

Wotan's return

through Poland and east Germany

Anthony Fawcett

I had wintered *Wotan* in Mariehamn in the Årland Islands of southwest Finland. During February, with two of my previous season's crew, I visited her to find her beautifully tucked up under a prefabricated cover. When I arrived to commission her in early June, she was in the water waiting for me. I was joined by Michel van Biers, who was an invaluable help. He is



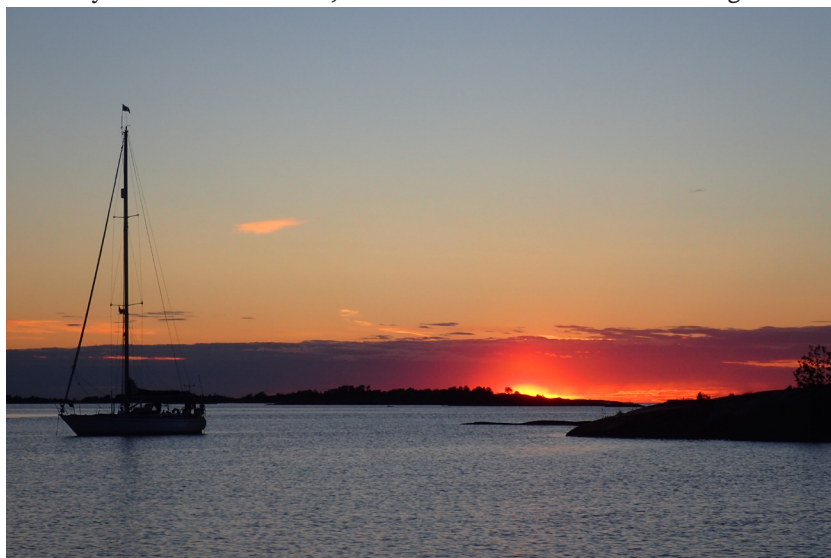
Swedish, so nothing was lost in translation. Sadly, he had to return home before we could start sailing, but he was to join me later in the cruise.

We set off from Mariehamn to circumnavigate Fasta Åland, the main Åland island. I was joined for this leg by Basil Taylor, who had sailed with me from Itchenor to Copenhagen last year, and Carl Sjösted, who had most recently sailed with me from Stavanger to Shetland. Our first stop was at Notviken, a small marina close to the remains of the Bomarsund fortress. We scrambled up to the ruins of the Notvik Tower, which provides a panoramic view over the surrounding area. While sailing around to Djupviken, we only saw one yacht. I was pleased to see that it was British. The season in Finland is very short and few local boats were out so early

in the year.

We enjoyed a squiggly rock dodge round to Eckerö. This was where the Stockholm to Åbo (Turku) mail route made landfall in the Ålands. The mail was carried across from Grisslehamn in Sweden in small open sailing boats. Being a mail boatman was a perilous activity as you had to operate both across the ice winter and by sea during the rest of the year. The day we were there, there was a re-enactment with replica mail boats sailing over from Sweden. There was little or no wind, so I suspect that most of the boats were towed in by their supporting craft. The Post Road Museum in Eckerö is well worth a visit and gives you a good idea of the dangers involved.

Safely back in Mariehamn, Carl returned to Stockholm leaving Bas and



Wotan in Stor Långören

me to sail down to Saltsjöbaden. We were both very sorry to see Carl go as we could not match his culinary skills!

I followed the outer route back to Saltsjöbaden, which I had taken last year. Things did not go quite so smoothly this time as my engine died just as we were leaving the Stora Nassa archipelago. Quick thinking on Bas' part had the genoa pulling, while I was struggling in vain to breathe life into the engine. We beat for 20 odd miles to Sandhamn. The KSSS (Royal Swedish Yacht Club) staff could not have been more helpful. We had been warned by the boatyard in Mariehamn that they had taken some gunge out of the fuel tank, so we decided our first job should be to empty and clean the fuel tank. Bas discovered that the fuel station had a pump for pumping out fuel. With the fuel tank pristine, we refilled it only to find that after a few minutes' running the engine stopped once again. I

concluded that it was the fuel pump that was the cause of the problem. A local engineer helped me install a temporary electrical fuel pump. Amid these alarms and excursions, Bas and I were able to take time off for dinner at the Vårdhus restaurant, which is said to have been open since 1672. Just to make life easier, we arrived in Sandhamn on the day before Midsummer's Eve. On Midsummer's Day the town was *en fête*. A maypole was raised in the park around which young and old danced singing the traditional songs well known to all. Baz headed back to Stockholm to join his wife for a long weekend in the City.

I was joined by Tom Trevelyan, another Itchenor resident, to sail down to Saltsjöbaden. Tom is a keen racing sailor, so he kept me on my toes trimming the sails. We had a splendid time sailing around the Stockholm archipelago, taking a delightfully indirect route down to Saltsjöbaden so I could show Tom some of the archipelago. We also had time to visit Stockholm and the *Vasa* Museum before Tom caught his flight home. Once I had replaced the fuel pump, the engine ran like a sewing machine! This



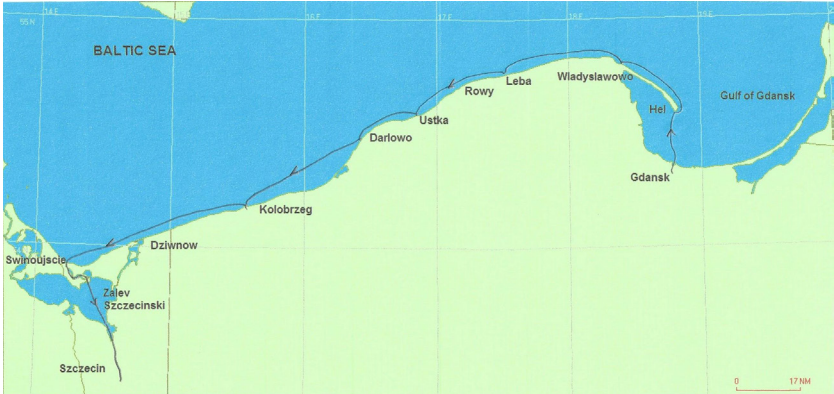
Old Crane, Gdansk with galleon moored nearby

was important as I was about to hand *Wotan* over to Douglas Byatt (RCC) to sail her down to Gdansk.

I was able to follow Douglas' progress down the coast of Sweden on AIS. I could see him hopping in and out of anchorages gleaned from *Naturhamnar på Ostkusten* (Swedish east coast harbour guide). He had a windless passage cross from

Kalmar to Gdansk. I picked up *Wotan* in Gdansk in mid-July. She was looking immaculate.

My crew on the leg to Szczecin was Mike Derry, who had sailed with me from Helsinki to Mariehamn last year and lives in Helsinki. I had not been to Gdansk for over 10 years. It was very noticeable that the infrastructure had improved considerably during that time, a reflection of Poland's economic success. We were due to meet Simon and Sophie Olszowski in Hel. What a place to meet up! Simon had sailed across the Atlantic with me in 2005 and since then had wisely avoided sailing with me! He is bilingual in Polish, which proved invaluable as I could not understand the alphabet, let alone the words!



Mike and I motored out of Gdansk and over to Hel. Hel used to be off limits but it is now a thriving holiday resort, with a recently enlarged marina and a wide choice of restaurants. Hel is at the end of a long sand spit that encloses the western side of the Bay of Gdansk. Our next port of call was Władysławowo, which lies at the root of the Hel Peninsular. It is a thriving fishing port and also something of a holiday resort. It has a large sheltered artificial harbour, with a small marina tucked into one corner. The facilities are modest and the shore side landscape industrial.

The Polish coast is essentially one long beach with harbours of varying sizes and depths where river estuaries enter the sea. We had a brief sail followed by a long motor for the 33 miles to Łeba. There is a marina in Łeba near the entrance. We found that it was quite shallow, but after touching the bottom several times we found a berth by the fuelling dock. Łeba has an active sailing club. We watched an enthusiastic group of children being taught to sail.

There was a Kon-Tiki type craft on display beside the marina, with a sign board extolling the exploits of Andrzej Urbanczyk, a local sailor,



who had set out to sea in this craft back in the 1950s. He subsequently became an accomplished ocean sailor, covering 120,000 miles in, I should hasten to add, a more seaworthy craft. It was a 20 minute walk in the rain to town, which was popping with holiday makers. I was amused

by the number of galleons and pirate ships that we saw along the coast, which seem to be a feature of the Polish holiday scene. Sophie went for a run through the pine woods and along the beach, and reported that the beach had fine white sand and was very attractive.

Between Łeba and Ustka there is a small harbour called Rowy, but with a depth of just over a metre it was too shallow for *Wotan*. We had a beat all the way to Ustka in a W5-6. It took us nine hours to cover the 30 miles. As far as we could see we were the only yacht heading west. Mike was in his element steering *Wotan* into the head sea, while keeping up her speed. The chart on my iPad showed a bridge across the entrance to Ustka that did not feature in either my pilot book, or my somewhat dated chart. Sure enough there was a bridge and it was closed. Simon called the harbour master in his best Polish and was informed that the bridge would be opening in ten minutes time. Well-designed modern blocks of flats, with smart restaurants on the ground floor, line the quay on the east side of the river. A marina was under construction in the old fishing harbour on the western side. The swell in the river, caused by the strong wind, made mooring alongside the quay quite uncomfortable. Our bow fairlead was pulled out when a breast mooring rope suddenly came under tension.

By morning, the wind had dropped to a very comfortable F4. We sailed almost all the way to Darłowo (pronounced Dar-wowo), only putting on the engine to ensure that we caught the 1600 bridge opening. The marina on the eastern shore of the river had been smartened up considerably with an excellent shower block. The local authority had clearly decided to invest in tourism by developing facilities for yachts. We were told that we were the first British yacht to dock in the marina that season. The majority of the visiting yachts were German with a smattering of Swedish and Dutch. We took a bus, from the bus station behind the marina, into town, encouraged by the tourist brochure. The town was attractive with a number of historic buildings, though very quiet.

Simon and Sophie departed early next morning as Simon had business in Gdynia. This left Mike and me to sail *Wotan* the rest of the way to Szczecin. We motor sailed all the way to Kołobrzeg as the wind was so light. Kołobrzeg marina had been recently redeveloped. The main building contains not only the marina office and showers, but an attractive café/restaurant and a chandlery. A rally of the west of Sweden section of the Swedish Cruising Club (SXX) had taken over many of the visitors' berths in the marina, but the very helpful English speaking harbourmaster found us a berth. We invited a German couple, who kept their boat in Hamburg, around for after dinner drinks. They gave us some very useful advice on places that we should visit along the German coast.

The forecast for the morning was W5. We decided that we should declare a lay day and visit Kołobrzeg town, a short bus ride away. It turned out to



Old houses in Kołobrzeg

be a very attractive and prosperous town. It was laid out along a tree lined river in which fountains played. We took the lift to the top of the cathedral spire from where there were wonderful views of the surrounding countryside. For us boys, there was a military museum with an impressive collection of WWII uniforms and equipment. Outside, the park was full of Warsaw Pact aircraft, tanks and material.

When we returned to the marina, Miranda Delmar-Morgan (RCC) called me, having seen *Wotan* on her AIS, to find out if there would be room in the marina. She had been unable to find a berth in Dziwnów the night before and was keen not to be left out in the cold again. I said that *Polar Bear* would be welcome to lie alongside us as there was little or no other room. Miranda and Edward kindly invited us for drinks after dinner. Mike had noticed a classical music concert at the Cathedral and decided to go. He returned seriously impressed by the quality of the performance in time to join us for drinks.

We set off in the morning for Świnoujście, about 50 miles away. There was practically no wind, so I am ashamed to say that I motored all the way. Some local yachts stuck close inshore and picked up a zephyr that kept them moving. Świnoujście has a large marina situated just inside the harbour entrance. We met up with the SXX again, who took our lines and invited us to join their drinks party. Moored near us was an S&S Swan 65, with Saltsjöbaden as its port of registry. I could not resist talking to the owner. He was a young man with two small children, who were clearly having a ball on Daddy's yacht. The owner did a lot of singlehanded sailing, which, in a 65 footer, I thought took some doing!

Our final leg took us up the Oder to Szczecin (Stettin). First we had to cross the Zalew Szczeciński, an inland lake, which were to be something of a feature of the coast as we headed westwards into Germany. We had a fine sail across the lake before starting the motor for the remaining 15 miles up to Szczecin. The river banks were initially made up of fields

and woodland, ideal habitat for duck and other wild life. Indeed, we saw several sea eagles. Approaching Szczecin, the landscape transforms into an industrial one. The first feature is an enormous spoil heap on the western shore behind which was a huge chemical plant. Moving closer to Szczecin, there are dockyards and wharves. The Kaiser built much of his Imperial Fleet here. We berthed at the Pogoń Marina at the entrance to a canal leading to the Jezioro Dąbie, a large shallow lake to the east of Szczecin.

There are a series of marinas along the southern shore of this lake. The Pogoń Marina was delightful, surrounded by trees, with a little café-restaurant. It was also conveniently placed for buses into town. Mike took a train to Warsaw and flew home from there. This gave me the chance to explore the old town of Szczecin, of which sadly not much remains, and to visit the Palace of the Dukes of Pomerania, which was being restored.

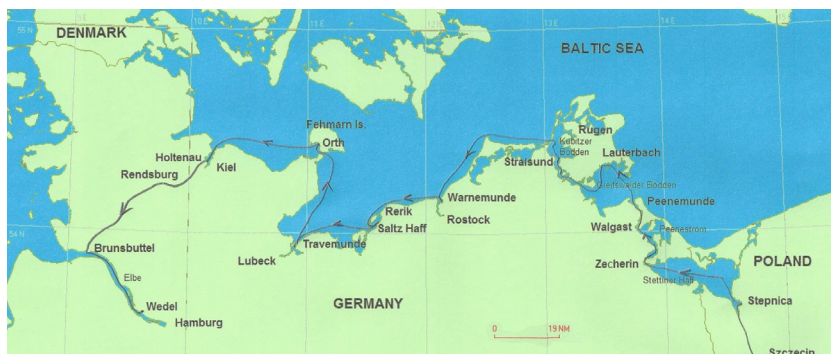
I had a quiet day sorting out *Wotan* before I was joined by Alison Miller (RCC),



1918 lake yacht in Pogoń Marina

Digger Harris and Robert Gayner, all of whom have sailed with me on a number of occasions. Robert was to prove particularly useful as he spoke fluent German. After a morning's heavy shopping in Szczecin, we set off down river to Stepnica. We berthed in the commercial harbour. A new marina had been built just to the north of the commercial harbour in the old fishing harbour, but we did not have a chart for it. We carried out a lead line survey of the marina and concluded that there was a depth of 3 metres on the outer pontoons. We found a quirky restaurant beside the marina, where we ate in almost pitch-darkness, the only light being by the bar! The Stepnica YC has a marina up the Kanał Zeglarski to the north of Stepnica, with a depth of 2.2 metres, which we were told was rather attractive, but too shallow for *Wotan*.

The time had come to cross into Germany. We were heading for Wolgast, but first we had to negotiate the Zecherin Bridge. The pilot book warns that bridge opening times vary from year to year, so I had Robert call the bridge master to check the times. While we were waiting for the bridge, we heard a mayday from Bremen Rescue. There was an MOB about 7 miles away. It all ended happily when a passing yacht picked up the casualty. There was some confusion over how many casualties had been picked up,



but then we heard the skipper of the mayday yacht saying that he only wanted one wife back!

We were heading on up the Peenestrom when we spotted a large black cloud heading for us. Digger made the excellent suggestion that rather than get wet, why don't we simply anchor and sit out the squall. We then decided to anchor further inshore for the night rather than head into Wolgast. Next morning we set off early to catch the 0845 Wolgast bridge opening, only to find that it now opened at 0745. We made a virtue out of necessity, moored up on the town quay, just by the bridge and took the train to Peenemünde. We had to change trains in Zinnowitz, where we found a delightful, if slightly incongruous, Vietnamese restaurant for a quick lunch before heading on to the Peenemünde, where the V1 and V2 rockets were developed in WWII. The whole area had been a military industrial complex. The power station was still standing, though stripped of its turbines. A V1 stood on a launch ramp and a replica V2 near the power station. In the museum there was an exhibition which described how Germany had developed them and the role played by Dr Wernher von Braun. In the cinema, there was a film about their development and another about the role of women in the Luftwaffe, in which Judy Lomax (RCC) starred. Another part of the museum included components and technical drawings of the V2. The technology was incredibly advanced for the time, both in terms of the rocket propulsion and the control systems.

Our next stop was Lauterbach on the island of Rügen. The weather and the visibility had deteriorated considerably, but nevertheless we set off up the Peenestrom. There is a shallow and narrow channel in the south east corner of the Greifswalder Bodden just north of the Peenestrom, where if you stray off the channel you find yourself in 1.2 metres of water. Needless to say in the strong wind and pouring rain, we found ourselves on the mud. We were eventually able to extract ourselves from the mud. We were very pleased to berth in the shelter of Lauterbach, five hours later. There is a really good chandlery near the harbour, where Digger replaced his

Anthony Fawcett

aged oilskins and was rewarded with a free set of boots!

By the time we set off for Stralsund next morning, the weather had improved considerably. We had a good sail across the north-western side of the Greifswalder Bodden before motoring up the channel to Stralsund.



Robert, Digger and Alison on *Wotan*

We found ourselves in company, which was encouraging as we had probably timed the bridge opening correctly. There was a *mêlée* of yachts waiting to pass through the bridge. There were too many alpha males for my liking, so we let everyone go ahead of us! We found a wurst stand on the quay near the marina where a rock band was playing. We were in heaven! In fact all we ate that day was wurst.

Our next stop was Warnemünde. The weather was now beautiful, but there was no wind. We headed north out of Stralsund across Kubitzer Bodden another of these shallow inland lakes. It is a National Park and one can quite understand why. I have never seen so many swans in my life. Robert, who is something of an ornithologist, could not take his eyes off the swans. He reckoned that there must have been over a thousand of them. In the migration season this lake must play host to countless migrating geese. Once again, we had to follow a straight and narrow buoyed channel before heading out through the Gellen Strom back into the Baltic. It seemed that the marina at Stralsund had simply emptied into the Kubitzer Bodden. I would liked to have had more time to explore the harbours and anchorages in this area, which is something of a national playground. From the sublime to the ridiculous, we moored in the enormous Hohe Düne Marina, which is overlooked by a large corporate looking hotel. In the morning we took the ferry over to Warnemünde, which is a bustling seaside resort.

The fishing harbour, the Alter Strom, is lined with stalls selling all kinds of fish and other delicacies. Our dinner was assured! We went for a wander down to the beach and around the town, where Digger insisted that we have more wurst. Sadly we did not have time to visit the Hanseatic city of Rostock. We decided to spend the night at anchor in the Saltz-Haff between Warnemünde and Travemünde. You enter round a long sand spit and through a narrow channel. I would have liked to have gone up the

Rerik at the top of the Saltz-Haff, but the channel was too shallow. We had a very peaceful night at anchor with only two other boats sharing the large anchorage. We weighed anchor to find it covered in weed, which is noted on the chart. We set off under a cloudless sky towards Travemünde in a light south-easterly and docked in the Passat Marina under the square-rigger *Passat*.

We had planned to visit Lübeck as we had had to miss out on Rostock. A walk through woods took us to the ferry to Travemünde and from there we took the train to Lübeck. The entrance to Lübeck is guarded by the Holsten Gate, which could be described as a statement. There were some lovely old Hanseatic buildings incongruously juxtaposed with modern high street shops. Robert led us through the streets of old Lübeck to the Haus der Schiffergesellschaft, (the Shipowners' Guild) which had been converted into a restaurant. It is almost as the guild members left it, with model 17th Century ships hanging from the ceiling. Nearby, we visited one of the courtyards and mews, which are a feature of the city.

The task for the day was to pass under the Fehmarnsund Bridge, which had a clearance of 23 metres plus or minus 2 metres. My RCC burgee would need to be lowered if we were to pass under it! We had a gentle sail up to Fehmarn Island until a big black cloud appeared just as we were about to pass under the bridge. The visibility was so bad that we could barely see the bridge in the rain squall. We motored backwards and forwards in the deep water in front of the bridge until the squall cleared and the sea calmed down. We tried to anchor in Orther Bucht, but the weed was so bad that we simply dragged. Instead we went into Orth, which provided the shelter that we were seeking. Come the morning, we found that Orth was a rather attractive little harbour.

The next day, we had a long way to go as we were keen to reach Rendsburg, as both Digger and Robert had fond memories of the place. We were fortunate that the Holtenau Lock in to the Kiel Canal was open as we arrived. We were able to arrive in Rendsburg before lights out. The Rendsburg YC marina, where we moored, is near town and has a delightful restaurant overlooking the marina. I was able to explore Rendsburg before we set off for Brunsbüttel in the early afternoon. We spent the night in Brunsbüttel.

While we were waiting, with some 30 other yachts to enter the Brunsbüttel lock into the Elbe, we saw smoke coming from a yacht waiting with us. Within moments the yacht was on fire with flames and heavy black smoke pouring out of it. A yacht nearby picked up the crew, who had jumped into the water. Fortunately, there was help at hand. A nearby tug was soon playing water on the yacht and extinguished the fire, but the yacht was a right-off. This was an object lesson in how quickly fire can take hold. Had this happened in mid-ocean, the outcome might have been

very different. A rather shaken gaggle of yachts nudged their way into the lock and out into the Elbe. We motored up the Elbe to Wedel, where there is an enormous marina. So big is it that it is divided into north and south marinas! Wedel makes a good place to change crew as it is on the end of the Hamburg S-Bahn railway system. Alison, Digger and Robert returned home and I was joined by David Cunningham (RCC), who had sailed out to Copenhagen with me last year, and Michel van Biers, who had helped me to commission *Wotan*.

The Elbe is a river where small yachts can only go with the flow. The tidal flow information on my iPad proved invaluable as the stream starts at different times along the river. We left Wedel at 1300 on the first of the ebb, and by the time we reached Cuxhaven at 1900 the flood was just beginning. We moored in the SVC Marina and waited for the next ebb. We slipped at midnight and joined the constant stream of shipping. It took me some time to acclimatise myself to the effect of the stream, the buoyage and the traffic as we were being swept downstream. I was glad to have the three of us on watch. We headed west along the inshore shipping zone in a flat calm until at 2130, we anchored off Ameland in the Molengat Channel which leads up to Nes.

We were surrounded by Dutch *botters* enjoying the good weather and heading up to Nes. We anchored in the channel, although we were still about a mile off shore! Our next stop, before entering the IJsselmeer at Den Oever, was Oudeshild on Texel. I had my first experience of offshore sailing in 1963 in a Dutch naval yacht in the IJsselmeer, so I was keen to revisit Enhuizen and Hoorn.

I was not disappointed. They were very beautiful. I would have liked to have spent more time visiting the harbours of the Markermeer. I was very impressed with the handling of the large *botters*, usually by a young skipper with a very small crew. Chartering *botters* has become a big business.

The Sixhaven Marina in Amsterdam was full, but we found a berth in the City IJ Marina, just below the Palace of Justice, which was very convenient for the station and the city. Michel had to leave us and we were joined by David Habershon, my daughter's father-in-law and a naval friend



Dutch *botter*

of the other David. We took the opportunity to explore Amsterdam and its canals. While buying charts, we were told that the mast up route was blocked following an accident. This meant that we would have to take the offshore route and enter the Delta system at Goereeseluis. We took the Nordzeekanaal and entered the North Sea at Ijmuiden, from where we headed down to Scheveningen. The marina there was full to bursting. We were lucky to find a berth. We were soon joined by John de Trafford (RCC) in *Alisara*. We were both holed up in Scheveningen for two days. Needless to say we enjoyed a lot of entertaining! We took a tram to The Hague to visit the memorable Mauritshuis collection of Dutch Masters.



Binnehaven in Hoorn

We then sailed south past the Hook of Holland and Europort, which is on a truly massive scale that has to be seen to be believed, and on into the Harlingvleit. We spent the next night in Willemstad, a delightful fortified town where the marina is in the moat. I was impressed by the volume of barge traffic. Since *Wotan* has a 20m air draft we found that we had to use the commercial locks rather than those for yachts. We were amused to see one or even two cars on the cabin rooves of these barges.

After an overnight stop at Veere, which seemed to have survived WWII almost intact, we finished this leg in Flushing, which was not so fortunate. I was sorry not to have been able to take the Mast up Route, as I very much wanted to visit the Kaag Lake near Warmond where I had learnt to sail as a child. I bade a fond farewell to the two Davids, who had been such good companions.

For the final leg back to Itchenor, I was joined by John Theophilus and Mike and Pally Gibb. John had sailed out to the Azores with me back in 2011 and Mike and Pally had sailed down the West Coast of Scotland with me a year earlier. This leg was rather disrupted by spending four days holed up in Ostend, so we had to race down the French coast to Honfleur if we were to have any time exploring the delights of the Seine Bay.

After a memorable sail from Calais to Dieppe, we visited Ouistreham. This was followed by a rather roly night in Port Winston, Arromanches, before going on to St Vaast. Then at last *Wotan* was back home again in Itchenor!