
Den Helder Den Whisky Den Home

Humber to Holland in *Piper* No 106

The 2009 Marcon Trophy-winning entry by Paul Jackson

This is an account of the exploits of the Good Ship *Piper* and her Motley Crew. A plan had been hatched, back in the spring, to enter the Humber Yawl Club North Sea Race. Paul Coult, known from now on as “Young Paul”, was keen to do the race and that fitted in with the plans of Paul Jackson, known from now on as “The Other Fellow” or “The Skipper”. Nick Colin being a stalwart of numerous crossings was sought out, as the final, yet equal, piece of the jigsaw. By the way, Nick is known as “Nick” and collectively, the crew are over 140 years old. *Piper* is a fin-keeled Trident and only 34 years old.

Throughout the spring, *Piper* was made fit for sea, HYC members Ted Rea and Dave Mouncey offered the use a life-raft, AIS receiver, larger radar reflector and a rocket propelled rescue line. Rod Connah, owner of *Tinker Liz* used his gauge to correctly tension the standing rigging and the rest at Winteringham Haven offered prayers.

All was on track but then the bombshell hit; the Other Fellow had a gammy knee and was waiting for a minor operation. A letter duly arrived giving the date of the operation, which was just four weeks before the race. The surgeon did a good job but the decision was made not to compete, as four weeks was deemed insufficient recovery time for the rigours of racing; of this, Nick and Young Paul were understanding.

A new plan was hatched to cruise to Holland or down the coast of England, depending on the condition of the Skipper. Three days before the set-date, came the green light. The Other Fellow’s knee felt good and provisioning of *Piper* commenced. The weather for the planned departure date looked suspect, but a weather window existed for the day before. Good fortune

prevailed, as the crew could accommodate the change in plan.

Friday 20 June.

Winteringham to Wells – 77 nautical miles

Piper’s trusty Vire 6hp 2-stroke engine was struck up, one hour before the morning’s high water; no cooling water was expelled! *Piper* had been moored stern-to, to ease provisioning, and mud had plugged the cooling inlet. The pontoon hosepipe was used successfully to back flush the inlet and then the journey began. A valuable hour had been lost.

The wind was kind and the cruising chute was deployed. Three bags of knitting later, the snuffer was removed and thrown, with disgust, into the fuel locker. The chute was redeployed just in time to remove it as the wind shifted. With Genoa and full main set, *Piper* was “in the slot”; thus we flew down the Humber. The standard racing course was used to exit the river,

so as not to impede commercial shipping. Next waypoint was DZ3 which is off the Dona-Nook live firing range. *Piper* reached with Nick and Young Paul on the helm, parallel to the east side of the Wind Farms,

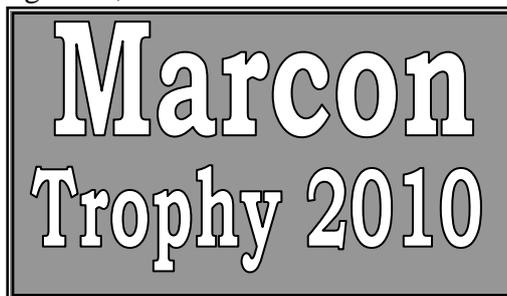
on the passage to Wells-next-the-sea.

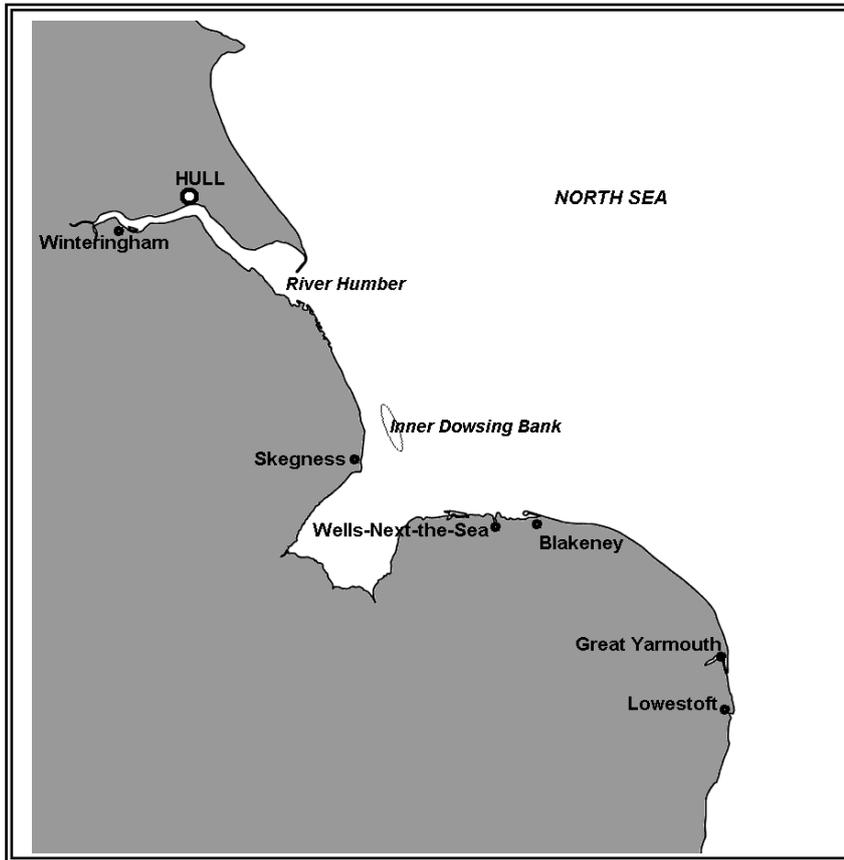
The wind reduced, prior to the forecasted shift, so we motor-sailed the final four hours into Wells. The Harbour Master, having given us permission to enter the harbour, was waiting aboard a motor yacht to take our lines. Fin keelboats, of up to two metre draft, can stay afloat, if rafted out, at the southern end of the pontoons that lay adjacent to the Harbour Office. Craft of less draft can stay afloat at this point when moored along side the pontoons.

Food and beer was sought out on land, followed by a “wee dram”, on board, as we climbed into our respective bunks. The journey was underway.

Saturday 21 June

We would have liked to depart on the morning tide, but there were things that we needed. Spare gas cylinders for cooking, was among them! Unfortunately the shops would not be open in time, so we stayed put. It must be said that the shower and toilet facilities in Wells are second to





Later a sheepish skipper, as way of an apology, presented Crew *Piper* with a bottle of whisky. *Piper's* Skipper filled glasses and shared the whisky between neighbouring boats. It was time to put things to rest.

Sunday 22 June

The Harbour Café beckoned once more. Then the bus was caught to Blakeney. Here seagulls were seen to fly backwards due to the strength of the wind. Blakeney is another beautiful place well worth a visit. We ambled around for most of the day and drank tea, whilst holding down plastic tables that the wind had other plans for. Eventually the bus returned us to Wells. The weather was studied and things looked good for the next morning. It was then time for fish and chips, washed down with more beer!

Monday 23 June.

Wells to Lowestoft 54 nautical miles

The forecast was variable force 2 decreasing, not the best sailing weather but better than yesterday's gale. Preparations were made to move on to Lowestoft. Breakfast was taken at Crew *Piper's* favourite café then, up-to-date weather printouts were obtained from the Harbour Master. We left Wells just before high water and passed Wells bar 30 minutes later. A two-metre swell was running by the outer-buoy, but the swell soon subsided as we cleared to the North of the bar. We steered a course of 104 true for a point off Sheringham. An hour on saw us off Blakeney outer buoy. As we progressed the ebb had kicked in and the wind became lighter. *Piper's* trusty Vire gave us a wind assisted 5.5kn hull speed but *Piper* was 2.5kn slower over the ground. We skirted the Norfolk coast, enjoying the scenery but were looking forward to the point when the flood kicked in. As dusk fell, on the last of the flood, we entered the inner channel leading in to Yarmouth. The windmills positioned on the sands east of the channel seemed to be huge in comparison to *Piper*. Nick called up Norfolk Coast Guard so that they could track us as we passed through the night's shipping. The Coast Guard, having asked us for our destination, suggested that we followed the inshore buoyage approximately one mile off the coast. It was said that this was a straightforward

none. The forecast was not good and we felt fortunate to be nestled in such a beautiful place. Crew *Piper* were hungry. In search of sustenance we discovered a gem, within the oasis of Wells-next-the-sea, called the Harbour Café. You can get a full English breakfast there, cooked to perfection and piping hot. We sampled such delights. Rejuvenated by our breakfast we discovered that Wells has a good, old fashioned, ironmongers where you can buy every thing but the thing that you want. We wanted a milk container to stop milk being distributed evenly throughout the boat! At least we obtained the gas.

The evening flood made itself known and with it came a gaggle of craft, all seeking refuge from the impending storm. A motor yacht passed *Piper* and turned to stem the tide. Its skipper motored the yacht forward and then expertly ferry-glided to the pontoon and tied up. His companion had no such finesse. The turn into tide was much the same. However he lost control and wedged his charge under *Pipers* pulpit. We managed to fend off preventing further damage and were able to disentangle things and let the tide slide the offending craft down *Piper's* starboard. The resultant damage was a broken stanchion base. It could have been a lot worst. Not a cross word was spoken.

route and that the buoyage was obvious. The inner channel buoyage was not shown on *Piper's* charts, so it did not figure in the passage plan. However we decided to take the Coast Guards advice and proceeded accordingly. Midnight arrived and with the ebb came a classic wind over tide situation. We could not make head-nor-tail of the buoyage so the Skipper went below to mark a GPS fix on the chart. Young Paul alerted the crew to a dark shape forward of the bow. The Skipper looked up and Nick and the Skipper collectively called "Tack". The dark shape, by this time, revealed it self as a wall made out of boulders. Anchored a little further South was the ship that provided the boulders.

Tuesday 24 June

We continued, by now South of Yarmouth, still trying to make head-or-tail of the buoyage. Keeping red to port and green to starboard the sounder showed 3 metres. As we tacked just out of the channel the sounder showed 12 metres. This did not make sense. The Skipper decided to go back out to sea and pick up the outer buoyage. This we did, with heart in mouth and with eyes glued to the sounder. Safely in deep water we followed the buoyage into Lowestoft. Nick called the Harbour Master and he gave us a green to enter port. We tied up at 0100 UT, in the Royal Norfolk Yacht Club marina, behind a large fleet of Squibs. A banner proclaimed that it was the Squib Nationals Regatta. Young Paul broke out a bottle of malt and we toasted a safe arrival.

Refreshed by sleep we woke to see the Squib fleet preparing to leave for the day's race. The crews were all shapes and sizes, but all of them exuded purpose and intent.

We walked south, down the sea front, in search of breakfast. A good breakfast was found and we sat eating it, while watching the Squib fleet race. Having returned to RNYC we enquired about a certain pile of boulders. We were told that an outer harbour was being built at Yarmouth and that a notice to mariners had been issued three days previously as a warning!

Technically this may be sufficient but is it practical? Would Eastern Cardinals have been useful? Had the Coast Guard forgotten about the new hazard? Nick looked up comments about buoyage in the Almanac. The Almanac stated that the inner channel buoyage is reversed off Yarmouth, due to the technicality of the Controlling Port, being served by the inner

buoyage, not being Lowestoft. Perhaps we should have stuck to the passage plan? Perhaps *Piper* should carry better charts for this area?

Tuesday 24 June continued ...

Piper was re-provisioned and refuelled. The can-opener had failed the previous day and there had been no spare on the boat. Two new can-openers were purchased.

Mid afternoon, Russell, from Martham near Winterton-on-Sea, arrived by bus, having visited most of Norfolk's villages, en-route. The Other fellow, Russell and his wife Sally had met up in a pub, in the Norfolk Village of Somerton, when the Comet Hale/Bop was in the sky. The Other Fellow had been sailing on the broads at the time. The three have remained firm friends since. Russell and Crew *Piper* ate, drank and made merry at the Harbour Inn. Sally and the children Archie and Dylan arrived to collect Russell. They stayed for a while and the boys explored *Piper*.

The forecast looked good for the next day, so we turned in early having first consumed the now obligatory glass of whisky. Tomorrow would be an early start.

Wednesday 25 June.

Lowestoft to Ijmuiden – 99 nautical miles

We left Lowestoft 0300 UT on a heading of 90 degrees magnetic. The wind was light and variable so we motored under autohelm for the first two hours. The inshore forecast held good and the wind steadied itself as a SW 3/4. The off shore forecast was: *German Bight, Humber, Thames E or SE veering SW 4 or 5 later increasing 6 at times; Moderate Showers; Good.* *Piper* was in the slot, the crew were happy and we took turns to helm.

The Skipper took the opportunity to sleep, when off watch, in order to remain fresh for the landfall. Nick always takes his opportunity to sleep, a discipline picked up in his previous life as a Marine. Young Paul had to be encouraged to rest, as is the way of all sailors on their first crossing. Nick and the Skipper recalled how they were affected by tiredness as North Sea virgins. We did not want Young Paul to suffer in the same way.

The steady Southwest strengthened to 4/5 and *Piper* maintained hull speed plus surfing down the face of the waves. The main was beginning to blank the headsail as there was now more West in the wind. A reef was put in the main,

using newly inserted slab reefing points. The sea was building but still comfortable. The skipper allowed himself to be distracted from the task of helming. The resultant gybe ripped out the leach cringle and split the sail towards the luff. Second reef was requested and Nick and Young Paul did a quick and efficient job.

Piper continued, close to hull speed, giving us an exhilarating yet comfortable ride. The wind built to 5, gusting 6, with a three-metre sea. An uncontrolled gybe ripped out the remaining reef. The Main was put away. The conditions were no worse than an exciting day on the *Humber*, and the mainsail should have held. Never again will the Skipper take a short cut when dealing with sails. The slab reefing cringles had been put in by a cover-maker and lacked the necessary reinforcing.

We had six hours to run, now on headsail only. *Piper* was comfortable and still doing four knots plus. As dusk fell amber lights appeared on the port bow. Due to tiredness, Nick said that the lights were on the Dutch coast. The waypoint in the GPS said otherwise. The Skipper then suffered a crisis of confidence and double-checked the waypoint from two different charts, checked the current position and plotted it on the working chart. The lights shone from the oilrigs. The on-watch man, who was not helming, had been detailed to plot on the hour; this had helped to unravel the problem.

Thursday 26 June

Midnight came and went. An hour later, dead on course, the Skipper saw the lights of Ijmuiden steel works. An hour later still, these lights, being the working lights of a fishing boat moved to the North! "A man sees what he wants to see and disregards the rest!"

30 minutes later, the true lights of Ijmuiden came into view. It was difficult to pick out the lights of the harbour and shipping, due to the backscatter of lights on the shore. The wind had picked up to 6 or more and the sea was getting sloppy. The ship's donkey was struck up; this gave us a greater stability and prevented *Piper* from being flushed to starboard of the port entrance.



Shipping was leaving harbour, this added interest to the situation. The charts showed that Seaport marina was just inside the harbour to starboard, although there were no lights or indications, as such. Nick, having visited the marina several times, piloted through the harbour entrance towards the unlit marina buoys.

Safely inside Seaport, *Piper* circled while Nick and Young Paul made ready with fenders and mooring lines. It was almost impossible to communicate, between the cockpit and the foredeck, due to the noise from the impending storm. The pontoon was to windward and the available space between a large yacht and a millionaires floating palace was limited. This made berthing difficult. We had to come in fast and then slowed with astern. Both ropes were made fast, then between the three of us, we pulled in the slack, one rope at a time, until *Piper* was made safe. Young Paul and the Skipper lay springs and made good on deck. Nick rustled up food and warm drink. All safely below, the washboards were inserted just as the squall with accompanying rain hit. It was now 0300 BST, 0400 German Summertime, 0200

UT, 0300 UT+1 and the milk in the coffee was UHT. Aghhh! Time for a wee dram!

Thursday 26 June continued

Imuiden to Aoelus - 20 nautical miles

We woke not so refreshed at 0600 UT, there was not a breath of wind, and we found a sign adjacent to *Piper* that may have said in Dutch, "You cannot park here". Apart from a crewmember on the floating palace that loomed over us, no one else was about. Although it felt wrong to leave without paying there was no one to pay. On balance, we had used no facilities, other than to take safe haven for a few hours, and Seaport was not a welcoming place. We did not outstay our welcome.

Motoring up the North Sea Canal we entered the Zuiderluis. While waiting for the level, a sticker was found on the port shroud inviting us to pay before leaving Seaport. A diplomatic phone call dealt with the problem. A slight breeze sprang up. We switched off the engine and enjoyed the peace of a 2kn drift under headsail. A bowl of cereal and cup of coffee was consumed and, for that moment, the world seemed to be an idyllic place.

However, you need eyes in the back of your head

on the North Sea Canal, as commercial traffic gives no quarter and bears down on you at great speed. The engine was required to keep *Piper* out of harms way on the head-to-wind sections. We passed through the petroleum sector, it reminded us of home! Amsterdam's "Punts", waterbuses, came into view. These blue-coloured ferries wait only for craft bigger than themselves. It is your own responsibility to keep out of their way, as they cross from bank to bank. The hydrofoil bus zipped up and down the canal. Festooned with bicycles, it made an impressive sight.

Approaching Amsterdam six small naval vessels overtook us. They were of Her Britannic Majesty's Royal Navy. We dipped our ensign to each of them and received no response! The students crewing perhaps did not understand our salute or communicate such to the Officers. One of the four grey ships has a white rose painted on her and carries the identification number 164. She is familiar to all from HYC who venture to the East of the Humber Bridge, as her homeport is Hull Marina. This naval fleet moored just upstream of Amsterdam Railway Station. *Piper*

left them behind and then crossed to the far bank, and the Haven of Aeolus, when a safe gap appeared in the traffic. Here we were greeted by the duty Harbour Master, who seemed pleased that we would like to stay two nights, if not longer. We were directed to moor between piles and he helped to take our bow lines.

Young Paul asked if the Harbour Master knew of a sail maker and he explained our plight. Skipper in tow, the harbour master strode to his office and provided a telephone number. This number connected to a sailmaker, who would gladly make the repairs in five or six week's time. He explained that is a busy time for all sailmakers in the Netherlands. The Skipper thanked the sail maker and explained the outcome to the Harbour Master.

Following a flurry of phone calls the Harbour Master said, "Problem solved", and asked the Skipper if he had a rucksack on board. The answer was "yes", Nick had one. A map, name, address and telephone number was then provided. The rucksack containing main sail was fitted to the skippers back and the skipper was

fitted to a bicycle. It was fun to cycle, where the cycle is king, and the

stresses associated with the North Sea crossing leached out.

The skipper arrived at the door of a shop that was full of interesting presses and sewing machines. The proprietor, Paul Vaug, came from the back of the shop and greeted the "Englishman with the broken sail". Seeing the dishevelled state of the Skipper, an invitation was issued to sit and rest while Paul finished repairing a cockpit cover. The Skipper saw photographs of Paul's yacht hung on the shop wall and other sailing memorabilia so confidence in Paul's understanding of things sailing and his ability to effect a repair, abounded.

Paul turned his attention to the "broken sail", and to provide a much-appreciated cup of tea for the Skipper. Paul apologised, with a twinkle in his eye, that the repair would not be completed until the next day, and that he would not be working Saturday. I empathised, "of course Saturday is a Sailing day". He laughed in acknowledgment and proceeded to explain a more restful route back to Aeolus via the dyke and through the woods. Paul obviously understands the effect of the crossing and sleep deprivation. The picture

of his yacht, on the shop wall, was taken off Beachy Head. Having returned to *Piper*, Young Paul was found to be catching up on some shuteye and Nick was reading. The Other Fellow showered, so as not to be the odd one out, and then went to get some food. Later that evening, while enjoying a beer in Aeolus club bar, the duty Harbour Master had changed watch. The new man, having heard of our plight, asked if we had any success in repairing the sail. The Other Fellow explained that Paul Vaug was dealing with the job and that the sail may be delivered the next day. The Harbour Master added that his name was also Paul, so the Other Fellow introduced him to Young Paul, and explained that he was also called Paul but answered to the title of the Other Fellow.

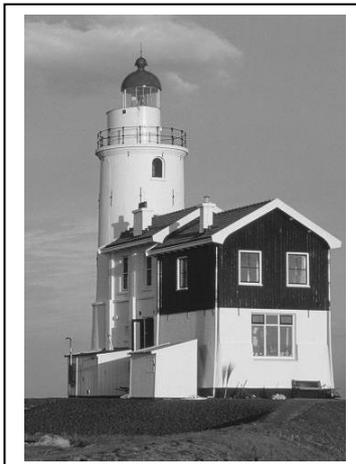
We all laughed and shook hands; seconds later in walked Paul Vaug. The ritual of the Pauls was repeated; timing is everything. Paul had brought with him the repaired sail.

The repair was to a high standard and additional reinforcing had been added to the reefing points. The bill for the repair was very reasonable. The Skipper will always be grateful to Aeolus Haven and in particular Paul Vaug. *Piper's* HYC burgee was presented to Aeolus Haven in recognition of this.

Friday 27 June

There was no rush to vacate the bunks, as this was a rest day. *Piper* had a wash and brush up, so did the crew. A short stroll was taken to view a monument, built in memory of the Jews of Amsterdam, who perished at the hands of the Nazis. Following contemplation we moved on and caught the Punt across to Amsterdam Railway Station. The Naval fleet were still moored up from the day before. We strolled through the city enjoying the views and a leisurely lunch.

Having returned, we sat in Aeolus Club House, enjoying a beer and conversation with members and visitors alike. The decision was made to eat out. The wife of the on-duty Harbour Master kindly offered to make us a reservation and had to ring a number of venues until success was obtained. We were surprised when it was suggested that we catch the Punt back to the Station and then catch the adjacent Punt, down



Marken lighthouse

stream, back to the bank we had just come from. It was explained that it was quicker to do this than walk directly.

We followed the direction and duly arrived at the Punt House Restaurant. A good meal was eaten in pleasant surroundings. We mused over our experience in Amsterdam. It is a vibrant city, with a good feel to it. Not once did we feel intimidated and we had passed through some of the less fortunate areas. We could not say the same of major British cities?

Saturday 28 June. Aeolus to Enkhuizen via Edam - 28 nautical miles

Crew *Piper* arose, bright and early. The journey was set to continue. Having been careful to avoid river traffic on the exit from Aeolus, *Piper* headed upstream under engine. Her Britannic Majesty's fleet passed us, yet again, heading for the Oranjesluizen, which is the gateway to the Markermeer. Nick had a word, via VHF with the craft out of Hull, and its crew gave us a friendly wave. The Fleet passed through the commercial sluice whilst *Piper* and four other yachts passed through the sport sluice. One of these yachts was flying the blue ensign of the British Merchant Navy. Its Skipper was somewhat aggrieved, as he had dipped his ensign to the fleet and had received no response. On exiting from the sluice *Piper* was made resplendent in full sail. The repair of the main sail was perfect; the sail still had fullness and there were no stress lines to be seen. We left the lighthouse at Marken to port and continued passed Volendam to Edam, where we stopped for lunch.

On entering the breakwater at Edam there is a small marina to port and to starboard be a few berths against a piled bank. Straight on is a sluice that gives access to the canal system. We were lucky and found a berth against the bank. A short walk took us to the town centre. Roads ran between canals and over numerous bridges, which can be lifted when required. A fine church with carillon of bells stands proud. Traditional buildings that are centuries old are beautifully maintained. Lunch was taken, as we sat outside to take in the view. Old Edam cheese was eaten; the English say, "mature".

It was time to move on, so we returned to *Piper* and continue the day's sailing. The time lost, in Wells-next-the-sea, had cost us the opportunity

to visit the town of Hoorn, so we pushed on to the Krabbersgatsluizen where the Markermeer gives way to the IJsselmeer. While in the sluice, we discovered that the gremlin, that puts knots in ropes, had removed a double stop from the topping-lift. As the main sail was dropped, the boom rested on the spray hood and the topping-lift disappeared up inside of the mast. Another problem to solve! On leaving the lock it was necessary to cross the main channel that commercial traffic used and head for the harbour wall of Enkhuizen. To port is a marina, to starboard is a bridge, through which is the harbour of the old town. Standing sentinel at the entrance to the old town is an imposing round tower with a conical roof and a chiming clock. Nick knew that the lucky few could tie-up in the old town. He radioed the Harbour Master who seemed pleased that he could lift the bridge and give us permission to enter. We were directed to raft against a catamaran skippered by a friendly chap from Germany.

Our minds turned to rethreading the topping-lift.

It had gone too far up inside the mast to hook back through the mast slot. A bosun's chair

would be needed. The friendly German said he had one and that he would find it for us. This gentleman wore a tee shirt on his top half; his lower half was attired in, what can only be described as, brief Bri-nylon budgie smugglers! The bosun's chair was attached by bowlines to both the spinnaker halyard and the genoa halyard. The bitter ends of the knots were tied together to prevent either bowline from slipping. The crew worked well together, Young Paul and Nick winched and the Skipper had the best seat in the house. The topping lift was threaded back into the masthead, Young Paul deftly fished it out of the slot at the base of the mast and passers-by took opportunist photographs. Task complete the Skipper was allowed down and we set off in search of food and beer. Over dinner we reflected on the picture postcard qualities of Enkhuizen and how fortunate we were to be there. The streets were spotlessly clean, there was no graffiti, the food was good and inexpensive and the service was efficient and friendly. It dawned on us that the same qualities had existed in Amsterdam and Edam. Dinner finished we moved on to buy the Germanic

gentleman and his crew a beer. We found them in a bar frequented by locals, a stone's throw from the harbour wall. The first beer was downed as we sat on stools around a large round table and exchanged stories. The Other Fellow, with hands on the table, in order to take some weight off the recently repaired knee, attempted to stand up and retrieve his wallet from a back trouser pocket. Unfortunately the table was not as stable as its size suggested; what good is a beer shampoo to a man with no hair? The Skipper stood his round and returned to *Piper* for dry clothes. Nick and Paul stayed on for one more beer, but the Germanic gentleman returned to his catamaran. Whisky was brought off *Piper* and the two skippers toasted fair winds. The crew of the cat turned up and promptly fell down the companionway. Nick and Young Paul turned up in a much better state.

Sunday 29 June

Enkhuizen to Urk – 9 nautical miles

We arose early, as we had a deadline to keep.

'...attired in what can only be described as budgie smugglers'

The Other Fellow had arranged to meet his Dutch friends Ton and

Ans in the village of Urk. He had met his friends on a French campsite ten years previously. They had exchanged "bonjour" on several occasions, until it became evident that none of them were French.

Crew *Piper* walked through Enkhuizen to use the shower facilities, paid an Irish lady working in the Harbour Office for harbour dues, asked for the bridge to be lifted and then departed for Urk. The Skipper had not helmed under sail during the previous day, so he hogged the tiller, enjoying a sporting reach at hull speed. Later it was planned for Nick and Young Paul to take *Piper* to Workum. The Other Fellow was to spend time with his friends and rejoin *Piper* later on. The breeze became fresh as we entered Urk. We ignored the marina on the way in and tied up, head to wind, against the town key.

Ton, Ans and eldest son Jeroen arrived at the allotted time. Along with Crew *Piper*, all decided to go in search of coffee and cake. We were delayed in doing so as *Piper* required additional fenders to protect her from the effects of a wind-generated swell.

Urk was shut for the day; it was the day of rest. We had been warned of this possibility the previous day, but thought the warning was exaggerated. Nick and Young Paul decided to continue the voyage and the remainder disappeared by car *en route* to Workum. As Ton drove the Skipper noticed that the trees were yielding to the wind. He voiced his concern, to Ton, as to the welfare of Nick and Paul. Shortly afterwards a text message arrived followed by a phone call saying that they were staying put, as the weather had deteriorated and that all craft were leaving the IJsselmeer.

The Skipper was relieved and complemented the two on a good decision. The Other Fellow had a pleasant day with his Dutch friends. The visit to Workum took place, although due to the strength of the wind, little time was spent close to the water. The tiny graveyard, around Workum's main church, was viewed. The graveyard cherishes the remains of Allied pilots, who were shot down returning from bombing raids over Germany.

On returning to Urk, Nick was found reading and Young Paul was catching up on some sleep. Ton, Ans, Jeroen and the Other Fellow had found a restaurant open and were going for a coffee. Nick decided to stay with Young Paul. A coffee and two white-beers later, it was decided to eat at the restaurant. Nick was phoned to see if the other two thirds of Crew *Piper* would like to join the party. Only one third turned up as Young Paul was feeling under the weather. Following a fine meal, Ton, Ans and Jeroen departed and Crew *Piper* bunked down to a restless night, as *Piper* was still being buffeted by strong winds and swell.

Monday 30 June.

Urk to Den Helder - 36 nautical miles

The wind had abated by the time we woke. We had to make haste due to the mileage lost the previous day. A diagonal had to be sailed from the Southeast to Northwest extremities of the IJsselmeer, then, we would have to make a tidal passage from Den Oever to Den Helder.

The end game had commenced. We were now focused on returning home to our loved ones.

The wind angle was unkind, we could not sail our direct course. We made good progress alternating between long and short tacks until the wind dropped to a whimper and veered. The headsail was dropped, the ship's donkey was struck up and a direct course was steered. The



Many fine craft grace Dutch waters

wind built again from a kinder angle and the donkey was stabled. By this time, a myriad of craft had come out to share the IJsselmeer. The Dutch have not abandoned their nautical heritage, thus many fine craft are maintained in good order and grace their waters. Beautiful sailing barges and clippers in full sail, drifted by. In the final few miles on the approach to the Stevnsluizen at Den Oever we had a tactical competition with a boat of similar size to *Piper*. Honours were equal as we reached the main channel. *Piper*, then under engine,

pushed on to the sluizen, the other yacht carried on, tacking towards a marina. We joined the Wadensee with a gaggle of larger yachts and pleasure craft. Then we followed the buoyed channel, cutting the corners when there was no traffic and moving out of the channel when it was prudent to do so. A red/green buoy was reached and the channel split into the route to Den Helder and the route to the island of Texel or beyond. It is a lengthy swing round to Den Helder to avoid the shallows over sand.

Den Helder is the base of the Dutch Navy. As we approached a tug was leaving the harbour to attend a warship incoming from the North Sea. *Piper* skirted behind the tug, so as not to impede the shipping, and entered Den Helder Marina. Once moored under the direction of the Harbour Master we visited the Club House Bar. Here beer is served in man-size glasses and a menu of simple but wholesome and beautifully turned out food is served. This is a sailor's club mainly serving members of the Dutch Royal Navy, but it is also a re-fuelling and rest stop for sailors passing between the North Sea and the Wadensee. The staff, members and visitors alike,

understand the demands that the sea places on individuals, thus a quiet camaraderie exists here. Every question we asked was answered in the positive. “Are there any Showers?”; “Yes, they are free”. “Can I order some beer?”; “Yes, would you like me to put it on a bill?” “Can I pay my harbour dues”; “Yes, would you like me to put it on your bill?” “Can we order some food?” “Yes, shall we add it to your bill?”

A screen in the clubhouse was displaying weather information, in Dutch. The Skipper required 24-hour weather information for Den Helder and 48-hour information for the North Sea and English East Coast. Two chaps passing through from the Islands into the IJsselmeer helpfully translated the screen and added information gleaned from elsewhere. They also provided local tidal information, which was more precise than the almanac.

Young Paul asked the staff if it was possible to buy some bread and milk to supplement our provisions. They went away for a short while and returned with a carrier bag containing a number of different breads and a container of milk. We asked if they would add it to the bill. They replied: “No, it is a gift!”

Tuesday 1 July.

Den Helder to Wells – 146 nautical miles

Piper tip-toed out of harbour, so not to wake anybody and then motored out towards the North Sea. The wind was light and unhelpful, so we continued to motor under autohelm until we were clear of the Islands. The Skipper turned in for an hour. On awakening the cruising chute was flying, engine was off and *Piper* felt comfortable. Young Paul then went off watch to take his rest. The Skipper noticed that *Piper* was well south of the intended course of the 53rd parallel, so he set about re-trimming the chute while Nick adjusted the course.

The Skipper should be banned from thinking about the cruising chute let alone touching it. As soon as the manoeuvre began, the wind died. Down came the chute, on went the engine! We negotiated the shipping channel and avoided the rigs off Den Helder then headed for open sea. Two Tall Ships had come from above the islands. One was motor sailing down the south-going shipping channel. The other was sailing, having sailed further out to achieve a tacking angle. Out of the channel we happened upon a trawler. At first, try as we might, we could not

keep out of his way. Eventually his trawling pattern became clear to us, and our paths parted. *Piper* made her way, across a saucer of calm, open sea. All that could be seen was the round rim of the saucer. It was a grey sea and the sky above was full of uninspiring weather. This prophesied a slow crossing; the ships donkey would have to earn its carrots. The sun had done its shift and would soon be down, the temperature was dropping.

It was time for Crew *Piper* to consume its carrots, so a hot meal was prepared and eaten while the sea was relatively calm. Following dinner, Nick and Young Paul enjoyed a freshening wind and did a bit of housekeeping. The pans were spun in the sea, on the end of a rope, to clean them; well, either that or Young Paul was fishing again. Just before midnight we were in sight of the outer rigs on the English side. The wind was now force four and on the nose; a reef was overdue. The genoa was changed for the number 2 jib, the pans were clean and no fish had been caught.

Wednesday 2 July

Concentration was required to clear the rigs due to the tightness of the beat, but the situation soon eased as the rigs were left behind. As dawn came, the clouds were lit up with an orange glow as lightning forked through them. Low rumbles were heard in the distance. As the cloud formations looked ominous, “all hands on deck” was called. *Piper* was reefed down as a precaution. The threat subsided as the storm tracked south to north, way in front of us. The Skipper went off watch.

He arose later to the sound of footsteps on deck; reefs were being shaken out. Sunshine was streaming through the companionway and the temperature had risen. Young Paul and Nick were removing waterproofs and hanging them to dry. They had been drenched by a downpour as the thunderclouds moved off. Some people have all the luck!

Our charted position showed that we were sandwiched between two rigs and the sandbanks off the north Norfolk coast. We were below the planned course of the 53rd parallel, but not sufficiently south to avoid the sandbanks. The wind was from the west and had dropped to almost nothing. The tidal rate and direction meant the sensible course was to tack to the SW for two hours, and then, when the tide changed, tack to the NW. Plans changed as the dribs and

drabs of wind shifted. We were trapped in the Norfolk Triangle. The GPS did strange things, showing an inverted course on the rolling road. *Piper* was pointing in the general direction, but moving backwards due to the effect of the tide, so the donkey had to be used though fuel was at a premium. We motor-tacked due north, cleared the banks, after what seemed an eternity, and then motor-tacked due west. The Norfolk coast could just be made out in the distance. Motoring is not good for people who prefer to sail and time dragged. Eventually the view of land became clear and we ran parallel to the north-facing Norfolk coast. The tide had already turned against us and it looked doubtful that we would reach Wells-next-the-sea in time to take advantage of the evening's tidal window. The fuel level was becoming a concern. Apart from half a gallon, kept back in reserve for entering harbour, the last gallon and a half was poured into the tank. A fine line was walked between hull speed and fuel economy. Visibility became poor and in order to stay clear of shipping we ferry-glided inshore. Cromer Pier became a milestone followed by Blakeney. Dusk fell and the lights of the buoys became visible. In order to avoid the shallows east of Wells and Wells Bar, a good offing was to be given. The Wells Harbour Master was consulted as to possible anchorages. He suggested Holkham Bay, which is just west of Wells.

Thursday 3 July - North Sea

The tide turned and the ebb assisted us. We followed the string of buoys that led to the Wells-next-the-sea outer buoy. Visibility was moderate but poor in mist patches. At the outer buoy we turned to port and headed towards the first green of the fairway. At the green we turned to starboard and edged forward until the sounder read 3.5 metres. Here, the anchor with 18 metres of chain was dropped. Information from the chart, coupled with almanac high water information, predicted that we should have a margin of 1.5 metres under the keel at low water. We toasted the return to Blighty with the now obligatory glass of whisky and turned in.

Later we woke to the sound of the anchor drag alarm. The anchor had not dragged but the tide had turned during the night and the wind had



picked up, thus *Piper* had swung to the extreme of her tether. The day was much brighter as the murk had blown through. The kettle went on and

Young Paul tried a spot of fishing, while we waited for high water. Two fine looking mackerel were caught. They were too big to fit on the boat so they were thrown back; honest!

The quality of the light was quite special as we motored into Wells. The gaily-painted beach huts stood out like sentinels, the white feathers of the gulls shone out. Fortunately the floating berth

at the end of the pontoons was available, so we turned into the incoming tide and glided in. Hardly a word was spoken as we tied up, partially in reverence to the peace of the early morning, but mostly because Crew *Piper* were working well together. Waterproofs and other such things were put out to dry and air. *Piper* looked like the village green of yesteryear on washday.

The Harbour Master came on duty, took our harbour dues and provided a swipe card for the shower and toilet facilities. We asked him the whereabouts of the nearest petrol station, as we required fuel for *Piper*. He said that the nearest petrol station was a bus or a car drive away, but he hoped to fetch fuel himself. He could not guarantee when, because he would require a relief for the lifeboat, as he was the coxswain, but said he would not leave us in the lurch.

Scrubbed up and ready to face the day, Crew *Piper* headed for the Harbour Cafe. During the previous day, at sea, we had salivated over the image of a full English breakfast. The breakfast was now for the eating. The ladies behind the counter remembered us from the previous week and asked of our exploits. We got an extra egg apiece for our story!

The crew re-fuelled we returned to see the Harbour Master. We did not want to harass him, nor did we want to be found missing if the opportunity to fetch fuel arose. We explained this to him and he invited us to leave the fuel cans in his shed, saying we could pay him later in the day. We busied ourselves, planning our return to the Humber and enthusing about ice cream. On the return from a stroll in search of ice cream we saw the Harbour Master leaving in a hurry. He said the fuel and the bill were in the office and he had to rush off to man the lifeboat. We paid our bill at the office and refuelled *Piper*. With the tank full, two gallons remained

in cans as reserve. This should give us 20 hours steady motoring in total.

It was one hour before high water and time to leave. We knew that the tide would be running, west to east, as we passed Wells Bar, but planned to turn into it and crab north whilst awaiting the ebb. Thoughts strayed to arriving in Winteringham the next morning.

Wells to Winteringham – 77 nautical miles

We motored out, pushing a 2.5kn flood. On passing the outer buoy, it could be seen that the forecast did not match reality, as the wind had more north in it than expected. This forced us to beat on port-tack, engine assisted, while crabbing to overcome the tide. It was a beautiful evening, visibility was good and the sea was kind. As the sun dropped in the west, dead on track, *Piper* crabbed down the northern side of a golden cone of sunshine. This seemed to be a good omen for our homecoming, it was a magical phenomenon.

Through the glare, a craft was seen on our reciprocal course. The craft revealed itself to be the Lifeboat towing a yacht with engine failure. We tacked to starboard to give them sea room, received a cheery wave in thanks, and then continued on our way. The sky became flame red as the setting sun reflected off the clouds. The heat of the day drained away. The ebb arrived and the engine was shut down. A trawler, with nets deployed, came from way back and overtook us on our starboard side. The trawler then cut in front of us, causing us to take evasive action. The Skipper spun *Piper* three times backing the sails as she rotated, to kill speed and hold station. When it was thought that the trawl was well passed, *Piper's* original course was resumed. We passed just four metres above the trawl; an error of judgement on the Skipper's part.

Friday 4 July

The wind became fresh, and darkness had come, *Piper* was under sail and going well. The Skipper could feel the wind building and asked the helmsman how the boat felt. "Exhilarating", came the reply. This was not the reply the Skipper was looking for, as a freshening wind on top of "Exhilarating" would be untenable for any length of time. The headsail was changed and a reef put in the main. The buoyage around the

Inner Dowsing bank could be seen to starboard, as could the shipping, which was heading to and from the Humber. The wind by this time had built, the beat became tighter and the sea was confused. The engine went on to give *Piper* some stability and punch the chop.

While approaching the Protector Buoy, a freighter, incoming to the Humber, was on a course that would bring it close to us. Nick was asked to call "the freighter approaching Protector Buoy" telling them that we were "The yacht off their port bow". Nick did this six times and received no response. Yarmouth Coastguard, although taking industrial action, then called "Yacht *Piper*" and asked us for our position. On receiving this, they informed us of the name of the freighter. We decided to tack

'This seemed a good omen for our homecoming'

out of harms way and knew it would cost us a lot of ground. While we were manoeuvring, a sleepy sounding Captain hailed Yarmouth Coastguard to say he had been informed that his boat's name had been mentioned on the VHF. The Coastguard directed him onto a working channel and no-doubt reminded him of his obligations! Humber Coastguard then called Yacht *Piper* to check on our wellbeing. We think they thought that we had been run down, as we were radio silent while tacking. It is good to know that the Coastguard are there for you. Crew *Piper* wish them well in achieving fair pay for the valuable service they provide.

It took some time to regain lost ground. We passed Protector then headed for DZ3. Way in front of us, off *Piper's* starboard bow, we could see the stern light of the infamous freighter. Because of the sea condition, it took considerable effort to plot our position on the chart. Also it was difficult to read information off the chart. We assumed that the DZ buoys would be lit "Yellow". In fact they are not lit and after an hour straining to see them, DZ3 appeared out of the grey of the new day, off our port bow. Another lesson learned.

The tide was flooding, by now we should have been at the mouth of the Humber. This was going to add to the punishment of the previous night. It was necessary to punch hard with the engine so that we could enter the Humber before the tide built and thus prevented us from doing so. The engine cut out and was refuelled with the two cans held in reserve. Once more under the engine, now assisted solely by the main sail, we

rounded the sands and headed for buoy 2C then buoy 2B at the mouth of the river. The flood became apparent and flushed us up the river.

The Skipper, plotter and chart in hand, calculated tacking points so that *Piper* could take advantage of the deep and faster water and the angle of the wind, the strength of which had died to a whimper. Fuel was becoming a concern, the wind had died, and the tide was due to turn again. Worst-case scenarios were running through the Skipper's mind, "Hawkins Point could be ok, perhaps Brick Yards Chimney, what about Paull, could we make Hull"? The breeze picked up but was variable. We used the breeze to the best advantage, now under full sail, punching what had become a foul tide. Approaching Paull a milestone had been reached; if the engine cut, we could tack across to Brickyards and anchor. Sandsend was passed; Paull now became the safety exit. The next target was the *Pride of Rotterdam*. The headsail was put away, as it was backing and tacking would be counterproductive. Having passed the crumbling jetties east of Hull we cut to the shallows of the north bank and took some respite from the tide. Young Paul was tasked to the foredeck, with instructions to drop anchor if the engine died. To port we could see *Tinker Liz* sailing down river. We waved but thought that they were too far away to see our greeting. We wondered if they had come to escort us home. *Piper*, keeping as close into the bank as possible, crept in to the outer bay of Hull Marina and awaited the Lock Keeper who had held last pen for us. Once safely inside on the visitors berths it occurred to us to dip the tank. The tank was half full, enough for eight hours motoring. If we had done this on entering the Humber, we could have pushed harder, got to Hull an hour earlier and saved our selves a great deal of stress. Sleep deprivation does strange things to you. In hindsight the engine had probably not cut out due to an empty tank, but due to heeling while motor sailing, causing the carburettor float to stick.

It was now noon and the Minerva pub would be open. We had earned a pint and a good meal, which we enjoyed. We returned to the marina to pay our harbour dues and take advantage of the showers. The Showers and toilets were the worst ones visited on the holiday. Also, Hull Marina was the most expensive stay of the holiday. The lock keepers are as good as anywhere, and the office staff friendly and efficient. "Come on

management, get a grip. It is embarrassing that sailors, visiting from Holland, may judge England by the state of the facilities on your watch! Also, why should we put up with it?"

The crew bunked down, awaiting the first pen of the flood that would take us home to Winteringham. A traditional coble, from Northumberland, that had a cabin grafted onto it, locked out with us. Its owners had sailed down from Northumberland and were heading to Goole, the canal system and eventually the west coast.

We had a good sail to start with then the breeze dropped and became variable. Determined to sail the last leg, we were sometimes pointing down stream in order to ferry glide, thus keeping in the channel. A coaster was hanging back waiting for water, and when it made its move we gave it clear water to pass. *Tinker Liz* was motor sailing at a great pace towards us. We wondered if Rod might cut the engine and sail with us. As we tacked *Tinker Liz* carried on going. Later it transpired that they thought we might motor in with them. They were not to know, how much we needed to savour the last tranquil moments of our journey. The time came to put on the engine and put away the sails. *Piper* ferry glided across to the south bank, so not to get swept up river, and entered Winteringham Haven. HYC member Andy Wain with crew, on *Jabber*, was going out for a jolly. They greeted us as we passed port to port. Andy was sounding the foghorn and had a grin ear to ear. It was good to see them. On the bank people were waving, another horn was being sounded. Our lines were taken as we reached the pontoon. Our minds were in turmoil with the warmth of the greeting and our efforts of the previous 24 hours.

The old chestnut is true; it was hard to leave your friends and boat at the end of a journey, having shared so much together. However it was good to be home to family and greater circle of friends. The journey had ended.

Paul Jackson

Paul Jackson has owned *Piper* (No 106) for 8 years. She is berthed at Winteringham Haven on the South bank of the Humber along with *Tinker Liz* (No 17) and *Shaar* (No 137). Paul has also cruised *Piper* North to Blyth and Amble in Northumberland and had crewed on North Sea crossings but this was his first venture South in *Piper* across the Wash to Norfolk and across the North Sea to Holland. *Piper's* Vire engine is her second: an engine overhauled by TOA member John Yates.