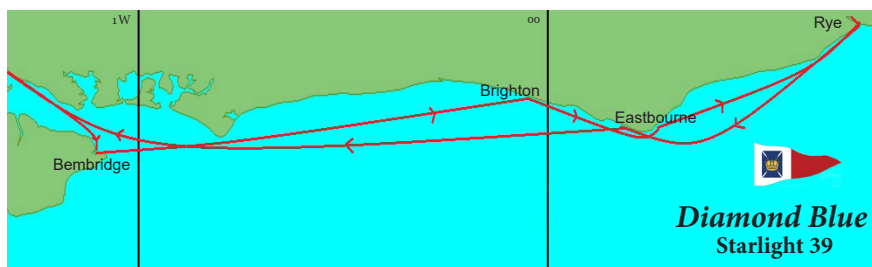


## Destination Rye

Richard Close-Smith



Plans A and B both went after the imposition of quarantine on those returning from France. Plan C was to switch our destination to the Scillies but that was thwarted by the westerly gales which struck in mid-August, and so with *Diamond Blue*, our Bowman Starlight 39, still in the Solent we urgently needed a Plan D. Maybe Devon or at least Dorset?

Venetia Kenney-Herbert (RCC) was due to join us as our 5th crew member and pointed out that subjecting my wife and teenage daughters to a hard slog to windward in heavy weather might have adverse long term consequences on my

*Diamond Blue*  
Richard



aspirations for future family sailing; so our revolutionary Plan D was simply to turn left out of the Solent and head east up the channel with all these strong winds behind us.

The Sussex coast has some super marinas which have their attractions as ports of refuge and of course excellent showers, unlike the one on board *Diamond Blue* where fresh water is rationed by the mean skipper who, as his daughters shower, sits glowering at the chart table with his hand hovering over the water pump switch. Nevertheless marinas don't make memorable objectives and what we needed was somewhere a bit different, hence our choice of Rye, situated between Beachy Head and Dungeness and described

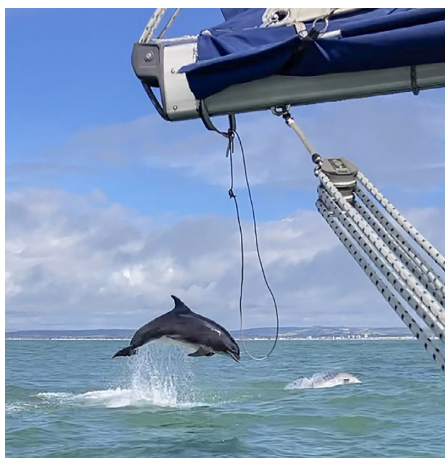
## Richard Close-Smith

by its tourist office as 'an ancient town which nestles on a hill two miles inland from the sea.' Just the job !

We slipped our moorings at Elephant Boatyard on the Hamble on Sunday 23 August with a poor forecast but at least a fair wind. First stop was Bembridge, nothing too ambitious and the attraction of a pub which promised to serve supper on a Sunday evening. Rather tricky berthing on a short finger pontoon in a strong cross wind but two marina staff kindly turned out to take our lines which made it all possible.

The following morning, we nervously departed Bembridge, nervous because we had maximised the time in our bunks so it was over two hours after high tide and Bembridge bar dries, but all was well, followed by a fine run down to Brighton. A highlight of the passage was when, off The Owers, we were entertained to one of the finest aerobatic displays from a pod of dolphins that I've ever seen.

As we neared Brighton Marina the wind was increasing rapidly



Dolphin showing off

Georgina in a tailwind  
Sea wall, Brighton



making for an unpleasantly rough but welcome arrival. We remained gale bound in Brighton for 48 hours, but with plenty to do (without resorting to the nudist beach). The Brighton Pavilion is fascinating and well worth a visit and for those with less appetite for culture there were dodgem cars on the pier, a street tattooist who succeeded in selling us her services, fresh crab rolls on a windswept beach and even time for some shopping of the non-chandlery variety.

Brighton Marina makes for an exciting sanctuary in a gale with waves breaking over the sea wall and

## Destination Rye

a surge which frayed our doubled up mooring lines, so as soon as we safely could we ventured forth on 26 August and well reefed down had an exhilarating sail round Beachy Head and into Sovereign Marina outside Eastbourne. A huge modern artificial marina with a more sheltered entrance, two large locks with a very efficient twenty-four-hour operation making it a perfect place to carefully time one's departure for Rye.



Venetia off Beachy Head

Rye is one of the ancient Cinque Ports at the confluence of three small rivers, the Rother, Brede and Tillingham with a colourful history dating back to Roman times. It was sacked by the French in 1377 and rebuilt as a major port. In those days Dungeness headland was actually an offshore island before the coastal shingle shifted and effectively reduced an important medieval port into a drying harbour, with an offshore bar best attempted only in settled weather near to high water.

Our approach was okay for timing but we could have done without the heavy rain squalls which reduced visibility to a quarter of a mile just as we approached the low lying coast - it certainly delivered the required sense of adventure. Once over the bar and into the river it's more like the Essex coast with every little creek occupied by a boat in a mud berth from which it appeared doubtful it would ever emerge.



Rye today with Dungeness in the distance.

As one enters Rye there is a further sense of adventure as wind and tide push one forward up a river which is already getting too narrow for turning. The limit of navigation is Strand Quay right in the town centre where there was just room to turn thanks to the agility of Georgina and Rosanna shinning up the harbour wall with our warps. The



## Richard Close-Smith

quay dries completely at low water. The harbourmaster had assured me on the phone beforehand that the mud was soft enough; now this really mattered to us as although we draw only 1.6 metres our shallow draught is thanks to an exceptionally wide wing keel (fashionable in 1990) – but not so wide that one would wish to try and balance the boat on it.

The crew went for a well-earned dinner ashore while the skipper spent the evening nervously adjusting warps as the water receded; happily of course the harbourmaster was right and the wing keel disappeared gently into the glutinous mud, the boat remained upright and equally importantly emerged again from the mud on the flood!



Family time

We all found Rye picturesque and charming with its narrow cobbled streets so, if you are happy to tackle a slightly tricky entrance, enjoy a bit of gunkholing and are content to settle into a soft mud berth, Rye is a welcome change from posh yachting. It even has a rail station on a single-track branch line, making it good for a crew change.

The icing on our cake was the fact that the strong westerly winds which had prevailed for the previous ten days chose the moment of our departure from Rye to veer to the north so we were blessed with two days of fine reaching back to the Solent, overnighing in Newhaven – another unposh spot with an all-weather entrance, friendly natives and a particularly well stocked chandler, although without the charm of Rye.

Maybe Brittany or the Scillies will beckon us next year.

