



MANCHESTER CRUISING ASSOCIATION

A Life on the Ocean Wave

18 May 2006 John Goode

John wowed us all with his fiddle and a couple of jaunty tunes to warm us up. Or was it to induce an atmosphere of submission? He's been playing for less than a year with just one formal lesson from a timid spinster more at home with fragile and reluctant children than an alarming Master Mariner. But he's disappointingly good (in the way that estate agents have houses as "deceptively spacious") and, before we knew what had happened, he was away on a roller-coaster tale of his life.

From a sea-going family, he was raised in Brixham and himself went off to the sea when he was 12 on the 4-masted barque **Peking** and then for a spell on the **Winston Churchill**. Then to officers college (my notes just say "budgies in salmon sandwich" but there must have been more to it than that) and to sea again as an apprentice. His advancement was rapid thanks to God, native cunning and (he didn't claim this himself) competence. God took a hand as they left the River Plate in the hands of a pilot. John was sent below to rouse the Third Mate but he couldn't, principally because the Third Mate was stone dead. Leaping to the bridge he told the Master who's response was: "No he's not! Not until after we've dropped the pilot". And thus it was that the Third Mate was buried at sea without the bureaucratic complexities of taking a corpse back to Montevideo and John became the new Third Mate at 17. How so young? This is the cunning part. He was the only person who could deliver a full mug of tea to the Captain in a gale. How did he do it? Full mug in galley. Step outside. Take large swig and retain in mouth. Walk to bridge. Before entering, regurgitate tea into mug. Enter smiling and hand ample mug to Master.

By 18 he was a Second Mate and shipping Agent Orange to Vietnam; a year later he made First Mate. Though cared for in far-off places by many a girl with a heart-of-gold, they were dangerous times on rough ships with dodgy cargoes. He saw three mutinies, one in Liverpool. And that seems to have been enough, two Master's tickets or not. He swallowed the anchor and was responsible for 90% of the motorway barriers on the M6 and M62 before, 20 years ago, he bought the Southern School of Sailing. So the anchor came back, rather like the tea.

He read us his version (unpublished) of a modern "Sea Fever" written for an age of GPS, radar, electronic charting and fridges and then we all had a pint. After that he turned to cruising philosophy which was: understand, enjoy and be not beholden to electronics. He cautioned on GPS not just because it failed but because in some parts of the world the charts were less accurate (particularly in longitude) than you might believe. And cockups are just too easy. He quoted an example of three experienced sailors on a charter boat all getting the boat speed wrong because their pocket GPSs were still set to km/hr rather than knots - as was the boat's main set too.

Should the electrics fail you can get the boat speed easily enough by tossing a piece of wet toilet paper over the bow and timing its passage along the boat. With that information and compass readings you can plot a rough course. In this, and so much else, his commonsense approach could rescue many of us from embarrassment or worse.

For a leading RYA Examiner his views on qualifications were robust. He pointed out that 18 out of the last 20 deaths on cruising boats happened when Yachtmasters were in charge. Overconfidence was as dangerous as the sea.

And the organisation of sailing? He was concerned that the RYA now had so many boating interests in its hands that the cruising yachtsman might be ignored. He saw a risk that the organisation might become so thoroughly commercial that it no longer represented the members' interests. I suspect you'll find more in his Sailing Today because Sailing Toady (his name) it's definitely not.

Rather like his campaign for more reasonably- priced moorings, an issue that eats at the heart of sailing.

It was one of his Masterclasses. Maybe not yet in fiddling, but in enthusiasm, sailing skills and entertainment.

More tea Captain?

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