

End of Summer Dinner Dance to Weymouth by Robert Miller of Millers Folly

As soon as the list of dates went up on the CQBHA website we decided to book ourselves on to a selection of trips following the success of our trip to Cowes last year on the "first timers" cruise.

We were down for three Channel crossings (hopefully six as we had ambitions to come home each time) and the end of season trip to Weymouth for the dinner dance.

Even though we were relative newcomers at the start of the season, by the time the Weymouth trip came round we had forged a whole series of friendships with other members and were beginning to consider ourselves as "old hands".

The usual dockside meeting was much busier than usual and it was only when we were given a berthing plan (we had never had this before) did we actually realise just how many boats were going to be making the trip. Twenty five in total, and all needing to be packed in like sardines when we arrived in Weymouth.

A beautiful clear day with little wind greeted us when we awoke on Saturday morning and knowing that we had a town centre berth in Weymouth, we made little effort to take on supplies (only later did we realise what a mistake this was!)

For those who do not know, Weymouth has a lifting bridge that requires just a little planning, though most of the boats less than 30 feet are able to get through regardless of the tide. Therefore, it was decided departure would be at 9.30 and so the largest flotilla we have been involved with left Cobbs Quay at around 9.15. At the bridge basin, the "traffic" was quite heavy with everyone trying to make the most of the bank holiday sunshine and possibly the last sailing of the summer. There were boats strung out all the way back to Cobbs even as the bridge lifted. We were really glad we were not sat in the car waiting to cross the bridge! The usual radio checks from "Reality" took place and everyone confirmed they were receiving "loud and clear".

As this was a much less arduous journey than some of the cross Channel trips, we did not depart in a convoy but in a series of informal groups and with some boats travelling nearer the shore and others further out we were a pretty impressive and formidable group. I am sure that if Phillip of Spain had turned up with his Armada, he would have turned tail at the first sighting of us.

The run down to Weymouth is extremely pretty, all along the Jurassic coast. The cliff formations and rolling meadows above are fascinating and form a great backdrop for any boat photographs. As we were quite low in the berthing order, and as I used to play there during holidays when I was a small boy, we decided we did not need to rush and slid quietly into Lulworth Cove to reminisce. It was so nice there with a variety of boats sitting at anchor, people bathing and others getting ready to sail that it would have been extremely easy to have dropped anchor and joined them. Regrettably, we had to continue our journey but not without storing this memory for a weekend next summer.

It was a little foggy as we arrived near Weymouth and the Naval Base at Portland looked quite eerie! However, we slid into the river mouth and dropping our speed to around two knots we meandered up the river towards Weymouth Marina.

The river in Weymouth runs through the town and a variety of shops, cafes and restaurants lined the banks. We made a note of the nicest of these for future reference.

We could hear various boat names being called in to the berthing area and it turned out that Peter (formerly from Amanha?) was our berthing master for the day. As the tide was still falling, some of the largest boats, which were needed to berth first, were still unable to pass under the bridge. Therefore we passed them by, and having cleared the bridge we tied up on the town wall and

awaited our call. Those who have read our previous report know how spooked we are by mooring but this one went like clockwork. No wind, bow into the tide, and the water pushing us on to the wall. I think a blind man could have done this but even so it was another success chalked up!

Angela and I had a quick tour of the local chandlery, all the time monitoring channel 6 and waiting for our call.

Eventually we received our summons and made our way up to the berthing area. The wind had picked up a bit, there were by now 20 plus boats already berthed, and once again we had to moor in the full gaze of all these expert boaters. I can only think that I need an audience because mooring 2 went perfectly and with helping hands from the adjoining boat taking our lines we had the engines off and the sigh of relief was heard all around Weymouth. Able to actually take in our surrounds now, it was amazing to see that our group had attracted a huge audience up on the inner bridge who were watching an incredible display of professional boat handling. (In our case.... if only they had known!) We were packed in like sardines with not a single glitch. We noticed that "Shammy" had muscled in amongst the big boys at the back; we always knew that Bob punched above his weight.

I then set to helping "Taffy" to raft up against us. Having secured them, Neil and I went to help Richard and Doreen on "R Plaice" tie up against Taffy. Angela and Sharon were nowhere to be seen and then the pop of a champagne bottle being opened gave their location away. It is amazing how that sound attracts an immediate audience and in no time at all a full blown party was under way on "Miller's Folly".

There were far too many people to mention individually, but a big thank you to everyone who contributed food and drink to what became a very pleasant and relaxing afternoon. With personnel changing continuously, the "party" went on until around seven o'clock. Unfortunately, this was too late to obtain any food and supplies and realised the error of our ways in not stocking up before departure. As ever, help was on hand with a call from Roger and Marjorie on Clearwater inviting us to join them and Bob and Gayna for a casserole. I hope they did not spot our speed of acceptance.

We ate a really enjoyable meal, and after a remarkable short stay (perhaps we had peeked a bit early!!!!) we "staggered" off to bed. The clambering across "Spindrift" was a sight to behold and how we managed to reach our boat without getting wet feet is still a mystery.

A bright Sunday morning greeted us as we crawled from our bed. I did not remember eating a fur coat but there was definitely one lining my mouth! A teeth clean and cup of tea sorted us out and we prepared ourselves to face the day. The facilities at Weymouth Marina are first class with a modern shower and toilet block. Suitably scrubbed, Angela and I set off in search of a café for breakfast and shops for retail therapy. (I will leave you to decide who wanted which!)

Weymouth is quite a quaint town with large and small retailers mixed together with the regulation English seaside souvenir shops quite prevalent on the beach end of town. Walking along the beach we found a very small funfair, a crèche offering fun for children (Angela stopped me joining in the sand castle competition) and an amazing exhibition of sand sculptures. The beach was quite crowded and it is very obvious that if we could guarantee this kind of weather then few of us would ever venture abroad. Unfortunately, we also encountered the kind of yobs who give us such a bad reputation abroad, swearing, drinking (are we in a position to talk) and intimidating passers by. Still, at least they were not "representing" Britain in a foreign country.

Returning to our boat, with a full complement of Sunday papers, we set about catching up on the world at large. Realising that it was also the Belgian Grand Prix, I dashed in to town, bought a £9.99 aerial and managed to receive perfect pictures on our TV. (How much money have we

wasted on specialist boat aerials, none of which seem to do anything!) I watched the Grand Prix whilst Angela recharged her batteries lying in the sun.

As the evening beckoned, we readied ourselves ready for the dinner dance. If I say so myself, we scrubbed up rather well, and ready to go we then wandered along the pontoon to a Pimms reception on Giovanni. Everyone was already in party mode and this was just a kick start for the evening! Thanks to Robert & Jane for their hospitality.

A 15 minute walk to the Prince Regent Hotel and we were ready to party. A few pre-dinner drinks and then a grand entry into what we can only describe as a "magnificent ballroom". High ornate ceilings, lavishly decorated walls, and all in a building that it would have been very easy to walk straight past. (Hopefully when we experience the full effects of global warming, these wonderful places will make a comeback). Peter and Anne were on hand taking photographs of every couple and these images can be found on the Work of Art website

<http://www.workofart-marine.co.uk/dinner%20&%20dance%202007.htm>

Thanks to both Peter and Ann for helping us all to enjoy our memories.

An excellent meal, at tables for 8 or 10, very well planned by Linda and Kevin, a few awards to immortalise various incidents throughout the cruising year, and then the dancing began. The music reached across all tastes and everyone danced the evening away. Young and old alike, everyone enjoyed themselves and even those who did not want to dance were able to sit and talk quietly in the bar. Finally it was time to return to the Marina and with people collecting on various boats, a final nightcap was enjoyed before sliding wearily in to bed.

The sunlight woke us again on Monday and luckily I hadn't swallowed the fur coat again! Bacon rolls and the early morning news preceded a long walk around the area stretching our legs and trying to walk some of the food off.

Everyone was in good spirits, cleaning their boats, taking their dinghies out or generally relaxing. Finally it was time to think about leaving. As we had a long journey to South Wales (not by boat I hasten to add) we bid our farewells and headed back to Poole.

The return journey went well until the power steering belt snapped. This meant that every steering effort was 10 times normal but we felt it was easier to do this than to try and fix things at sea. Neil and Sharon were quite close so we were happy we had support if further problems had developed. Once we arrived at Cobbs, they pressed ahead to their berth and were ready to take our lines. Yet another straight forward mooring and I finally feel as though I am getting the hang of it! Unfortunately with the winter ahead, I will have forgotten everything by March!

In closing Angela and I would like to thank everyone who helped make this such an enjoyable weekend. Kevin and Linda as Cruising Organisers, the entire Committee for the efforts in making the arrangements which went like clockwork, Peter and Ann for their photographs, and all the many new friends we have met who have made our boating an absolute pleasure. Our heart felt thanks to all of you.

Once again we would recommend cruising in company; we have crossed the Channel three times this year (3½ if you count our aborted first run to Guernsey) and made the trip to Weymouth. We have had a huge amount of fun but also had time to ourselves. A perfect combination! We will have no hesitation in signing up next year as soon as the trips become available.