

SUMMER 2012

When John and Karen asked us if we would be interested in a 3 month trip taking in Paris this summer we jumped at the chance and made plans throughout the winter. It was to be the trip of a lifetime, especially as we didn't need to worry about time scales with both Lynn and myself now retired. The day after the Diamond Jubilee Bank Holiday saw us at Naburn readying to be lifted onto a low loader transporter, which John had kindly negotiated for us. The first problem I had was when John's driver (Paul) told me that the tonneau cover Lynn and I had spent several weeks making would have to come off as the backdraught would probably rip it off. I spent the next fifteen minutes gaffer taping all of the edges to stop the wind getting in! I haven't had a boat transported before and it was with trepidation that the journey began, with both John and I on our respective boats wrestling with overhanging branches, as the convoy edged its way out of Naburn down the single road towards the A19. Just as you thought you had done really well in deferring one branch, another would be ready to slap you in the face as you turned to look ahead. In the layby we climbed down and after a final check we were off, me with my driver Neil in front and John and Paul behind. Up onto the A64, but as we went under the first bridge there was a loud crack and Neil and I just looked at each other. At the first available layby we pulled in and were both out of the cab in a flash. I expected to see my windscreen in the middle of the road but at first sight it was still there. I was up onto the boat and checking round, and Neil who thought he had blown a tyre was checking round the trailer. We didn't find a problem and decided that it must have been a rig going in the opposite direction which had passed under the bridge at the same time. If you have ever had a boat lifted before you will understand the feeling when it is out of its natural environment and swinging about on strops. This was the feeling I now had as I could see the beam of the boat overhanging the trailer through my rear view mirror. UK lorry drivers were pretty good on the whole but foreign lorries had this attitude whereby they would overtake as close as possible and because they were left hand drive they were alongside you waving frantically into the cab. Over the period of that day I exercised my derriere cheeks that often that I'm sure I could have cracked walnuts with them by the time we got to Brighton. We had arranged to meet Karen and Lynn (who had travelled down by train) at Brighton Marina Village, which created a whole bunch of new problems for our drivers. We had picked up an escort on the outskirts of Brighton, who cleared traffic for us, but in the village itself things were that tight that we were going the wrong way round roundabouts, pulling up barrier posts and eventually coming to a halt outside the compound gates. At one point even catching a retaining strop on a traffic sign (fortunately missing the boat). After a meal in Weatherspoons where our drivers swung the lamp with tales from the road haulage business to keep us amused, we decided it was time to turn in. I could have sold tickets to the performance getting Lynn onboard that night off the trailer, but eventually we settled for the night. The following day saw some more inch perfect driving to put us in a position to be lifted and launched and by 10am the boats were back in their natural environment and John and I were a lot happier, that was apart from the howling wind and rain which persisted for the following week. Now there are places where you would be driven crackers if you couldn't move but fortunately Brighton and the surrounding area is not one of them. We took in the sights and made the most of it. On one trip into Brighton we were making our way to the front and the wind was being channelled down our road making it virtually impossible to walk. I'm sure at one point I was leaning at 45 degrees just to stay on my feet. Then when we got to the front, lifeguards were on patrol!! I don't think anybody would have lasted more than seconds in that sea. The following Tuesday a window of opportunity arose and with the wind

behind us we made our crossing to Le Havre. The sea was quartering from behind and we surfed down troughs all the way. The final approach saw us in dense fog. At one mile off I still had no visual contact with the land. At half a mile I picked up two leading lights and as we entered the port could just make out the entrance. A cruise ship had obviously been held back because as we rounded to the visitors pontoon in the Marina it was already making its way out of the entrance. After we had sorted everything we went for a quick look round. The port had been heavily bombed during the Second World War, and the main architect who took the responsibility of rebuilding the place has since earned the nickname "Godfather of reinforced concrete." Enough said! The following day we refuelled and took the short hop across to Honfleur and the eye watering fees of 40 Euros a night. We decided to stay a while as John and Karen had not been here before and started to relax as we had finally "got away." I have talked previously about Honfleur in a previous publication. Just to say things hadn't changed much - still beautiful. We did a day trip to Deauville and Trouville (again mentioned in the previous publication) and after 4 nights we were in the outer harbour ready for an early start the next morning. As we sat, the front of a ship passed us, and it went on and on and on. It turned out to be one of those river cruise boats and it must have been the length of a football pitch. As we watched he did a full turn at a junction then reversed it through a bridge opening before finally mooring it – very impressive. We saw several of these cruise boats during our trip (Dave Cocker take note). The following morning was an early start, the run up the River Seine was uneventful and took six hours. Karen had found a friendly Port de Plaisance on the outskirts of Rouen where a friendly "Capitaine" sorted the fees for our two night stay. The following day we walked the 3.5 km into the centre, found the V.N.F. office where we would license the boats the following day, then explored. Famously this part of France was under British rule during the Middle Ages and Richard the Lionheart's heart is kept in a lead box in the treasury at the cathedral. This is also the city where Joan of Arc was martyred by the English when they burnt her at the stake. A beautiful church now stands on the spot. The following day with the license in hand, we set off. An opportunity to refuel at Rouen was foiled as the fuel barge was undergoing maintenance, so we pushed on for the three hour run to the sea lock at Amfreville where we came across our first problem French man – you guessed it the lock keeper. They are a breed unto themselves and he had told John after he had called him up that he should speak to him in French. He should have been reminded that relatives had also visited during 1944 and there was no problem with us speaking English then. We found a quiet mooring just after the lock in what I can only describe as breathtaking surroundings. The Seine around this area is truly magnificent running through chalk cliffs with lush green vegetation and picture post card houses. After our first BBQ of the trip we turned in and endured a stifling night with temperatures too hot for comfort. The following morning we set off and planned to stop at Les Andelys where the ruins of Chateau Galliard are perched on the side of a cliff overlooking the river. Unfortunately we found that the moorings which had been advertised in the Fluvicarte were not in use so we had to push on to Vernon. Here we found moorings at a Yacht club which was also a school for canoeing. We arrived to a throng of youngsters who were everywhere. Gently up to the moorings as the depth was unknown and the deal was done. Still at the mercy of passing commercial barges we set off to explore the town and on our return found Lidl just on our doorstep. The following day we biked the 4 km to the Impressionist painter Monet's house and garden, and after a look round returned a bit quicker as it had started to rain. The following day we set off in search of fuel which we had been told we could get at Port de Plaisance de l'Ilon just through Mericourt lock. We passed through with an Australian skipper who was delivering a yacht to the Med and he got to the fuel berth first, filled his boat then

we were informed that he had emptied their tanks!! We pushed on and at Mantes-la-Jolie we left the main course of the river and found a pontoon just in front of a bridge. We explored the town and found it lived up to its name with piped music in the streets and a very relaxed ambience. If that had been York the council would have been arguing over what music they were going to play. The following day the quest for fuel was on again. This time a spectacular marina (according to the Fluvicarte) had diesel and overnight moorings. We set off feeling confident and about 3 km away from the spot, John called me up to tell me a cruiser was coming up behind us on the plane. He overtook us just before the cut and as we arrived at the Marina he was on the fuel pontoon. At this point we can play a game. You can guess what I'm going to write next and I'll give you half a second to come up with the answer. Yes- you guessed- he emptied their tank and even had the nerve to fill a dozen jerry cans he had in his lazarette before giving us a cheery wave and moved off. To be honest the place was a dump but the man in charge was very helpful and phoned another spot on the other side of Paris who confirmed that they had fuel in abundance. We stayed for two nights and the following day being a Sunday we biked along the edge of the Seine to Poissy, another quaint town which unbelievably had a market on (see Lynn's eyes light up)! It was here that I had a Marilyn Munroe moment as I stepped across a grate which had an updraught from somewhere beneath pavement level. My rain poncho blew up into my face, and very nearly went over my head.....It just doesn't conjure up the same image does it. With the fuel situation at the back of our minds till after Paris we pushed on to Halte Fluvial-de-Rueil which was a good mooring in a commercial section of Rueil Maimaison. A very up market area, with nice restaurants and shops. Opposite the mooring was the Maison Fournaise where Renoir, Monet, Manet and Degas would meet and paint. The famous Renoir "The Luncheon of the Boating Party" was painted from this spot. (This is an education isn't it?) We had a walk around the town and that evening had another BBQ and enjoyed the evening. At approx one in the morning Lynn and I were woken by a group of teenager's hell bent on enjoying themselves. They had come onto the mooring and rocked the boat, when I went up they were getting stripped off to go skinny dipping thinking they could use my bathing platform as a means of getting out of the water. As one girl approached the back of the boat Lynn gave out one of her best "park gadgee" calls and with a swift "Oi" the group retreated. Even I felt the hairs on the back of my neck stand up. They didn't move on straight away but lingered for another twenty minutes or so. The following morning I couldn't believe that John and Karen were unaware of the previous evening's events. I'm going to start drinking what he has. We pushed off at 8am that morning and four hours later we were taking photo opportunities as we entered Paris, passing under her famous bridges, the Eiffel tower, the Statue of Liberty (hang on we didn't do a right out of Brighton did we?) and finally to the Arsenal Marina. Another objective achieved. Will we get fuel and continue our holiday. What will John (lovely legs) Worsdale's song of the day be tomorrow? Find out that and more in the next edition.