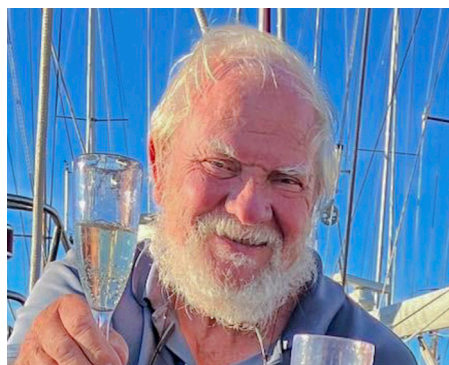


Youth and age and Beaulieu water

Salcombe to Solent

Jonno Barrett



‘I’ve really done it now, how do we get out of this one?’

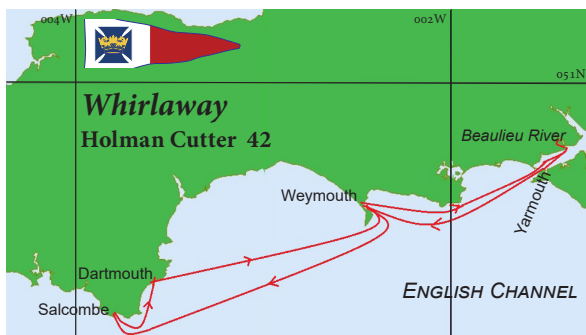
Rosie, Teddy and I had drifted from Salcombe to Dittisham for the night. Prosaic, you may think, yet a passage of great significance. For the first time for six years, this summer was spent near home. Rather too near home in fact. A 60 year old wooden boat needs a bit more work than the week a year she’d been getting as we ‘commuter cruised’ Norway and the Baltic. After

a long winter catching up we finally launched *Whirlaway*, our Kim Holman cutter, in June. A toxic combination of westerly gales and family events kept her securely moored through July and August. Finally in early September we were off.

Why so significant? During our time away grandchildren had been growing, and arriving. This was the first trip for nine year old Teddy, the first of the brood.

Roving Commissions has recorded many notable voyages; world girdles, Arctic adventures, gun running summers ... We who follow in their wake feel awe, and perhaps try to do them honour in the manner of our less colourful cruising. Yet should we not feel similar awe at the seemingly less roughy-toughty sailing of the RCC families; seamanship, self-reliance and the fun of it all shared to inspire the next generation? I certainly do, so this weekend mattered. A lot.

A pub supper and a quiet night in Dittisham and then off down river for home, promised an easterly 3-4. Teddy was learning knots at a rate that threatened to stretch my repertoire and his confidence (never low) was growing. As we felt the sea, he ignored Rosie’s advice and went below to read his book, but didn’t get very far.





Teddy perfecting his knots on *Whirlaway*

Quite quickly he reappeared to sit in the cockpit corner, quieter now and sporting a slight avocado tinge. My response was a plan that turned out less cunning than I thought as we headed west of the Skerries in search of some shelter. The snag? Between the end of the Skerries and Start Point the sea was short, steep and sloppy. We flopped about a bit, rounding Start in a bit less breeze than needed to push through comfortably. Teddy, seeing waves that seemed to him rather Cape Horn, not unreasonably announced he was never coming sailing again. 'Oh Lor, have I put him off for life? Is the wake of great Club families closed to us?'

Round Start and towards Prawle a bit of north in the wind gave some shelter as it picked up to a nice F4. Flopping about morphed to a charging reach and as the clouds cleared so did Teddy's verdant complexion. Sun and smiles restored, I breathed a gust of relief – Teddy smiled, grinned and asked when he could come again; fun returned, youthful energy recharged our aging bones and all was well.

Lee shores, gales, ice flows - even grazing orcas - are not the only dangers to contend with out there!

Some days later we were heading for another youth and age experience. The Jurassic Coast looked its very best as Durlston Head peeped out behind Anvil Point, sun and shadow intensifying the colours and contours. My view was rather less romantic.

I lay on the cabin sole looking into the bowels of the boat. It's a familiar position; I'd painted the bilges through over the Winter. This time my focus was closer as I shot a Paddingtonian 'Hard Stare' at the gearbox hoping it would respond by driving the prop again. The engine was running, the gear was engaged, but the shaft stayed docile – and there was no wind either now or forecast.

Here was another way for things to go awry.

Our passage plan didn't allow for a weekend spent drifting back and forth off the Dorset Coast perhaps offering an appealing target for Lulworth Range. Charming prospect though that would be in normal times, on this occasion we were heading for the Centenary Beaulieu meet. It all felt a bit much. Six reliable years in remote parts with not a hiccup and this passage had already produced a tide's delay, when charging stopped as darkness fell off Portland, and we had diverted to Weymouth to plug in. 'Range Anxiety' is not just a thing for Tesla drivers.

Waiting for us at Bucklers Hard were Ant and Sue Collins (RCC). Ant is youth and age in one energetic package, sporting the enthusiasm nurtured when his father owned *Whirlaway* in the late 60's. Those teenage memories he feels able to share feature RORC races spent on her foredeck dashing round the Channel; our plan was for memories of youth to rekindle that excitement among the aged. It was on no account to be missed.

What to do?

Call the lifeboat and we'd rightly have been drummed out of the Club before the Meet even started. The Paddington stare had no impact. Any actions involving spanners and what not were suppressed by memories of an enthusiast who, way beyond sense or competence, attempted to rebuild *Baroque's* gearbox in an Atlantic swell (the outcome - a pilot cutter rowed across the Solent and an ignominious tow up to the Berthon). I called up my profound expertise in marine engineering and bunged in some oil much, but not all, of which found its way into the drip tray. Perhaps due to crossed fingers, miraculously the shaft turned. Late now by a tide and a half, we made it to Beaulieu on Thursday evening.



Ant Collins enjoying *Whirlaway* (Sue Collins)

Where the oil had gone was no mystery - into the drip tray. But the route remained unclear even after deployment of our new endoscope (20 quid well spent); caution was in order.

For now concern was pushed aside by a splendid party and new minted memories of the sail past, not least among them Ant's grin as he helmed us past the great and sometimes good. In a previous life, perhaps he'd not been allowed in the cockpit!

We cooled off from the party aboard Ant's launch Annie, popping down to the Beaulieu entrance where

we anchored and jumped in. We all enjoyed a refreshing walk - it was about three feet deep!

Charging being iffy (albeit with a new earth lead fitted) and still unsure of the gearbox, sense dictated that we stayed at Beaulieu till Monday to seek an Engine God. A phone call to engineer guru back home triggered impressive tooth sucking. 'You've used the wrong oil there, chap - you don't want synthetic. It may emulsify and then you'll be in trouble, oh dear no, who filled it with that then?'. You know the kind of thing. Ideally an oil change was indicated despite his admission that to avoid the lifeboat, and certainly to get to the party, even olive oil would be worth a

Youth and age and Beaulieu water



The miscreant gearbox

and a splendid day was made even more interesting as we found a special interest in *Pen Duick VI*. Her crew boasted both the daughter of a friend of the Danis' as well as a close family friend of ours, Tom Napper, who is the mate. Great wavings saw them on their way, and as I write, Tom and team have just got to Cape Town after 40 days and 7800 miles. They were pipped for line honours at the very end.

Our challenge? A daring 100 odd miles home to Salcombe.

"Can you pop down to have a look at this gearbox?" we asked the local engineers on Monday morning. "Of course - in a couple of weeks." Plan B was required.

Ant had supplied some more oil, albeit still synthetic, we boasted both olive and rapeseed oils in the galley, so valour trumped discretion and we rather nervously motor sailed to Yarmouth to see what happened. The gearbox seemed to have fixed itself; perhaps the Paddington Stare had done the business.

Tea in Yarmouth with Dick and Pat Dawson (RCC) gave us the chance to say goodbye to their *Lone Wolf*, sadly being sold at the end of a 40 year relationship. Then it was off to Weymouth, still with not much wind forecast and expecting

try (though apparently not mayonnaise as that's already emulsified).

Sunday morning started with James Morrow (RCC) making a significant hole in *Tai Tai* when a seacock came away in his hand ('honest guv, I just brushed it' was his tale). Calm deployment of a wooden bung honoured the best traditions and they set off for a lift out from the Hamble.

Guillaume and Muriel Danis (RCC) rescued us from a loose end by inviting us aboard their impressive *Boreal* to watch the start of the Ocean Globe Race off Cowes. We followed the fleet to the Needles, toasting them in Taittinger



Pen Duick VI at the start of the Ocean Globe race

more donking and possible gearbox staring. By contrast, what we met was sunny weather and a fair sailing breeze – had our luck changed?

It seemed so; leaving Weymouth yet more calms were forecast, but instead we blew round Portland and on to the west on a broad reach. Luck indeed, as usually trips to the Solent involve beats back home. The sun shone all day, dolphins visited at teatime, and we made Dartmouth as night fell. In the morning we were joined by friends, and had a lovely sail to Salcombe.

In contrast to years of long summers aboard in places both remote and



Jonno and Rosie



fascinating this had been a very short summer, boasting minor frustrations and even moments of panic (thanks Teddy). Yet youth and age, and youthful age, recharged Rosie and me and reminded us that (despite what the Scots like to believe) the Western Channel is a pretty special place.

A limited season was made special by 'can we see the sea yet' enthusiasm, delightful passages and the odd hurdle leapt, or at least stumbled over. Above all we had introduced a new generation to shared pleasures that are as worthwhile as nothing else, absolutely nothing else, can ever be.

Whirlaway off Beaulieu in the Parade of Sail (Sally Batten)