

Cunliffe on Cruising **August 2009 Yachting Monthly**

A large bonus that comes with writing about yachting is that a stream of interesting material lands on my desk. Today's arrivals provided a stark glimpse of how attitudes to sailing are changing. Nobody can halt the march of time, but when I read this morning's offerings I couldn't help reflecting on the stresses of modern life.

The first item was a tiny cameo of a book which my wife, who collects sailing literature by women, had ordered. I dipped in, and was captivated. *Puffin's Log* (ISBN 978-0-9561469-0-8) is about family holidays on a diminutive wooden yacht in the early 1950s. The work is illustrated with charming sketches and watercolours, plus a few monochrome photographs. The text is deliciously uncomplicated. The 21ft yacht has the tightest of headroom and a minute petrol engine whose consumption would be measured in pints, so little was it used. There is only one pair of bunks, but a mattress tossed up into the focsle affords modest comfort at bed-time to the two small girls. The son, somewhat older, dosses down on spare sails between his parents.

Puffin lives on a mooring half a mile out in Poole Harbour, probably at the cost of a few shillings a year. The writer, Jocelyn Greenway, does comment that their holidays are very economical. They row out, come wind or weather, in a clinker-built dinghy which they then tow to wherever they are going. The children are encouraged to use this to develop their seamanship skills, which, of course, in the absence of an outboard engine, they do. When it rains in harbour, things are a bit tight, but somehow they manage. They cruise to the Solent and all the usual South Coast destinations, but they also spend time in the Seine Bay and twice make it to Holland and the IJsselmeer. This is good going by any standards in such a craft which, you'll note, doesn't even have a self-draining cockpit, much less VHF radio, liferaft and all the other paraphernalia without which many of us wouldn't leave harbour.

Irresponsible? You could say that, but I won't. Robert Greenway had just come through WWII, fighting in India and Burma. He was a qualified architect and a university lecturer. A man of experience few of us can equal, and no fool. The love and care for one another which shines through his wife's accounts are simply a joy, and we can be grateful to their daughter Cathy for having the logs bound and published.

My breakfast reading was rounded off by a session with the RYA Magazine. I contribute to this from time to time, so I'm certainly not going to knock it. In fact, the RYA do well in monitoring what the authorities have dreamed up next to make our lives a misery, and at least trying to keep the worst excesses in check. Here, instead of reading about sensible people making up their own minds about what was safe and what wasn't, I found reports of convoluted regulations suggesting the eminently sensible LED navigation lights a friend just fitted to his yacht may not be acceptable under the regulations. For your information, the rules in question are brought to our attention by 'MGN393'. 'MGN', by the way, is 'Marine Guidance Notice' to you!

Next, I discovered that Health Care charges are no longer covered in the Channel Islands (I wonder if Mr and Mrs Greenway would have cared), and that when purchasing red diesel in the UK, I must request the retailer to mark the invoice or receipt as 'duty paid', logging the date and engine hours to reinforce the record. I also discovered that if I put the stuff in a can, I'll be in dire trouble.

We need to know these things, of course, because those who would rule us keep piling on the agony, but the contrast with fifty years ago as evidenced by *Puffin's Log* is stark. You can't argue with the fact that, if we comply with every regulation, and load our boats up with the recommended life-saving kit and backup navigation systems, we'll probably be less likely to come unstuck than the Greenway family. The message of my morning reading, however, has been that to accept this without looking further into the question is to miss the point of why we go sailing.

Today's standards tend to concentrate on what we might call 'secondary safety'. This is about buying things that may give us another chance when the boat has failed us or we have failed ourselves. Primary safety, on the other hand, is about having a well-found yacht that is properly seaworthy in shape and displacement, then operating her in a seamanlike manner. The European Small Craft Directive wouldn't give *Puffin* many points, yet the Greenways enjoyed years of adventurous cruising and never came to grief. Knowing what I now do about the character of the people, I wouldn't put this down to good fortune. I conclude that they kept a weather eye out for trouble and steered well clear of it. By avoiding obsession with gear, or paying huge money for a yacht far bigger than they really needed then relying on others for their ultimate survival, their stress levels stayed at rock bottom. You've only to read Jocelyn's account and see the art that Robert found time to produce to feel their inner peace.

As I remarked at the outset, we can't turn back the clock, but we'd be crazy not to learn a few lessons from the Greenways.

Tom Cunliffe