

Really Wrecked SAC newsletter

Number 56, January 2019



Happy New Year everyone! I hope your year has started at least as well as mine, but that you're now over all the coughs, colds, norovirus and other hideous lurgies that spoiled your break, and are well into the misery and relentless grind of working during the coldest, darkest month of the year, while going out of your way to make things easy for yourself by indulging in the madness that is 'dry January'. Or is that just me? Well, not the dry January bit - I mean, why would I want to do something as stupid as that? Good on you if you are, but really, dry June seems a lot more sensible to me. For a start, the evenings are not long, cold and dark, forcing you to sit around not drinking, twiddling your thumbs, thinking Silent Witness isn't as good as it used to be and waiting for bed time. More importantly, it's months away, giving you plenty of time to change your mind.

Still, we're well into 2019 now, and the good news is that we haven't had a single cancelled trip so far this year. Not one! Looks like this year is going to be a cracker. I've been thinking about the number of trips that are cancelled these days and wondering whether things genuinely are worse than in days of yore. Obviously I haven't done any actual research, like going through old newsletters and counting the number of trips per year, but I think we can all agree that, in the absence of any concrete facts, it does *seem* as though we get blown off a lot more than we used to.

Now, if we accept this baseless feeling as solid truth, then why should this be? Well, I have a theory, you may be surprised to learn. I don't believe it's because climate change is making things windier. Nor do I believe the jet stream has permanently shifted south, pushing all low-pressure systems right over the channel, though again, the information on which I am basing this belief is threadbare, to say the least, as I haven't got any facts about average windspeeds or barometric pressure to back this up, but I don't care. Someone else can do the research.

Actually, now I think about it, why don't the TV weather people care about the wind? We get all that pointless information about how "Today was the hottest day in October since 1873", or the

sunniest Sunday in November since records began, or how this had been the wettest May since 1982, but no-one, ever, EVER, **EVER** says anything about whether this day, week, month, year, decade, whatever is windier or less windy than normal. Why not? What have those bastards got against the wind? Or more, particularly, against us, the Really Wrecked Sea Angling Club? All we want to know is whether we're living in the worst era for boat fishing since Piltdown Man built himself a skull from the cranium of an orangutan and the jaw of a Littlehampton barmaid, strapped himself into a coracle, muttered "I'll be back in by lunchtime" and set to sea. It's not too much to ask is it? Well, clearly it is.

So, into the gaping void where all this information and fact does not dwell rush I, with my stupid, fact-free theory. And here it is. I reckon that, on average, the weather is no worse than it used to be but that we are in fact going on fewer trips than we used to, despite booking more, for the following reasons. I think we go on just as many lovely, flat, gorgeous, relaxing trips as we used to, and just as many flattish, grey, drizzly but otherwise reasonable days, but we rarely, if ever, venture out on those force 3 to 5 occasionally 6, or even force 3 to 4 occasionally 5, lumpy, horrible days. Days where you can't feel the bites at anchor because your lead is banging on the bottom, and you are unable to retrieve while lure fishing because you've just slid across the deck and fallen over Kim's prone form, where he fell 25 minutes ago and has been unable to get back to his feet because Stevie has been using him as a footstool; days where, when you reach round to grab something from your tackle box to replace your shad (lost in a snag because, when Dave shouted "Wreck coming up", the boat pitched down, and your tackle went down with it into that lovely bit of wreck netting, to be lost forever), you see your tackle box sliding at a rate of knots back down the deck, taking out Rab, snapping Robin's rod and knocking Kim, who has finally struggled back to his feet, down into the scuppers again. The sorts of days when, with the torture finally over, and we're allowed to return to port, you are genuinely

delighted that you caught absolutely bugger all and can therefore shelter in the cabin, instead of rolling around in the freezing spray on the soaking deck with those two idiots trying to fillet the three fish they caught between them.

That's the difference in my opinion. That's the fun we're missing out on. I suspect (yes, more speculation) that this is because a) We're older, feebler and, to a very limited extent, wiser, and therefore don't jump all over the chance to blank in terrible weather and b) Skippers have recognised this and not wishing to bite the hand that feeds them, no longer force us out to endure freezing, wet, fish-free misery on the grounds that we are more likely to come back for more if we don't actually hate everything about the day out. It's also possible that c) They've all got other jobs, so they no longer have to force their unwilling crews out to have a dreadful day, as they can earn just as much elsewhere. There's probably a d) somewhere too, but I can't think of it at present. I welcome your suggestions.

Some of you may miss those days. I am more ambivalent myself. I think I can remember one day, in the more than 20 years we've been doing this, when a horrible rough day actually flattened off and we caught loads of fish - the day Stevie famously pronounced the prophetic words, referenced above, that we would be back in by lunchtime - but apart from that, as far as I can recall, the rough days have been more or less uniformly rubbish. But if there is a groundswell of support, of no less than 2.4 metres peak to trough, roughly the kind of groundswell that makes a day borderline fishable and properly unpleasant, in favour of risking it and taking on the elements in a brave, not to say foolhardy, fashion, then I'm up for it too. Together we can make this a year to look back on with genuine regret.

There is another option though. Quite often, when a trip is cancelled, Adam and I try quite hard to book a replacement. Sometimes these are blown off too, but almost as often they fail, despite clement conditions, because we can't get a crew together. Yes, I know some of us still have jobs, and still more of us have doctor's appointments and pills to take, and daytime TV doesn't watch itself, you know; but even so, if we could all (me included) try and be a bit more flexible when it comes to grabbing a place on a replacement trip with relatively little notice, and perhaps check our email (and maybe even reply to the ones that mention replacement dates), perhaps this year will turn out to be a year we won't forget, for all the right reasons.

Club Notices

But that's more than enough of that. The view from my high horse is beginning to make me giddy and maybe even a little seasick so here, at last, are some actual facts. These facts come in the form of fishing dates for the coming year. As we have seen off yet another skipper, having driven Clem into early retirement (and not the early grave he so richly deserves - see the trip reports below for more details), our Weymouth trips this year will be with the excellent Lyle Stantiforth on *Supanova*. We've fished with Lyle a few times and have always had a good time, and he is one of the best-regarded skippers on the South coast. I'm really looking forward to our trips, and I'm sure we'll get through most of the year before he turns out to be just as much of an annoying bastard as Clem. Thinking about it, I really don't think that is possible.

Most of our Sussex trips are all with the excellent Neil French, with whom we've only had enjoyable days out. I was going to book some trips with long-time favourite Dave Elliot, as his health was improving, and things were looking good. But now, sadly, there are further complications, so Dave advised me I'd be better off looking elsewhere this year. We wish him all the best for a speedy recovery and maybe we'll be out with him again next year.

I have therefore arranged a few days out with Terry Lee, who was part of *The Golden Age of Sussex Congering*, fishing out of Brighton. His current boat, *Sea Breeze 3*, is a huge cat, very stable and will fish ten with comfort. I have booked three trips with him - one spring pollack and two congering trips. He really is a top skipper, so come and have a go. There's also a wrassing trip with Ivan to organise, but that's not in the diary yet, as Ivan is currently sunning himself in parts exotic, so I'll let you know about that when it's booked.

So, this is what we have. Let us know which you'd like to come on, and we'll run our special algorithm to determine that Adam gets to go on them all and Colin is only allowed to go on the one which is cancelled. Actually, there are lots of you that I didn't see at all last year, and in some cases, for a few years, and it would be lovely to fish with you again.

- **Monday February 11th** Weymouth - pollack
- **Monday March 4th** Littlehampton - plaice or bass
- **Friday March 15th** Weymouth - pollack
- **Friday March 29th** Brighton - pollack

- **Monday April 15th** Littlehampton - smoothhounds and rays
- **Monday April 29th** Weymouth - pollack or flatfish
- **Monday June 3rd** Littlehampton - black bream
- **Monday July 15th** Brighton – wreck conger
- **Monday July 22nd** Littlehampton - cod on wrecks, or bass, or rays and turbot
- **Monday August 12th** Littlehampton - big tope and blondes
- **Friday/Saturday August 23rd and 24th** Weymouth summer trip
- **Monday September 9th** Littlehampton - bream, trigger fish, bass
- **Friday September 20th** Weymouth - blonde rays and bream
- **Monday October 7th** Littlehampton - conger and/or big huss
- **Friday October 18th** Brighton – wreck conger
- **Monday December 2nd** Littlehampton - cod and whiting (possibly bass)

Just so you know, for all of the Weymouth trips, I have booked B&B places for the night before, either at the Marden Guest House with Jan and Gary, or at the Crown Hotel, so if you want to come down to Weymouth, please let me know if you want a bed for the night, so I can firm up numbers. The cost is £40 for the night.

The other thing to sign up to is, of course, our Annual Dinner and Awards Ceremony on this Saturday the 26th of January in the Dorset Arms in Lewes. This year is going to be a bit of a humdinger, with special one-off events, free gifts and a promise from our regular speaker (me) to do much less of his regular speaking and more drinking and remaining silent. This is a one-time offer, so I'd get my place booked early if I were you, to avoid missing out on this once-in-a-lifetime experience. Seriously. Be there or regret it for the rest of your miserable existence. Contact Adam with your food choices and to ensure there's a seat for you at the highest of high tables.

Now, as you all know, it's my duty to tell you about any recent trips out to sea, mainly in order to remind those of you who haven't been for a while quite how much fun it all is; to encourage you to dust off your 1970s Milbro solid glass rod of indeterminate line class, strap on your Penn Squidder, check that it has at least 30 yards of Bayer Perlon it, and come out fishing. But be warned, not all the trips I'm about to tell you about resulted in smiling, happy anglers having fun. Some of them *may* have resulted in some anglers bemoaning the fact that Frank has retired in a manner reminiscent of José Mourinho talking

about the ref. Yes, Adam, you remind me of Mourinho.

Friday 20th July

As you all know, because you all read these newsletters from start to end and memorise everything I say without exception, we've had a bit of a run of bad luck with skippers retiring, running away to foreign shores and generally doing anything within their power to avoid having to take us out fishing ever again, and last summer we were in the process of trying out a new one as a possible replacement for Dave, who had vanished from the scene for a variety of sad and very reasonable reasons, and for Jon Himpfen who had chucked in the towel without ever telling us why, or even, in fact, letting me know that he had given up, till I phoned him to check up on our dates.

So for that reason we found ourselves at Brighton Marina bright and early searching for a boat called *Brigand*, skippered by Steve Green. Well, I say "bright and early", but in my case, due to the fact that this was my first visit to Brighton Marina, which is almost entirely inaccessible by car, even with Satnav, mobile phones and Aragorn the Uncrowned King and Ranger of the North doing the map reading and trailfinding (or at least it appears so if you're an idiot who thought he'd left Wiltshire in plenty of time, but it turned out he hadn't), and also the fact that the boat in question was not, in fact, called *Brigand*, (this was the name of Mr Green's previous boat, and is still the name of his charter boat business, but is not the name of his new boat which, it turns out, is called *Proteus*), I arrived flustered and late, having kept everyone waiting for at least 20 minutes.

Unaccountably, this journey had left me somewhat out of sorts, and therefore unable to respond in jolly kind to the good natured and friendly banter I received from the crew on my eventual arrival, in which I was called a number of perfectly accurate epithets ("useless cunt" being perhaps the friendliest and most accurate of them) and in one case (possibly from a club member who sports a famous tattoo), being asked for financial recompense for the fishing time lost. I was, however, on the boat, at last, which is more than can be said for the fuel, which we then had to go and fill up with. This provoked a second round of grumbling, in which, at that moment, as a proven waste of time myself, I felt unable to participate with any enthusiasm. In hindsight though, it doesn't seem that sensible a way of proceeding, given that all the paying customers involved had dragged their creaking and elderly bones from their beds at various ungodly hours in order to get

a good day's fishing. Maybe filling up the night before would have been a better idea, except that it turned out that Steve actually lived in Epsom, or Epping, or Eritrea or something, so popping down to the boat to get things ready the night before wasn't as easy as you might imagine.

Next, we had a boat-dividing debate of a more divisive and corrosive nature than the matter currently undergoing some scrutiny in parliament. As I explained above, Steve Green was acting stand-in stunt double for Dave, with whom we have primarily enjoyed wrecking trips over the years, generally, in the summer part of the year, targeting conger eels for much of the day. As some of you may have noticed, the size of our Really Eely Tankard winner has fallen in recent times and last year we were unable to award it at all, as **not a single conger was caught by a club member on a club trip**. Not one. Feel free to insert the open-mouthed-with-horror emoji at this point, those of you who know what an emoji is.

For this reason, we had booked the day as a wrecking day, with the focus squarely on eels. Steve however, despite assurances that he loved eels with a passion not seen since Samson allowed Delilah to cut off his hair because she was reasonably fit, or Anthony went to war with his home town because Cleopatra wiggled her asp at him, suggested to the crew, before my arrival, that we might prefer a brilliant day drifting for turbot instead of what could be a dodgy day's eeling. For some in the crew, stalwart, upright men of honour and angling renown, such blandishments fell on deaf ears; we were there for eels, and eels were what we should target. For others though, club members, not to put too fine a point on it, of a more weaselly and unsavoury aspect, members from whom, for example, you wouldn't want to buy a second hand car, or from whom you wouldn't expect to get your lawnmower back in one piece, were all for plan B and clamoured for turbot, turbot! TURBOT!!! in a most unseemly way.

With this seemingly unbridgeable divide between the sides, Steve, playing the part of Theresa May returning from Europe with a possible compromise plan, suggested we could head off for an eeling wreck which was both closer to our current location and to the turbot-laden banks than the other, better, but more far-flung, eeling wreck and, if the eels weren't playing ball, we'd therefore be able to change tack and drift the banks which were, at the time, so thickly carpeted with flatfish as to contain more organic matter than actual sand. The three options were put to a single transferrable vote (as first past the post failed to

produce a working majority), and the compromise solution was accepted by our valiant crew.

This had the effect of leaving everyone reasonably, but equally, unhappy, so overall it was clearly the best solution, and off we bugged to have a go for eels. With all the unpleasantness left behind us in port, we fell to tackling up with gusto, setting up both heavy and light gear, in order to give ourselves the best chances of success, no matter what. It was then we started to discover another slight problem with things, namely that *Proteus*, as an ex-dive boat, had a somewhat inconvenient awning over the cockpit (or deck if you prefer). This would provide useful protection from the elements for divers, but for anglers attempting to handle expensive 7 or 8 foot rods with relatively easy-to-snap tip sections, having a vast superstructure covering the back of the boat, and gunwales festooned with struts and bars and other unhelpful metalwork, made things slightly trickier. There was also a bulky table-like structure, which had presumably housed air tanks and wet suits and the like in one corner, and which now served as a baiting table and general obstacle. Walking the boat became a question of threading your rod in and out of struts, and watching carefully to ensure that no-one was about to poke your eye out while attempting a similar manoeuvre of their own.



What a gorgeous tub! And the fish too, etc. etc.

However, let it not be said that we are grumblers in the Really Wrecked Sea Angling Club! No! When the going gets tough, we knuckle down, tackle up and get on with things, with a light-hearted tra-la-la. This lie was exposed for the vile fabrication it was, just half a mile offshore, where we stopped to catch the mackerel said to be waiting for our arrival. If they were waiting, it was only so they could point their fins at us and laugh, and half an hour produced the princely total of three fish for bait. The muttering and whinging could be heard by anglers in Vanuatu. We eventually decided to head for the wreck and to try again for mackerel while Steve got the hook down.

As we set off, Stevie (I have reverted to calling him Stevie here to differentiate him from Steve Green, our skipper, without having to resort to surnames every time, so please pay attention to spelling from now on, or this tale is going to make even less sense than usual) availed himself of the facilities, only the find himself locked in the little boys' room. This was not due to some hilarious prankster having a laugh at his expense, though we did all laugh, you can be assured of that. No, it was simply down to that fact that the lock, having perhaps received less than the optimum amount of TLC in what is, after all, a relatively corrosive environment, had rusted and/or brined itself shut. In the end, despite our earnest entreaties to Steve that he should avoid damage to his boat and it was fine with us if Mr Newham were to remain incarcerated, Steve freed Stevie by smashing the lock off the door. To be fair to Steve (not to Stevie, never to him), after some initial grumbling, he did break his own boat with fairly good grace. Perhaps we should have asked him to dismantle the enormous erection on the back of his boat while he was at it.

After an hour or so steaming we arrived at our destination, and while Steve had a couple of goes at setting the anchor in a good position, we did manage to get enough bait to be going on with. The wreck itself seemed to be in fairly shallow water, which according to knowledgeable anglers, such as Kim, made it an unlikely candidate for a daytime eeling wreck. Other ex- and current-boat-owners among the crew speculated that the wreck in question might be that of the *Mira*, a nice enough wreck for a summer jaunt after schoolies and bream, but not one known to be groaning with large snakes.

Anyway, come what may, we were there, anchored up and tackled up, so we cut ourselves fillets and flappers and dropped down, agog with anticipation; apart from those of us who were positively scared by the prospect of hooking a

conger. You know who you are, Mick. Within a few minutes, we felt the familiar knock, knock, knocking of an eel bite and two or three brave souls wound down into... really quite disappointingly small straps. Then a few more, followed by pouting by the dozen. Then everything stopped. We had a total of five or six eels to no more than 15lb before the bites dried up. I claimed the largest, putting me in pole position for the Really Eely Tankard, which is all that ever really matters.

Adam's enduring memory of our time spent eeling is Steve's attempts to T-bar off a 3lb eel, which was not heavy enough to unhook itself, while using a tea towel to grip the line. The cloth then ended up in the water as he shook the poor little eel mercilessly, trying to bully it into falling off the hook. It was a performance that even Clem, with his well-documented and pathological fear of conger, would have struggled to match.



*See if you can guess whose rod this is...
Apologies for the romantic blur, that fish
slime gets everywhere.*

Steve then suggested that we make a move, as the eels weren't playing and meanwhile, on the banks, the brill and turbot were literally and actually, in a completely non-figurative way, crawling up anglers' rods and throwing themselves into the fish boxes. With our crew half-composed of lily-livered children, there was overwhelming pressure to leave the wreck and head off to the banks, so we did, without too much rancour, or at least not much more than normal, because, after all, turbot fishing is good fun if the fish are biting. There's an 'if' lurking in that last sentence that has been known to bite harder than any fish.

About an hour later, we arrived at the bank and started to drift. There wasn't much tide, so the drifts were slow; too slow it turned out, for much in the way flatfish action. This may have been an indication that perhaps the tide we'd picked for a day's eeling, was in fact suitable for a day's eeling, rather than a day drifting sandbanks for flatties. Steve also had an unusual way of arranging his anglers. He wanted us to alternate light and heavy leads along both side of the boat, fishing one short, one long, to avoid tangles, whereas we prefer to fish heavier leads on the uptide side of the boat (i.e. those fishing under the boat), and lighter leads on the downtide side to fish well away from the boat. We did try Steve's method, but it seemed to us to be rather better for encouraging tangles, and after a drift where we were all on one side of the boat, only for Steve to set the drift so that everyone's lead went under the hull, we reverted to what we knew best. But we must give Steve's method another go, perhaps on a day when we welcome back Smed and Jonathan. Or we could just cut our lines, snap our rods and shoot ourselves in both feet, which would be more fun.

Still, we were getting a few bites. I had a nice bream, then Stevie had a turbot. Simmo hooked and landed a ginormous tub gurnard, smashing the club record with a magnificent 5lb 6oz specimen. We had a few tope into double figures, and there were a couple more flatfish. But the main species that kept us busy all day was the angler's friend, the cuddly lesser spotted dogfish. That we had so many of these is more or less undeniable proof that there wasn't enough tide to drift effectively for flatties. Clem always says you need enough tide to go faster than the doggies to give the turbot and brill a chance to get at the bait, but there just wasn't enough current for most of the day.

Now, I think I've done a reasonable job of including everyone's complaints, though Kim also pointed out that while there was a fishbox with ice for our fish, the ice itself was bloodied from a previous day's fishing, which is not ideal. But we did find Steve to be a decent bloke, and his boat, though difficult to fish off because of the pointless, irritating ironmongery, was a good stable fishing platform, so we decided to give him another go.

Friday 27th of July

This was a lovely day out of Littlehampton on Neil French's boat, *Spirit of Arun*, with sun, a flat calm sea and a gentle cooling zephyr playing mischievously with what remained of our hair. We fished the rough ground around the Kingmere Reef

in about 40 foot of water, with a decent, but not super-fast, tide, so we got away with light gear and about 4oz of lead for most of the day. Pretty much everything was perfect, even down to Andy Barker crying off at the last minute, as he had already used up his quota of feeble excuses to skive off work the week before for the *Proteus* trip, and he didn't think he could get away with it twice in seven days.



Robin, as manly as ever, shows off a nice undulate ray for the camera.

The first mark reached after a short steam, we dropped our simple running leger rigs down, with 4/0 hooks baited with mackerel or squid, hoping for largish rough ground fish - you know the sorts of things, conger, huss and rays mostly. And guess what? From the off we caught conger and rays. Well, I say "conger", but even calling them straps is to overstate their importance in the

ecosystem. Tagliatelli is closer to what they were, and certainly not large enough to threaten the huge eel in possession of the Really Eely Tankard. We've all seen bigger pipefish. The rays were a better size though, with both thornbacks and undulates to the fore, some into double figures. One of the thornbacks looked sure to be double figures, only to find, on weighing it, that it fell just two ounces short of our record, agonisingly tipping the scales at 9lb 6oz. Bad luck Kim.

Over high water at midday, we moved to a new mark about half a mile away where Neil said there was more chance of bream, along with the larger fish. As the tide got away, the bream came on the feed and the bites came steadily, yielding nice fish to 3lb, spread evenly among the crew. Martin hooked into something substantial, which gave him a right battle on his bream gear and, when landed, proved to be the biggest eel of the day, at 18lb, so not a monster, but a good fish on light gear, and big enough to snatch the lead in the race for the Really Eely Tankard. Adam did what he does best, which is to land pretty much anything that isn't a fish, with a record-breaking (and delicious) 3lb lobster, which, on his return home, made him temporarily the most popular man in his household.

It was a lovely day, with lots of bites, lots of good fish and lots of room on the boat to enjoy the flat calm sea and sunshine. Can we have more of this please?

Weymouth Summer Trip 2018

As per usual we all turned up in dribs and drabs (and can we all agree to shoot any bloody millennials who refer to "drips and drabs" - it's just plain wrong. And while I'm on the subject, can somebody tell Sian Lloyd and the other weather presenters that there's no such thing as "spits and spots of rain". It can be "spitting", or there might be a few "spots of rain", but "spit spot" means nothing unless it comes out of the mouth of Mary Poppins telling children to get a fucking move on) and as usual tried to organise a place to meet up and drink beer, or lemonade and orange, for the very aged. That went as well as it usually does. I arrived last, to find Adam and Chris in *The Rock* as per Adam's emailed instructions, but everyone else in *The Boot*, as per Stevie's insistence. This led to a tense phone-text-based Mexican stand-off between Adam and Stevie, but in the end, it was Stevie who blinked first and the whole piñata came to join us at *The Rock*.

There we raised a glass to Brooksie, as this was the first summer Weymouth trip without him since he first started coming. We were then entertained

royally by Cat, a lovely girl maybe a few years past the first flush of her youth (i.e. a lot younger than most of us), but still with many of her own teeth and a good line in quiet, understated conversation. She was a bit sweet on Tony to start, and invested some time getting to know the real man behind the Real Tree™. But eventually our Tone tired of Cat's shy advances, and decided the allure of his lonely bed was more tempting.

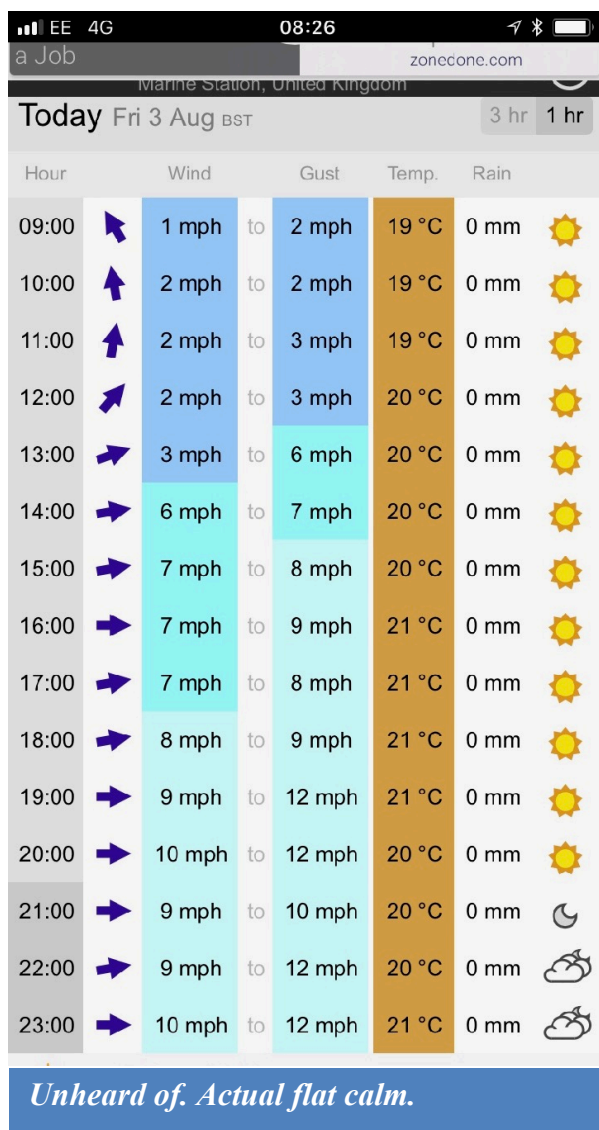
At this point, the plucky lass transferred her attention to the rest of us. She was excellent value and taught us a great deal about fishing in Weymouth, including the location of the eleven and a half foot long conger eels that her son had caught from the shore on a handline, a 72lb koi carp and where all the 38lb wrasse are to be found. These are the actual figures she quoted, and, as a local, I'm sure she's right. We couldn't fail to catch these fish if we just followed her precise directions - go right and not left and then six metres further on. I wrote down these instructions at the time, so I'm sure they are 100% accurate and useful. Eventually, having pumped her for all her inside fishing knowledge, we dragged ourselves away and off to bed, though not before she'd tried to marry off her 17-year-old daughter to either Andy Barker our newest recruit, Jari's son, Thomas. She didn't seem to mind which.

Day 1

On the boat, Clem was demob happy, due to his impending retirement which meant that this was the last year he'd have to put up with us. This happiness manifested itself in any number of increasingly annoying ways. First, he turned the hose (kept in the loo) on when Stevie went to relieve himself, so Stevie emerged, somewhat soaked and rather bemused. This was actually quite funny, though secretly I did think I might have found it less funny had it happened to me.

Soon after, I got the chance myself to see how I'd react to a jolly prank, as our merry host thought it would be hilarious to distract me as I leant on the boat's railing, apply Superglue to where my hand had been and then encourage me to put my hand back down. This achieved, he sat back to await the side-splitting results. Sadly for Clem, I moved my hand before the moist sea air had catalysed the reaction of the Superglue, so instead of being attached to the railing, I merely, unknowingly, now had a hand covered in wet Superglue. This then helped me form an even stronger bond with my lovely Century Excalibur rod butt, which I was already quite attached to. A minute or so later, as I peeled my hand, now black with Hyperlon, off the butt, Clem couldn't contain himself and had to

confess loudly to what he'd done. Nice work. Luckily the Excalibur is a pretty cheap rod and I know Clem will see the funny side when I bill him for a new one. It's just a shame the original trick didn't come off, as it would have been much, much more amusing had I been welded to the rail at the back of the boat and we'd had to go back in to get paramedics to free me.



Away from Clem's world of clowning, mackerel were hard to come by - we spent a good hour chasing them and ended up with no more than 20. Luckily, I'd bought plenty of frozen because that's the kind of charismatic, organised and amazing trip organiser I am. Then, just as we were preparing to give up on feathering, Scoop caught a large, slightly odd-looking mackerel, which we forced him to weigh. It tipped the scales at 1lb 6oz - a good weight for a mackerel, though not larger

than our existing record of 2lb. But when I posted pics on Facebook, the responses suggested this was no ordinary mackerel but an Atlantic chub mackerel and at 1lb 6oz, a massive one to boot. Scoop the specimen hunter had struck again.

Our first mark was on the Stenness Ledges, a patch of rough ground to the West of the Bill, while we waited for the tide to ease enough for us to move to the 7-mile ground. We'd fished there with Ken in the past and caught some splendid pouting of well over 2lb. We waited a while for the first bites, but when they eventually started, we couldn't hook a thing! Hoping for bream, the usual suspects went down with light tackle, but they caught only pouting, enlivened by the odd poor cod. Adrian caught a small conger or two, and we did eventually manage to catch a couple of feisty bream which scrapped well on light gear in the shallow water.

Eventually the tide eased enough to make it sensible to move on to the 7-mile ground, but when we arrived, there was already a bunch of interlopers sat at anchor on Clem's favoured mark, so we had to anchor another spot perhaps half a mile away.



Atlantic chub mackerel, Scomber colias, and Scoop's hands.

Clem set the hook and we waited. Nothing much happened for longer than was strictly comfortable, and we began to wonder whether we'd have been better off staying on the Ledges. Finally, a few small conger decided to feed, but our big baits were being savaged by small fish, so, not having learned their lesson first time round, some of our feeble anglers, and I'm thinking particularly of Tony, Jari and Thomas here, sent down their light gear and small baits to try for bream. Tony made some pathetic excuse about a hiatus hernia

making handling large, angry fish, such a conger or rays, painful and unpleasant, but I looked things up on the Internet and a hiatus hernia could actually make landing manly fish easier and more fun, according to the information that I found on www.true-fishing-and-brexite-facts.co.uk.

They did actually catch a few bream though, which made Tony a very happy man as he does like catching fish, just so long as they aren't too challenging to land. Some of them went well over 3lb, so it was excellent sport. The bigger fish did also decide to put in an appearance, finally, with some double-figure tope, and few more eels and some nice undulates to over 12lb. Overall, it was a very pleasant day, with plenty of fish, plenty of sun and a flat calm sea.

The evening was very jolly, despite the fact that we were unable to persuade Adam to try the delicious steaks at the new Portuguese place, and we ended up at the Gurkha, where, surprise, surprise, certain club members ate until they unable to move, or think, or buy a round. So, no change there, then. We adjourned to the pub, where we were disappointed to find neither Cat nor her daughter.

Day 2

The day dawned as sunny, and almost as windless, as the previous one, as Weymouth clearly tried to make up for forcing us to cancel the previous year's summer trip for the first time ever. Clem was also his usual sunny self, chuntering away about "noddies" and "fuckin' idiots", but I was simply not prepared to return his Superglue to him, not matter how sulky he got.

Mind you, he was more or less spot on with his remarks, as joining our crew of 10 anglers brave and true, we had the redoubtable form of Andy Selby, pasty master of angling, and his sidekick, World Champion and not-as-good-as-me-at-catching-flatfish angler, Ray Barron, come back for more lesions, I mean lessons, in how to catch fish from the Really Wrecked SAC.

As we had not had a decent eel for over two years, we decided to start the day on the inshore wreck where we'd last had some big eels, over to the West, off Abbotsbury. When we arrived in the vicinity, it was clear that some fucker had put nets on it, so anchoring was going to be tricky, but Clem gave it his best shot and we did eventually get the hook down, with a chance at getting at some eels.

It took no more than five minutes for our baits to work their magic, and for the eels to start investigating. Before long, Barks was hauling in something reasonably substantial which turned

out to be a thirty-pounder. At last we had something approaching respectability. I had a fish of a similar size before losing a much bigger one in what felt suspiciously like net. Then, when the eels came on the feed in earnest, we lost fish after fish, most of which felt a good size. Given the position of the net floats, it looked as though the net was between us and the wreck, so all the eels had to do was back down a couple of metres and they were safe.



Tony with a nice bream. Well, I'm not going to say anything sarky now I know his hands are deadly weapons.

We did land the odd fish, but they tended to be the smaller ones. Then Stevie hooked into something decent and, employing the reserves of skill for which he is rightly known, he managed to cajole it away from the net and to the side of the boat for unhooking, where it was pronounced 40lb. Now we were cooking with gas. Shortly after, resident genius and rod-threading supremo, Andy Barker, also landed an eel of a similar size, splitting the Really Eely judging committee down the middle. Luckily, before we came to blows, Chris came to the rescue by landing an eel that was clearly larger than the other two and which Clem estimated to be 45lb.

After several more fish were lost, along with lots of sets of gear, we gave up on the wreck and headed back to the 7-mile ground to see whether we could get on Clem's favoured spot. That wreck clearly has a very good head of decent eels though, and we should definitely pay it another visit.

They say the devil finds work for idle hands, and it's certainly true aboard *Wild Frontier*. Once the anchor was set on the mark, Clem had bugger all to do really, apart from net a few fish (badly) and generally piss about, so he set about hatching another evil plan. He had noticed the day before that Adrian had cleaned the head before making use of it, so he decided to test how serious he was about hygiene. He sat in his cabin, mixing coffee granules, bran and water, concocting something that looked, to the naked eye, pretty much as though the Gurkha had run amok in someone's intestines. This he then loaded in an old bleach bottle and sprayed liberally around the head. Our master prankster then poked his head back into the smallest room on the boat and loudly proclaimed his disgust at what appeared to have been done there.

I looked inside. If someone had been vile and horrid to that extent, they would have been very seriously ill indeed. Clem had sprayed his fake faeces all over the bowl and down the wall, as though someone had downed their trousers and exploded in uncontrolled fashion, like Krakatoa, only with more serious consequences. As if by magic, Adrian appeared, marigolds on, with bleach and sponge in hand. He could barely believe his eyes as he took in the devastation. Things were said about whoever had done this that would have provoked great shame in the perpetrator, if it weren't for the fact that the perpetrator, far from having a dicky tummy and no sense of public responsibility, was sitting in the cabin, laughing his head off.

Meanwhile, away from all this hilarity, we set up a variety of rigs for rays, tope, eels and bream and to start with, the big fish were on the prowl. Despite his best efforts, Tony could not tempt a bream for love nor money, but never mind, because he loves bagging pouting, being that kind of fellow. Meanwhile a few decent fish were taken by the big fish boys, including a nice undulate for Barks, and a 20lb tope to Chris.

Meanwhile, things had not exactly quietened down in the head. Buoyed by the success of his joke first time around, Clem, like all great comics, repeated it. Exactly. The same mix, sprayed in the same way all over everything, followed shortly by him loudly expressing disgust that someone could

be that thoughtless and selfish, again. Up stepped the same saviour, wearing his rubber gloves once more and bearing his sponge and bleach like a sword and shield. It cannot be said that Adrian was happy about this, but to be fair to him, he did set about his unpleasant task with vigour and enthusiasm.

You'd have thought being bent over double laughing at his own joke might have slowed Clem up in other departments, but not a bit of it. When he judged the tide to be right, despite the fact that no bream had been caught, he picked up a rod, dropped down a bait and within two minutes had landed a fine pouting. And then another. A lesser man might have given up at this point, but not Clem, a third bait went down, and he finally snaffled the first bream of the day, followed shortly by the second. Seeing this gave Tony fresh hope and it wasn't long before he was also in on the act, taking the first of a good number of bream he landed that day.



Chris displays a nice tope, while modelling some of the extensive range of club merchandise now available.

Others were also breaming, Ray, who had distinguished himself all day with his banter and self-abuse, much like a mini-Brooksie, though

without Brooksie's sophistication, proceeded to show us all how it was done. Sitting enthroned at the back of the boat, using his long match rod to cast his lead a long way downtide, he caught more and bigger bream than anyone else. Yes, yes, world champion, blah blah blah. One thing noted by all and sundry though, in addition to the catch-rate, was Ray's **refusal to walk the boat** (insert that horror-face emoji again). Now, to be fair to him, he did ask if it was okay to stay where he was, but, having thought about it, the point is more that, really, you shouldn't ask. Our members, as a general rule, are too polite to say no, but not too polite to seethe with indignation at the injustice of it all. Well, not everyone is too polite, but Ray had the good sense to avoid asking Stevie. Gentle words will be had the next time Ray has the pleasure of fishing on one of our trips, and order will be restored.



Heavy metal fanatic and trainee half-Finnish lunatic, Thomas, yanks a breams from its underwater mosh pit and shows it who's boss.

At this point, the third and final phase of Clem's evil plan came into force, as he sprayed the back of Andy Barker's calves with his special mixture, along with the deck behind him, suggesting that Barks was so ill, and so lacking in any form of dignity, or indeed, basic humanity, as to have shat himself on the deck and either not have noticed, or not have cared. Giggling like a schoolgirl Clem then proceeded to mutter about "the dirty bastard" until Adrian noticed. With hesitation, Adrian grabbed the deck-wash and gave poor Andy a thorough hosing. This was actually quite funny, (perhaps less so for Andy himself), though there turned out to be a small fly in the brown and lumpy ointment, as we shall see later.

Things now settled down, as Clem was gaffer-taped to his chair in the cabin, and the bottle containing his mix confiscated, to join the Superglue in being kept by teacher, and we fished out the rest of the day in peace. The big species went off the feed, leaving only bream, and they got increasingly hard to catch. Eventually we tired of the Ray Barron masterclass and headed back to port for a shower and our traditional curry, and what turned out to be an eventful evening.

As this was to be our last summer trip with our friend and skipper, Clem, we treated both him and his lovely wife, Emma, to an evening in the Balti House. Also joining us were Lord and Lady Selby of WIBAC, though obviously as Andy wasn't retiring any time soon, we didn't offer to pay for them. There are limits to our legendary generosity. You can rest assured though, that the day Andy does decided to hang up his pricing gun, joy and celebrations will be unconfined.

In the first of many poor decisions I made that evening, I took the opportunity to return Clem's property (not his awful mixture, obviously, just the Superglue), while things continued in a fairly standard way for a night out at a curry house, with pints of Kingfisher drunk and food ordered. But, on returning from a visit to the little boys' room and putting my specs back on (I'd left them on the table), I noticed a slight stickiness on my hand. Yes. He actually had. The curly-haired fucker had smeared my glasses with Superglue in the hope that they would stick to my nose and ears in comedy fashion. Clem really does want to see me in A & E. Along with the rest of humanity, I suspect. Sadly, his fiendish plot failed, and merely left the lenses of my glasses smeared with dry Superglue in a way that left my vision somewhat impaired. Luckily, I was able, through chipping away for the rest of the evening, to clear enough of the lenses to allow me to drive back the next day with no more danger to other road users than my driving normally entails. I re-confiscated the glue obviously.

However, the Superglue was not the only prank that kept on giving, as Adrian was still pretty unhappy about the events of the day and wanted Barks blackballed from the club for his appalling behaviour. Obviously, if events had actually been as they appeared to be, Andy B would have been kicked out of the club forthwith, or awarded a club trophy, or both, at the discretion of the committee. But, and it is a big 'but', things had not been as they seemed, and Barks was as much a victim as Adrian. I could bear it no longer, I had to do something to put a stop to the bad feeling. Clem was not keen on my plan simply to tell Adrian the

truth, but a man must reap what he sows, so I did just that. Initially Adrian didn't believe me, and would not, until Clem himself assured him that the whole thing was a joke. To be fair to him, Adrian did take it very well, and I think all is now forgiven. I sincerely hope so.

Once that was out the way, the atmosphere improved, for me at least, and the rest of the meal passed without incident apart from some old bore standing up to say nice things about Clem and his skills as a skipper (and as acolyte of Loki), and to award Adrian a special prize of some marigolds and cleaning equipment to commemorate the day.

Then it was off to the pub for a drink and a chat. Except that here we failed to follow the script. Andy and Charlie offered to show us some of the more interesting nightlife available in Weymouth, taking Clem, Emma and Ray with them. I was up for anything after the evening we'd had, and Barks and Tony also tagged along. Everyone else went off to *The Boot*, where I'm sure they had some delicious ale and red wine and had a lovely chat about the events of the past two days, fish, Cat, Clem, pranks and all.

The splitters, on the other hand, ended up outside the *Duke of Cornwall*, a very lively pub indeed. The bar was both too full and too music-filled for us to stay inside. Actually, it was both of those things on the pavement outside, inside was more like the right-hand panel of Heironymus Bosch's famous triptych *The Garden of Earthly Delights*. We drank some beer, I tried to Superglue Clem's hand to his pint glass, and then we moved on, leaving Clem and Emma to return home and, I hope, for Clem to consider the error of his ways. Fat chance.

Next up was a gay nightclub called *The Closet*, obviously. We arrived to enjoy the last few numbers from a drag artiste, who wasn't half bad, and then the disco started in earnest. I have to say the music was excellent, and Andy, Ray and I mounted the small stage where we danced both enthusiastically and skilfully, to the delight of the crowd, and the others who had joined us on the stage. Andy, Charlie and Tony, for some reason, didn't fancy strutting their funky stuff, but I'm pretty sure they enjoyed our performance as much as we did.

From there we moved on to a delightful establishment called *Peekaboos*, a venue where Andy and Charlie regularly entertain the great and the good of the fishing industry in the company of some delightful and friendly girls. The dress code was quite relaxed, with trainers and jeans perfectly acceptable, though the code was especially relaxed for some of the girls, who for some reason

appeared to have forgotten their clothes altogether. Luckily it was quite warm inside, so I don't think any of them caught a chill. Despite being with the Selbys, who were clearly important dignitaries, well-known in the club, we were not permitted into the VIP area. I think this was probably due to Ray bringing the overall classiness of our party down somewhat. Despite this, I have to say that Ray was on top mini-Brooksie form and was thoroughly entertaining all evening; as were Andy and Charlie, obviously, but then, both of them would have *walked the boat*.



Meet the Weymouth Massive, fresh from their dancing triumph on the podium in The Closet.

Mr and Mrs Selby then arranged for me to have a lovely chat with one of their young friends called Layla or Lala or Po or something like that. She was very friendly and we talked about her young child and how she was saving up to go to university to continue her education. Oh, to be young, and single, and dressed in my underwear in public (again)... Barks also had a chat with another friendly sort called Bustina or Stormy, I think, and he and she hit it off in a big way. There was talk of an autumn wedding, and in the end, Tony and I had to wrestle young Andy away from the bar where he was threatening to remortgage his house

in order to buy the very reasonably-priced bottles of champagne to celebrate his forthcoming nuptials.

Having dragged Andy and his open wallet policy away from the bar, we decided that perhaps it was time we all headed home before we were all overwhelmed by the sheer romance of the situation. Tony was very helpful in this regard, showing himself to have hitherto unguessed reserves of steel and resolve, which was handy in persuading our smitten amigo that it was time to go. We thanked Andy, Charlie, Ray and our lovely hosts for their hospitality, and for a thoroughly entertaining evening from start to finish. I definitely recommend the Selbys' *Weymouth Nightlife Guided Tour Experience* to anyone looking for a top night out. On the way home, Tony gave us an insight into his past and revealed that he might actually have a black belt in posh foreign fighting, so he's now my new best friend, and I want him on my side when we're picking teams for a bundle.

Remarks were made at breakfast about us dirty stop-outs, but we maintained a dignified silence about the entire evening. Or do I mean I recounted the whole thing to anyone who would listen? I can't remember now, but I do remember feeling that, as usual, Weymouth had provided us with more than its share of absurd, ridiculous and surreal moments, and some fish too. Well done that town.

Monday 20th August

Our second trip out with Steve Green aboard the climbing-frame-cum-modern-art-installation-cum-occasional-charter-boat that is *Proteus* was at least as successful as our last, and may well, I think, turn out to be the last time we enjoy its quirks and peculiarities. To help him with his duties, Steve was joined on the boat by Cisco, who was not, as you might assume, a crewman with a bit of a wanky nickname, but his dog, who assisted in all kinds of ways throughout the day. Any job that required dashing around between people's legs, looking for scraps that might be edible, sitting on people's feet or lurking as a low-level obstacle on the deck, Cisco was there, mucking in with enthusiasm, much like his master. Some might say that having an additional trip hazard aboard a boat already containing eight of the most unsteady, incompetent idiots known to man was not the most sensible or safest policy, but we prefer to think of it as an excellent way of keeping everyone on their toes. It's just a shame Kim wasn't in the party, as he would have risen (or fallen) to the challenge with particular aplomb, I'm sure.

The trip was potentially as very interesting one, with cod being taken on wrecks and flatfish on the banks, so the mood was generally good as we boarded the boat. This took a slight turn for the worse when, as before, Steve took us off to fuel the boat before fishing, which felt like a waste of our time, but never mind, eh? We were heading out to sea on a calm day to catch monsters.

After steaming in a generally South Easterly direction for about an hour and three quarters, we began drifting over a low, but well spread wreck. What it lacked in height, the wreckage more than made up for in tackle-hungry snags. Sadly, it did not appear to be heaving with the target species, though the same could not be said of pouting, which were very eager to snaffle whatever was sent their way. Uncharitably, Colin suggested that, despite the wreck being spread over approximately 200 acres of prime underwater real estate, Steve was managing to drift down the side of it.



Andy shows off a magnificent 3lb codling, his proudest moment all year.

This ludicrous suggestion was proven false by the amount of tackle Adam kept sacrificing to the wreck, and by the cod that Steve took exceptional delight in catching just to show everyone how it should be done. Except that, in fact, he didn't show anyone how it should be done, or offer much in the way of advice, he just grabbed a rod and fished, when he might have been better employed netting the odd fish that we poor fools in the crew did manage to hook, making tea and coffee, or offering tips on what the fish were taking and what weight to use to better avoid tangles.

On the other hand, had he not put all the anglers on the port side of the boat, only to set up the drifts so our lines were going back under the boat, perhaps there would have been fewer tangles. On the other, other hand, had he done that, he would have had less room to fish on his own on the downtide side of the boat, so in purely self-interested angling terms, it was an excellent manoeuvre.

The fishability of the boat, previously discussed at length, already slightly challenged by the charming metal sculpture it sported, was further improved by a new innovation - that of leaving the fenders tied to the rails, in board, to roll around the scuppers and generally provide a secondary hazard to footing, only slightly less mobile than Cisco. It would obviously be much too much extra work to untie them, stow them safely and then retie them again at the end of the day. Likewise it was unreasonable of Simmo to expect, when catching mackerel for bait, having caught one which bled on the gunwale a bit, not to receive an earful from the skipper for messing up his lovely boat. Or of Scoop to feel aggrieved when Steve rightly told him off for accidentally stepping on his dog, which was, after all only doing his job of patrolling the decks, tidying up anything that looked like it might be food, like you'd expect on any decent charter boat. Apparently, as befits a top skipper, Lyle has a whole pack of feral dogs roaming his deck throughout every trip, and a crew considers it an honour to have one of their members torn to shreds and eaten in front of them. Obviously, Frank has sabre toothed tigers for his regulars and is planning on getting a pack of velociraptors for weekend trips.

With nothing much happening on the wreck for our lucky crew, there was a general feeling that a visit to the banks to try for flatties might not be any worse. Steve took some persuading - after all, he was catching - but eventually he gave in to the clamour from his paying customers and set off for the banks. Once there, he set to drifting, but as before, the tide was so slow that mostly what took the baits were dogfish. Barks had an undulate of almost double-figures, Sicknote caught a thornback of around 5lb and Scoop, much to everyone's amazement, landed a small turbot, but apart from that, it was doggies all the way. The tide slackened and dropped away to nothing, and rather than wait for it to turn, Steve took the crew back to the wreck they'd fished before, for more of the same excellent quality of fishing. In the end, we had perhaps 15 codling to about 4lb, though obviously if everyone had fished as well as Steve there would have been far more.

Now I know I haven't spent too much time describing the fishing on the trip but, to my mind, reporting the complaints circulating by email after the trip is much more entertaining. Who knew that the normally amiable Simmo would be such a dour and uncompromising bastard, with such a wicked turn of phrase, or that Colin even knew how to use email? It was as though the whole lot of them were applying *en masse* for consideration for the *Steve Newham Trophy for Optimism and Cheer*. One might even start to think that it hadn't been a particularly great day out overall, but to be fair to Steve, he was really grumpy from start to finish and didn't make any cups of tea or coffee, so no, it hadn't.



What a lovely way to round things off, with this picture of a vicious snapping thing, holding a lobster.

If that doesn't persuade you to come out with us, I don't know what will, although if you browse the list of bookings for this year, you may be struck by an absence of trips aboard *Proteus*. Colin has suggested that all of you should club together and buy me a solo day out with Steve, apparently forgetting that I am such good company that I bet Steve would be great and that we'd have a lovely day of it. But I don't suppose it will ever happen, and I'll just have to keep paying my own way, despite all I do for you.

Right, that's your lot. If any of you have read all the way to here then you deserve a medal, and if you come to the dinner, maybe you'll get one. See you there, or maybe, if we're all really lucky, on a boat.

Cheers,
Ben