



Prawle Point

No: 44

'eyes along the coast'

Spring 2013

IN THE WAKE OF HURRICANE SANDY AN ATLANTIC ADVENTURE

When Luke Danby, of Aveton Gifford, skipper of the 70' Bermudian sloop *Vittfarne*, put out a request for four crew members to help bring her back to the UK after installation of a new rig in the States, turning down such an experience seemed sheer foolishness in the minds of John Crellin from Kingsbridge, Martin Beck from Thurlestone, professional photographer, Ben Crossley from West Alvington and Freddie Cleary from Crewkerne unaware that hurricane Sandy was working her way up the eastern seaboard. All crew, except



Luke steering down a big wave.

Photo by Ben Crossley

Martin who joined three days later, flew to Boston on October 25th thence joining the ship in Newport Rhode Island for two days of sea trials checking that the new carbon fibre boom and hundred foot mast were suitably compliant and functioning. It was during this trial period that her abilities and impressive power to windward could be appreciated as thereafter sailing was largely offwind. Built in Sweden by Baltic Yachts in the 'Spirit of Tradition' style of the nineteen twenties, *Vittfarne* boasted plenty of mod cons including powered winches; modern materials blending seamlessly with craftsmanship in wood giving pure classic, racing lines.

Although the hurricane inflicted her worst havoc in the New York area, *Vittfarne* caught the tail end effects on October 28th whilst anchored outside harbour in the lee of Rhode Island. The decision to aim for open waters was prompted by the sight of a marina full of boats twice her size jostling in potentially perilous confinement. In a ten metre depth, 300 yards offshore, they dropped anchor on 100 metres of stainless steel chain to give plenty of scope. For three noisy, exciting hours they rode out winds gusting up to 66 knots without damage. Meanwhile a storm surge flooded the waterfront of Newport revealing, by daylight, fallen trees and power lines. Amazingly there were no casualties in the area and little damage to property although two days elapsed before services could be re-instated.

After final adjustments to the new carbon fibre rigging were completed, the crew set sail on October 31st for the thousand mile leg to St. Johns, Newfoundland which took five days of brilliant sailing enhanced by sunshine, dolphins and the sighting of a humpback whale. Fishing vessels and coasters were the only craft encountered. As harbour was approached, however, the wind was increasing strongly from the NE so for four days *Vittfarne* kept company with the stormbound

local fishing fleet until the weather abated thus giving opportunity for the crew to explore the rugged capital of Newfoundland and meet the friendly locals many of whom, somewhat surprisingly, spoke with a distinct Irish accent. Forecasted weather patterns over the north Atlantic for the following week were studied on the many electronic resources available on board and the bewildering choice of recommended courses were widely discussed.

November 9th and time to move on, motoring at first during two days of mixed weather and poor visibility

followed by a strong westerly airstream of 30/40 knots allowing excellent progress of a steady twelve knots under number two headsail. Although sporting two forward stays plus an inner stay for storm conditions, *Vittfarne* is classed as a sloop rather than a cutter since only one stay is used at a time. Her number one, number two and storm jibs can be unrolled and trimmed from the cockpit. As the wind continued to increase to fifty knots all sail was furled and, with the engine ticking over to ensure steerage way, she continued under bare poles for 36 hours achieving speeds up to 18 knots sliding down fifty foot waves. Mercifully, in this part of the open ocean, distances between crests were lengthy and she rode the waves superbly with just a few coming on board. For fourteen hours the wind speed exceeded fifty-five knots with a maximum of sixty eight seen on the instruments. John recalls a momentary fear of heart attack when at the helm, before he realised that the tightening sensation around his chest was only caused by the lifejacket auto inflating as the cockpit filled to thigh level. Ben experienced an even more scary moment on watch when, completely immersed by an extra large roller, he could only cling to the binnacle for security and emerged to find a bent pushpit, the spray-hood mangled into weird shapes and the main GPS aerial missing. Two Jon buoys had also disappeared off the pushpit leaving only fragments of the plastic mounting brackets.

Eventually the wind began to moderate, a headsail allowed some steady progress at twelve knots until, just four hundred miles west of Ireland, lighter winds meant resorting to the engine and a chance to fish for supper. An estimated 60lb tuna slipped the hook after a five minute tussle- or so the story goes! One small container ship was the only vessel seen on passage. At this distance from land the Internet was inaccessible but satellite phones on board kept the crew in touch with

relatives willing to monitor and relay forecasts. Soon a kindly force six from the south west had *Vittfarne* sailing powerfully with double reefed main and number two headsail. Passing the Isles of Scilly, the wind increased from force seven to eight for a great sail up channel with the intention of anchoring in Salcombe – an oft visited harbour- but this would entail using the electro-hydraulic system for lifting the keel to reduce the draft and, with some degradation of the electrical systems due to water ingress, confidence in the system had waned, besides Salcombe Bar was looking decidedly unfriendly. They passed Prawle Point on Monday November 19th at 0830 hours (earlier than logging began at the NCI station) and tied up in the Hamble at 2000 hours- their final destination for a winter haul-out. It had taken ten and a half days to cover the 2200 miles from St.Johns.

A visit to the *Vittfarne* website will reveal her impeccable lines and beautiful panelled accommodation below. During off-watch periods the crew read or watched

movies on the 42" television screen, two fridges and a large freezer stored food for regular meals cooked using a gimbaled electric oven and gas hob, there are heated towel rails and electrically operated loos. Control, largely from the cockpit, is enabled by six power winches each equipped with two buttons giving three speed facility. The North-made mainsail is composite laminated plastic with cobweb appearance of the conventional slide and track design, stowable into lazy jacks. The auto-helm motor was replaced after burning out in the early stages of the transatlantic passage but could not have coped with the conditions encountered, also an on-screen chart plotter and radar display in front of the helmsman soon succumbed but, with a back-up system down below, this was not a problem.

Overall the crew enjoyed a thrilling and memorable sail with no serious concerns for their safety in such a sizeable, well-found craft but felt it could have been a very different story in an average 35 foot yacht.

STATION MANAGER CONGRATULATED ON HIS RETIREMENT BY NCI PRESIDENT

Roger's recent retirement leads me to offer a few words of gratitude for all that he did for the Station during his tenure.

Running the Station with an easy touch, which was much appreciated, Roger transformed the technical and advisory literature at the Station. Furthermore he was instrumental in developing the Visitor Centre, which is remarkably interesting to the area in which we operate. Training standards were maintained whilst new equipment was introduced ensuring that NCI Prawle Point remains one of the outstanding Stations in the ever-widening network around the coast.

Roger remains a committee member, so his valuable experience and advice are still available to us. I am sure we are all grateful for the contribution Roger has made.



Roger Barrett receives recognition of his invaluable services to NCI Prawle Point from Coastwatch President, Jon Gifford during the 2012 AGM when Roger retired after 5 years as Station Manager.

Long service medals were presented by President Jon Gifford to Steve Owen, George Pannett and Val Turner for 15 year service and for 10 year service to Mike Brice, Brian Gosling and Roger Hardiman.



Left to right: Steve Owen, Mike Brice, Roger Hardiman, Brian Gosling, George Pannett and Jon Gifford.



Friends Of Prawle Point

The Station Christmas Party, organised impeccably by FOPP yet again, attracted a good number of watchkeepers and partners last December.

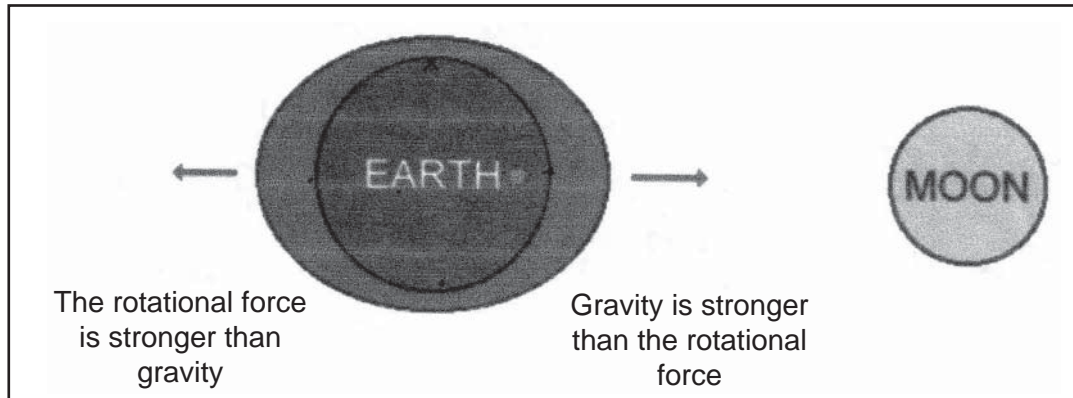
It was a happy and festive event with food and raffle contributions proving just right for the occasion. Secretary, Jane Payne remarked that dancing in the aisles was probably a first for FOPP! New fund-raising ideas for 2013 are already in the pipeline.

Their committed efforts and dedicated support are much appreciated.

DISCUSSION FROM THE LOOKOUT

A quiet winter watch affords time for a chat and a ponder. Tidal bulges come up for discussion. We know there are two, the source of two high and low tides experienced daily by most coastal regions of the world. We know they are caused by the effects of gravity in the Earth-Moon-Sun system. The bulge nearest to the Moon is easy to understand but why an opposing bulge on the far side?

The Moon's effect is nearly twice that of the Sun (ref. Newton). The gravitational attraction between the Earth and the Moon is stronger on the side of the Earth facing the Moon simply because it is closer. As gravitational force acts to draw water closer to the Moon, inertia tries to keep the water in place. The gravitational force exceeds it and water is pulled toward the Moon, causing a bulge on that side.



On the far side the gravitational attraction of the Moon is less because it is farther away. Here inertia, the tendency of objects to keep moving in a straight line, exceeds the gravitational force, the water tries to keep moving away from the earth and so forms the antipodal bulge.

As the Earth rotates each meridian comes under these influences during 24 hours and 52 minutes.

This model is for a uniform body with a uniform layer of water. The real situation is complicated by a rotating earth with irregular shaped land masses interrupting the pattern. The result is a series of "basins" or gyres moving about an amphidromal point pushed in the Northern hemisphere to the right by the Coriolis force and the solid Earth flexes too by as much as 30cm!

Val Turner

Have you a discussion to share? Topics would be gratefully received by the Editor.

NAUTICAL WORDS IN COMMON USE

- Heads* Historically sailors would relieve themselves over the bow, or head, of the ship, hence the nautical term 'heads'.
- Landlubber* The Old English word *lobre* refers to a lumbering or clumsy person so was used for a landsman who had just joined the crew and yet to find his sea-legs.
- Figurehead* Large carving on ship's head giving identity and aiding morale but of no practical function.
- Bulwark* Derives from the Saxon words for tree (bole) and work (woerc).
- Loggerheads* Originally massive chunks of wood, embedded in the deck near the bow of early whaling ships, to which ropes from the harpoon were attached thus providing a straining point during battle which ended only when the whale was dead or the ship overturned.
- Flotsam and Jetsam*
Derive from the French words *flotter*, to float, and *jeter* to throw.

NCI PRAWLE POINT: INCIDENTS TO DATE



12.1.13 Watchkeepers were concerned as the small cargo vessel *MV Peikko* suddenly turned due N heading directly for Prawle Point at a speed of 7 knots. She was then 2 miles off so this unusual move was reported to Brixham CG who radioed the vessel. Her skipper advised he was having 'weather problems' but was heading for Plymouth.

The wind was force 7/8 and the sea state- rough. Vessel Tracker showed a most erratic track and revealed that *MV Peikko* had been travelling up and down the channel for several days. Further AIS tracking showed her entering Plymouth Sound, her reported destination, and the incident was closed.

SALCOMBE MARITIME MUSEUM

Beneath the steps of the old council hall in Market Street is a door inviting you in to discover old Salcombe, its dramatic links with the surrounding coastal area and trading connections far across the world. The sea's influence on every facet of human life becomes immediately evident and is richly portrayed through this unique collection of artefacts, images and records.

In the entrance corridor hangs a large photograph, taken in 1988, showing the remarkable number of people employed in Island Street; they fill the boatyard slipways and occupy many moored craft; a striking reminder

that, just one quarter of a century ago, Salcombe still boasted a high level of marine occupation and dependency. On entering the Ship Room however, the visitor is transported to another age altogether- a heyday of shipbuilding when Salcombe shipwrights were producing fast, ocean-going schooners capable of delivering fruit, sugar, tea and other costly but perishable goods at competitive speed from distant countries to the ports of London, Liverpool and Bristol. The many paintings of these graceful vessels are representative of around four hundred ships built and/or owned locally in the nineteenth century so, at that time, the foreshore was occupied by rows of shipyards and associated workshops; fine bows projecting across the narrow Fore Street. Sounds and smells of timber being transformed into these noble vessels must have been all pervading. A small diorama depicts a typical boatbuilder's workshop. Paintings, traditionally produced by 'pier-head' artists, depicted ships under full sail outside a foreign port of destination, for purchase by captains and crews. For their satisfaction it was essential that all details of hull, rigging and sails were technically correct and crew visible. Displays of tools used in shipbuilding and rigging, fids, palms, cringles, needles, grease, bees-wax and mallets used in sail-making, blocks and dead eyes are all reminders of these prosperous times of working sail and contemporary navigation instruments indicate the many skills needed for every voyage. Painted signboards recall some of the family names familiar then and still evident today. Log books from the barquentine *Catherine* and the schooner *Lady Bertha* make fascinating reading for adults while a fruit schooner board game aims to keep children amused as they spin the wheel and steer their magnet-mounted schooners, laden with fruit from the West Indies to Liverpool, lagging behind through hazards of foul weather, submerged wreckage and loss of sail or forging ahead with clean hull and top gallants set. A nearby treasure chest full of pirate costumes is a children's favourite and working models enable practise in signalling via Morse code, telegraph and semaphore, even Armada beacons can be 'lit' along the coast. Also of macabre interest to children is the bag used to contain a body for burial at sea, it was stitched up before immersion, the last stitch passing through the nose of the corpse.

Artefacts and records from World War II emphasise the area's strategic importance and make poignant reference to personal hardship and suffering. Maps show locations of the 'hit and run' bombing raids and gatherings of moored landing ships and assault craft in Millbay awaiting Operation Overlord when sixty-six craft set off towards D Day landing sites. The Salcombe Hotel was commissioned in 1943 as US Headquarters for two thousand US troops stationed in the area and a dance programme, from the Links Hotel at Thurlestone, hints at the impact this would have had on the social life of the



The Ship Room at Salcombe Maritime Museum

local population. More sombre are the displays which include battle dressing packs and the many provisions against gas attacks such as warning rattles, eye shields, ointments and a little booklet entitled 'Personal Protection Against Gas' while Home Guard helmets and a shelter sign add to the picture of domestic upheaval. Two large volumes recording daily operations from Bolt Head and Hope Cove RAF stations make chilling reading as periods of monotonous inactivity alternated with sudden action. Spitfire crashes occurred including five at Prawle and fatalities were inevitable although a surprising

number of pilots escaped serious injury during emergency landings caused, for instance, by running out of fuel; one pilot lost consciousness when adjusting his oxygen mask but recovered at 9000 feet and managed to crash-land! A tiny Pocket Guide to France only emphasises the bravery of these men so basically equipped.

The room devoted to wrecks is no less impressive. A chart shows the shocking number of vessels lost along our dangerous coastline while many of the artefacts recovered from them tell intriguing stories. There is a reindeer hide, one of a bundle recovered after immersion for two and a half centuries from the brigantine *Metta Catherina*, the others being usable for making leather goods.

Coal from the *Ensign* wrecked near South Sands, an enormous 57 year old block of soap from the *Louis Shied* found off South Milton Sands, a teak rail and grain from the *Herzogin Cecilie* and personal possessions from craft too numerous to mention are all carefully displayed with informative text. The name of screw corvette *Cadmus*, wrecked near Salcombe Bar in 1869 gave her name not only to the offending rock on which she met her fate but also to the pilot gig raced by the local rowing club. An important section is devoted to the work of the South West Marine Archaeological Group whose amazing discoveries of more than 500 Moroccan gold coins, ingots and jewellery from the Moor Sands and Salcombe Cannon sites now reside in the British Museum.

It is the human aspect of wreck and rescue however, that makes most emotional impact on the visitor. On 27th October 1916, the *Lifeboat William and Emma*, heavily reefed, set off after 6am from South Sands 'like a greyhound' to rescue crew from the *Western Lass* wrecked on Meg Rocks beyond Prawle Point, but due to telephone lines being down in the storm, news was not communicated that her mission was no longer required as the casualties had already been rescued. After turning for home, coxswain, Samuel Distin and crew deliberated over the state of the bar, eventually deciding to set a drogue, lower all but the mizzen sail and attempt to row across. An enormous wave pitch-poled the boat and of the fifteen who bravely set out, only two men were found alive. On display is just one remaining item, a small section of the double-diagonal hull and a picture of the watch owned by survivor Eddie Distin, stopped at the time of the disaster.

The museum deserves to be savoured as a powerful record, to be explored in detail and appreciated for engaging presentation of its impressive treasures. Rolling programmes of old photographic images are shown on two screens and you can spend a leisurely hour or so listening to local characters remembering more fascinating details of Salcombe's past.

Opening times are April to October, from 10.30-12.30 and 2.30-4.30



Please help us to maintain this valuable service by making a donation and becoming a supporter of NCI Prawle Point or becoming a watchkeeper.

Please contact: The Secretary, PO Box 58, Kingsbridge TQ7 2QZ

Station tel. no. 01548 511259 www.nci-prawlepoint.org Cheques to NCI Prawle Point