

Of Fishy Tales, Oystercatchers, Avocets and Seals

Well, as I write this early Sunday morning we are all expecting Mike to sail back into Bosham later today. As he would enthusiastically say, "How exciting is that?!" At 6am, it is and it will be the most perfect end of Summer's day to greet him back to home shores...the sort of summery weather that poor Mike and his stalwart crews could have done with on his epic voyage around Britain. It does seem an incredibly short time ago when he set sail – in the teeth of a gale! – from Bosham three long, adventurous, exhausting months ago. And I know it has been tough, even for this Warhorse! Gaff-rigged yachts as I know from experience do not take kindly to head winds.

I have been trying to keep a watchful eye on all shore matters most mornings, and often wonder how things really are on board Theos' Future..and wondering what are his thoughts, expectations, and know he must be absolutely thrilled to have got back safely...and with so much money raised! It has been challenging and entertaining ringing up complete strangers asking for their help –

"Now, some time ago you met this chap Mike Brooke...well, he's sailing into your harbour any day now..!"

And of course Mike has a winning way with emptying purses from complete strangers who happen to be marvelling at the boat from the quayside! As he often said to us, his task is to get the dear little boat safely from A to B...the rest will sort itself out. And by that, I mean doing daily checks and repairs on the hundred and one things that boats on such a tough challenge need.

And it is a little boat! I had the recent privilege of joining him and his long standing friend David Moore down the East coast, and especially the Suffolk coast. I was made very welcome and found myself cooped up in the forecabin. Very snug it was too, if a little challenging for pees in the middle of the night! However, all chaps' bodies tuned amazingly well one night and nature called on us all at exactly the same time!

Apart from being regaled with memories still sweet from most adventurous voyages, and tales from the Royal Marines, I recall as soft and sweet rendering at midnight of a Royal Engineer's poem after a particularly good night's 'partying' on board! So we were lulled to sleep on the good ship Theo's Future.

And what a treat sailing down the East Coast was, really pleasant sailing conditions for once – for me as a boy, I had spent many days exploring its wild and beautiful Rivers, creeks and estuaries in all sorts of boats, some conventional, others less so. Leaving the rather turgid, oily and distinctly fishy waters of Lowestoft, we glided past remote desolate shores, sandy cliffs bearing centuries of erosion, bays of Southwold that held echoes of many a sea battle with the Dutch, with cliff gun emplacements still in place, stark strong lighthouses still operational, creeks filled with the mournful cries of Curlews, Oystercatchers and the fabled Havergate Island and its charming Avocets bobbing about its shores.

Not that Mike was able to appreciate all the wonders, as he was committed and glued to the serious business of endless navigation, the GPS and anxiously piloting up rivers and creeks. Perhaps he missed some of the most stunningly peaceful Suffolk scenery! Hey, he had a Boy from Suffolk on board who knows his rivers!

The enchanting village of Orford proved a delightful return and spiritual/family homecoming for Mike. It was like stepping into the pages of a late Victorian novel, such were the quaint and still untouched cobbled lanes and utter stillness in the village. What a welcome from so many in the one Shop / stores and Church reviving fond memories of Mike's Uncle, the Vicar many years ago, when Mike was a boy and used to come and stay. And wherever we bowled up, there was a friendly Harbourmaster and staff on the look-out for us and gave lots of vital information. Old River salts too gave us comfort in going out over the bar...and there are quite a few of the tricky entrances hereabouts on the Rivers Ore/Alde and Deben! We were treated to seals frolicking on a sandbank as we tensely crossed the Deben bar.

So, back home at last, and what a tumultuous achievement. And all our hats must be raised and the odd glass of bubbly for an outstandingly successful voyage, and not just the money raised for such a good cause, but for the manner, dedication and a very distinguished set of sailing skills and experience in which it was tackled. Our hats off too to the many fine, kind supporters around the country who so hastily and tenderly saw to Mike and crew's every need – you know who you are and we do hope to meet again soon.

Another Brookie chapter draws to a close, and there is and will be for months to come a beautiful warm, loving feeling all round for all those who have been privileged to be part of this journey.

Chaloner Chute