting buoy at North Foreland, more gismos consulted. Unequivocally this was another non-charted Trinity House aberration! Or a lack of sufficient fluid – with beers broken out all became clear, it was a fisherman standing on the Foreland spit!

Rounded as if we were cutting glass, a certain “nearly there” thought came over us – yet only seconds later a squall brewed up, so from Broadstairs to Ramsgate we were reminded that indeed we were on the sea!

Ramsgate VHF 16 were a great deal more accomplished than Thames barrier, they not only understood our VHF but appeared welcoming – all tied up by 6pm – 1st & 2nd leg done – what was all the fuss about!

Wednesday 20th May

All the Little Ships had somehow made it, even with their inferior passage plans. All we needed was a “Flying Visit”. Duly arriving in magnificent splendour the pride of the SBC fleet (with) Linda, Sue and exile from Scotland Don ABC drifted into the harbour – which was a bit of a shame, given the amount Linda had spent on engineers! With some long handled stethoscope’s (translation for Andrew : Screwdrivers) and more opinions than the Labour Party – we organised a quick boat lift (thanks Ramsgate). With the Lord Croom in attendance and his old school chum, waving Allen keys the offending noise producers were removed and Flying Visit was sorted.



Crowds gather again, this time Ramsgate as the SBC contingent is given a friendly wave off

Thursday 21st May

Spike & Billie chose to leave pre the Little Ships 7:30. Linda followed a little later and unfortunately, we all missed the Spitfire & Hurricane fly passed, as our progress was good. Another day, another passage plan – this one in Top Gear tradition – we had to hit the DK fuel pontoon AND be in good time for the only lock time! The Separation Zone held no fears as the hastily put together cocktail stirrer did indeed double as a radar deflector – it worked (thx Trev/Andrew). The weather was again kind. The fuel pontoon was more of a challenge! Greg was sure that his 1st go had pumped £100 of air, the 2nd attempt however appeared to work, as indeed did his 3rd attempt – Similarly on Billie, the opportunity to mark an “only 50 ltrs left!” mark on the fuel gauge was something I had always intended to do. A little later spreadsheets were hot – perhaps the boats were not quite as economical as the owner’s manual had implied! Could we make it back to the island in one hit, probably not!

Friday / Sat 22nd & 23rd May

Friday we created a new abbreviation FFrench. This proved very useful in the following days – initially it described the fuel pontoon owners (who had taken double the number of payments from our cards) later it described the helpful Tristram lock operators and subsequently proved a vernacular capable of answering most situations for enFrance.



Team HQ



Dock Side

The 1st rush home (post ceremony **Sat 22nd May**)

Helpfully the only way out of DK inner harbour is the Trystram Lock, and thus being FFrench they decided to close the lock on Saturday afternoon. This meant we needed to plan another early start – to get the boats out at the 8AM lock. However, the FFrench took Spike's name and mis-interpreted it to mean this is what they wanted – drinks spiked to ensure a 3:30am arrival back to their boat! Our fall-back was enacted, an 11am lock out. A new passage plan took the tides and wind into account, but not the FFrench weather forecast – after a ½ hour of steaming the call was made – a return to harbour try again.



RHS
Crossing
back from
Dunkirk

LHS
Engineering
skills honed

Sunday 23rd May: 6 am FFrench time (5amUK) and we were off with a passage plan direct to London – not stopping over at Ramsgate, but rather testing fuel calculations to the limit! Because we were using English time & weather we arrived (100 Nmils and 14 hrs later) within our tidal window for Gallions Point Marina (+ or – 3hrs HW Nth Woolwich).

Throwing some cash in the general direction of the non-resident lock keeper, allowed us to lock out at 6am...and benefit from the tide, all the way to Richmond. A little splutter at Battersea for Greg and a chance for me to again, top-up my power steering fluid – all were now honed skills.

Final thoughts:

Whilst the Small Boat Club was not around for the Evacuation Call, many in the local area answered it. This local link and more saliently, having a member on active service at the time (Gus) gives us a real connection with Operation Dynamo. Running the commemorative trip provides an insight into the trepidation that skippers must have been felt about the journey, which then must have evaporated on seeing the horrors they found when they arrived. For me I've always wanted to run this trip in my boat – this was my challenge, theirs was much greater. As was brought home most powerfully to me when in and around the Dunkerque water, looking at so many wreck symbols on the charts – all combine to remind of the real story that we chose to mark.

Dominic Evans

Commodore Small Boat Club Stephens Eyot Kingston-upon-Thames

May 2015



SBC members meet up with Crew of Shipfaced accompanied by a couple of dad's army stand ins and their kit



HMS Medway Queen operated from Ramsgate for most of the Dunkirk Evacuation in May/June 1940. The ship's crew withstood the punishing schedule and the danger for no less than seven round trips rescuing 7000 British and French troops. Each night would be filled with the noise and danger of battle; sometimes they were directed to the Mole and at others to the beaches, according to circumstances. Each day was taken up with repairs, cleaning and restocking supplies, ammunition and fuel.

It is fitting that the ship should re-visit Ramsgate this year to commemorate the 75th anniversary of Dunkirk in company with the Little Ships. Any such event is at the mercy of tides and weather but it is planned that the Medway Queen will be in Ramsgate from 19th May.

The Little Ships will be arriving on that day in time for a church service and military parade on Wednesday 20th when Medway Queen will be open to visitors.

The Association received an official invitation from the Mayor of Dunkirk to return to Dunkirk in May 2015 to commemorate the 75th anniversary of Operation Dynamo. Over 50 Little Ships escorted by the RNLI and the Royal Navy took part in the Return.

The Association of Dunkirk Little Ships has organised a Commemorative Return every five years since 1970. Despite the average age of the Little Ships now being close to 80 years it is anticipated that this Return may be the biggest yet. The task of taking this many elderly, traditional vessels across one of the world's busiest shipping lanes is by no means insignificant. In fact the event is quite unique. With the exception of a small number of vessels that are operated by 'Trusts', all Little Ships are privately owned and receive no financial or other assistance from any public body or NGO.

Angele Aline /Aquabelle /Aureol previously Kitty /Bluebird of Chelsea previously Blue Bird
Brown Owl previously Wairakei/ Caronia /Chumley previously Chalmondesleigh
Dowager previously Rosa Woodd and Phyllis Lunn /Elsa II /Elvin /Endeavour /Firefly
Gainsborough Trader previously M.F.H. (Master of Foxhounds) /Gay Venture
Gentle Ladye previously Jong /Greta /Hilfrantor/ Janthea previously Reda /Kingwood
L'Orage previously Surrey /Lady Gay / Lady Isabelle /Lazy Days /Lijns /Llanthony /Lucy Lavers
M B 278 at one time Susan K /Mada previously Fleury II /Maid Marion /Marsayru /Mary Jane
Mary Scott at one time Atanua /Massey Shaw /Mimosa/ Moonraker /MTB 102 /New Britannic
Nyula previously Betty /Omega /Ona II /Our Lizzie /Papillon /Princess Freda /Pudge
RIIS I previously White Heather /Ryegate II /Silver Queen previously Fermain V
Stenoa previously Cecil and Lilian Philpott /Sundowner Tahilla previously Skylark
Thamesa previously Minnehaha /Tom Tit /Trimilia previously Prudential /Wairakei II
Wanda /Wayfarer /White Marlin previously Fervant