



Ian Cunningham
organised this trip for
Friday 18 July until
Tuesday 22 July.
Sketch by Ian.

Maria and John
Hawes; Ian & Liz
Cunningham; Janet
Stiles ; Diane & Mike
Armson; Richard
Rivett; Adrian Farley;
David Alcock; Gary
Alderson; Roger
Thyer-Jones;

Skipper SHINER; Mate
Pat Schulenburg;



Built in 1922 by London & Rochester Trading Co., Pudge is a Thames sailing barge with a hull constructed of pitch pine on oak with a flush deck, with the steering wheel on a 'short spindle' without the usual raised cabin top. Originally spritsail rigged with a bowsprit she had an auxiliary oil engine made by The Bergius Co. Ltd of Glasgow and was installed in 1932. Pudge is one of the last wooden barges to be built, Pudge spent much of her working life carrying goods between London and Ipswich.

3rd Mate Phil P.

Oh No. Not Aylesbury Sailing Club....
My racing crew...you must be joking

Racing a 90 ton sailing barge with over 3000 square feet of sail was one thing that had never occurred to me. But that is what our club signed up to on Pudge. Friday saw us all arriving at Queenborough harbour for a 1400hrs departure.

Skipper Shinner and his crew, Pat and Phil welcomed us. After settling in stowing our luggage, food and a decent range of drink, Pat gave us our briefing, including use of the heads. Some of us it seemed, later adopted their own methodology as demonstrated in the quiz led by Ian on the last evening!

We left the berth having ditched the rat later spotted in the galley, (hopefully) under engine aiming to reach Gravesend piles, and sailing with an easterly 3 knot wind and fair weather to arrive about 1730hrs.

Race Preparation

Five barges were due to race on Saturday and we moored next to a beautifully restored barge, Marigold but all of them were stately and of course restless to compete. Some of us thought that our strategy should involve a few pints and so strolled down to the pub. Ian and Liz had prepared a spagbol and Maria banana cake with custard which went down very well.

Some calls for “entertainment “ saw me delivering the poem, ‘ Blasphemous Bill McKay’ one of my favourite poems with an unusual outcome and we got the guitar out for a few songs before calling it a day. Heavy rain in the night exposed me to a wet sleeping bag as it dripped through the decking. Hopping about in the middle of the night getting a bowl under the drips and then later, as I woke, kicking the lot over the cabin floor.

Race day on Saturday saw us up early for breakfast and an 0930hrs start line against our coastal competition, Gladys. We were joined by our second skipper, Tony, who added his great experience to the race.

We were over the line in under a minute, easterly 3 with 3 barges competing at the mark at mid swatch. There was a competition for best rounding and , in my view, our Skipper did a great smooth job with no dramas but we didn’t win it.....The wind increased to northerly 4 and our top mast looked very bendy which seems why our barge had a reputation as the banana boat. !



Wind was dropping and our 1700hrs finish deadline was not achievable not helped by the committee frantically trying to tell the skipper to abandon the race when clearly in racing mode. Soon the radio gave him the news and so engine on at 1712hrs and back to Gravesend having sailed for 8 hours and tacked a fair few times. We were almost melding into a crack crew..ish...



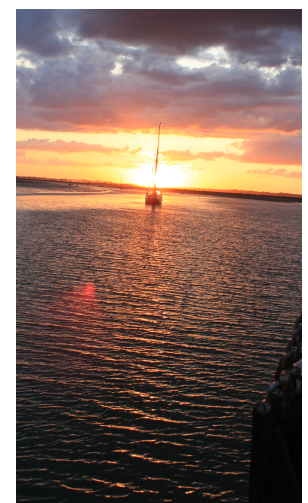
And so to the dinner and prize giving. Well, the amount of silver on display as the cups were laid out could have graced the palace. After a nutritious dinner and dessert our host speaker in the Three Daws gave us an overview of the race, pretty much at the same speed we raced at. A blow by blow account that thrilled the audience with tales of daring racing in huge barges. The presentation of the silver cups caused enthusiastic outbreaks of applause and our team were proud to see cups awarded to Pudge and her Skippers.



Returning to Pudge victorious with 2 cups and skipper Tony departing with our best wishes home with his cup carefully disguised against the possibility of robbery by footpads, we enjoyed spiced rum and a spirited rendition of the song, Chastity Belt and others before bed. All in all a most enjoyable evening.



Sunday saw a an early start, up at 0700hrs, departing at 0815hrs in drizzle for Stangate with a NE 3/4 moving us along nicely. We dropped off Liz at Queensborough where a launch sped her to the port eventually anchoring up at about 2100 hrs The scenery around us was not exactly inspiring: mudflats, wrecks; desolate marshes with a Dickensian look about them relating to escaping convicts; pylons galore with with farms and huge cranes dominating the skyline. The water was muddy and treacherously concealed a range of sunken obstacles. Good job our skipper knew his way about!



Monday we were up at 0700hrs departing for Gillingham with light SE breezes turning NE later. We decided that a brunch was appropriate and so our team with Adrian, Ian and me tackled the preparation of an award winning breakfast including fried bread which I last ate aged 11.

We sauntered up to Chatham passing Upnor Castle. With 400 years of history and 80 acres to explore we decided that a trip later would be worthwhile. We cruised past HMS Ocelot, the Cold War submarine, HMS Cavalier the Second World War destroyer and HMS Gannet, the Victorian sloop before turning and heading for our anchorage in Stangate Creek arriving at 1415 hrs.

Here was a chance for adventure. Led by intrepid Ian, the jolly boat was seized and in piled those in search of a pint including David, representing the senior seniors. Pat rowed them to the Barbary shore where they faced stony paths, barbed wire, threatening farmers, locked gates in order to reach the pub, order and drink one pint and then lope back the half mile or so for dinner. Maria's warnings on timings were ringing in their ears. Once again, Pat, met and rowed them back to the barge. The party were, late, battered but in high spirits even with the inevitable tongue lashing which followed.

Post dinner songs were sung including the famous Pirate song beloved by....landlubbers.

The many highlights of the trip included the Antiques Roadshow led by Mike and Diane when Mike produced various antiques and our two teams got the answers of value constantly wrong proving that we should never bid for anything at an auction. Ian's barge quiz baffled us with definitions of cat, mouse, dog and muzzle.

Asked to describe how the heads actually worked produced hilarity and incomprehensible diagrams despite all the advice displayed in them. Remember not to sprinkle when you tinkle.....



Tuesday saw us taking an easy breakfast before setting off in light winds back to Queenborough Harbour and arriving to embark about 1230hrs. But first we had a feedback session completing the questionnaire about our trip. Ian gave an overview thanking all who contributed to the planning and victualing for the trip but had a number of mentions for a wide range of winners including best breakfast, best games, best pirate song and many more not forgetting Maria's cakes. Of course he left himself out but we are all grateful for his organisation and fearless leadership of some of the party to the pub. The artwork is his as well.

No account could end without mention of our Skipper who chivvied us with great good humour and improved our skills without resort to the lash or the cat. Pat was ever helpful even when busy with the many demands for his attention and Phil with a winning smile never failed to support us and even gave a fine sea shanty in Polish. Pat is a film director and Phil works at the Greenwich Maritime museum and I was born in Greenwich next to the park and loved to explore it and marvel at the models of ships there.

Once again it was a privilege to sail on a barge which is part of our maritime history under expert guidance and we are grateful for the way both skipper and crew made sure we had a great and safe experience.

Our respects to all bargemasters, mainsheetmen and those volunteers who keep traditions alive with the support of the Port of London Authority.

Best wishes,

Roger Thyer-Jones

Hughenden Valley.

