

I had been contacted by John in 2009, about collecting his boat from Holland, where it had been for sale for 3 years, to Inverness Marina but circumstances dictated that this was not to happen until 2010. The marina in Holland had persuaded John that the North Sea in September was just too rough so they got another 9 months berthing fees.

John had driven, from his home in rural Perthshire, to Newcastle and taken the ferry to IJmuiden, thence to his boat in Monnickendam, to the north west of Amsterdam. He then picked the three of us up, Bill, Gingo and myself, at Schipol Airport on the Monday. When we got to the baggage claim, Gingo dashed off through the green channel, probably for a smoke, without collecting his bags. So Bill and I, picked up the kit bags and went through customs to find John waiting outside. Gingo turned up from somewhere, after 5 minutes and we all walked the mile, or more, to John's car.

He drove us around the Amsterdam ring road and out into the surrounding countryside, to a pleasant little marina, owned by the selling agent.

John kindly prepared a meal that evening and set about explaining the workings of Inga of Lorne, a 42 foot Dutch (Scheepswerf de Steven BV), steel, gaff rigged ketch which looked like a cross between a sailing boat and a canal boat. Above, she had a large open deck aft, with a tiller for emergency steering, a deck saloon and wooden main and mizzen masts, all designed to be taken down an erected by two people. Below, she was spacious with a sleeping cabin for two in the forepeak, a dining area and galley, the saloon, with the wheel and controls, and masses of storage.

We spent a pleasant evening with a glass of wine or two and John returned to his hotel. We had noticed one or two mosquitos but little did we realise that the boat was infested with them and each came back with scores of bites.

The next morning, John returned and took Gingo to a supermarket, so he could stock up on tobacco (he tried Van Nelle as he had a grandmother called Nellie), filled up three emergency jerry cans with diesel and finished explaining about the boat.

We cast off at 09.00 (all times in BST, Holland is an hour in front of us) and slowly made our way through the very shallow waters in the bay, turned north to go around the causeways of Marken Island and then south and west on the Markermeer. There was a lot of traffic going every which way and a weather eye was needed. After a couple of hours we reached the main channel heading south east to the North Sea Canal and had our first experience of large Dutch barges, some low and laden, some high on the water, but all going hell for leather.

The first obstacle was the swing bridge, Schellingwouderbrug, which opens every twenty minutes from the hour, for traffic. We just missed one opening, so slowed down and gently motored forwards and aft until it opened again. All the bridges and locks use a traffic light system for controlling the passage of boats and as soon as the green light is showing there is a mad dash. Just after the bridge you have to swing to starboard and follow the signs for the Sport Lock at Oranjesluizen, which is used by small and pleasure craft. As the lock was not open, we tied up, starboard side to, on a jetty available for just that purpose. When the light turned green, all of us were directed, not into the Sport Lock, but the one next to it, and got in with only a hire boat at the rear, having any problems.

Up we went in very short order, left the lock and headed west along the canal. The first couple of miles, we stayed outside the main channel, as advised in the almanac, and then through the centre of Amsterdam, where ferries and lots of boats were criss-crossing all the time. After Amsterdam there are the industrial areas with, not so many ferries, but ships overtaking arriving eventually at

Ijmuiden Locks. Crossing the canal to the southern shore, we tied up for a short time and entered the southernmost of 4 locks, the Kleine Sluis. The lock is quite deep but has posts inset in the wall to tie up to as there is no one to take lines on the shore. The lock cycled and we then headed into Seaport Marina to fill up with diesel, the dock being tucked up in a corner to starboard as you enter. Having spent no more than 15 minutes refueling, we went out onto the North Sea at 16.00 and set course for Smiths Knoll, eighty miles away.

The wind was light and certainly not strong enough to sail a 20 ton boat with a small sail area, at any reasonable speed. So we motored quite happily until the engine died from fuel starvation. John had mentioned that the boat had been sitting in Holland for 3 years with a three-quarters full fuel tank and that there had been a problem with diesel bug, which he thought he had cured with a fuel additive. The problem was worse though because, when Bill changed the primary fuel filter, it had rust particles in it. We started off again and decided to pull into Grimsby to fill up the diesel tank and sort out a couple of other minor problems, together with engine oil and water checks. Just as we were approaching the Humber Estuary at 18.30 the next day, the motor died again but replacing the primary filter was not enough, the two secondary filters also had to be changed this time.

Negotiating the Humber at night, which is a very busy place, without the aid of a chartplotter, is quite a challenge, bouy hopping along the southern shore until reaching the lock at the entrance to Grimsby fish docks. Inga just about fitted into the lock so we were able to get in without waiting for sufficient tide for both gates to be open, which is usually two hours either side of high water. Once in Fish Dock No. 1, we headed to the bottom right hand corner and down the short passage to the marina in Fish Dock No. 2.

After tying up at 23.55, we had a couple of beers and a dram before turning in for the night.

The next morning, after Bill did the repairs, we all walked into town to do some food shopping and get some fly killer to try and solve the mosquito problem.

We set off again at 14.30, just after both lock gates had opened, and this gave us the benefit of a couple of hours favourable tide down the Humber with a further five hours of tide going North. Coming out of the Humber was easier in the daylight although it did involve crossing the main shipping lane, having first asked permission of Humber VTS.

Heading North into a northerly force 4, the first obstacle was Flamborough Head where we arrived just as the tide turned against us. There was still a heavy sea running from the previous day's wind and it made rounding this headland very bouncy but Gingo coped very well on the wheel. The rough sea had stirred up the contents of the fuel tank and we were having to change the primary filter every 12 hours and the two secondaries every 24 hours, from that time. By the end, Bill could change a filter in 5 minutes.

The next day, the wind changed direction from north to south and the sea started settling down. By the time we came abreast of St Abbs Head, the sea surface was smooth, apart from the big long swell from the north which was not a problem. As we were starting to run short of fuel filters, I thought about making for Montrose but eventually decided that Peterhead was a better option with more chance of obtaining spares there.

We arrived at Peterhead at 13.45 the next day and filled the diesel tank before tying up in the marina to enjoy a well earned rest.

Before we arrived in Peterhead, I had contacted John and he had started telephoning around to

obtain spare filters but eventually only managed to get a promise to have them delivered by Monday lunchtime. While in the marina, we talked to quite a few nice boaties from different countries and on the pontoon opposite, a Dutch Halberg-Rassy 40 was tied up. Amoungst ourselves, we started talking about places in Holland and Gingo asked the name of the town where we had picked up the boat. Monnickendam, I replied. He explained that Totter, a worthy from Cromarty, had worked as a welder in Holland and would ask him about it. As a welder, Gingo added, Totter was more dangerous to metal than rust.

Bill and Gingo went out to the town and I fell asleep at 17.00. I woke at 22.00 and had a walk to the music marquee on the opposite shore where the finale of Peterhead Scottish Week was taking place. It was £5 to get in so I gave it a miss and wandered back to th boat to watch the spectacular firework display.

Sunday was a lazy day, reading papers, and Gingo cooking a wonderful roast chicken dinner. We did, however take the opportunity of giving the outside of Inga a good wash down and scrub in fresh water, removing most of the rust streaks.

Monday morning was tedious, just waiting for the filters to arrive, which they eventually did at 13.00.

We immediately got under way, calling Peterhead Harbour Radio for permission to leave port and turned north for Ratray Head on a smooth sea with the wind behind us. After rounding the headland, the sails were raised and stayed that way for most of that leg, the first time that we had favourable wind, neither being dead on the nose nor too little.

After an uneventful 16 hours, we arrived at Inverness Marina early morning, where we gve the boat a final clean and set off for home.

Gwyn

28 July 2010

