

Newsletter date October 2025

## It's been a disappointing season for many

What a season we have had! The whole season has been beset with difficulties and disasters. The weather has been so unkind to us in so many ways, the club cruise, AKA Commodores cruise, although started well enough descended into a farce! Four boats, *Baccarat*, *Moonshadow*, *Sulaire* and *Moonshine*, transited the canal in pleasant enough weather. However on arrival at Oban, where we met up with *Tennessee Waltz* and *Lazybones*, the weather deteriorated spectacularly and we were stormbound for 3 full days! The next problem we encountered was that with the poor weather to continue we were unable to remain in Oban town marina as stay is limited to 3 days. We tried to book into Kerrera but because of the forecast this too was full. We headed back north for an overnight at Linnhe Marine and decided just to amble back through the canal homeward. *Baccarat* did venture a little further than Oban but he too returned early. There have been suggestions to arrange a later date for future cruises as we have had 4 poor cruises in a row when starting July 1<sup>st</sup>. Another club boat *Aragorn*, Robert and Caroline Jollye were cruising Shetland when this was going on. Their article appears later in this issue.

The next problem to hit us on 4<sup>th</sup> August was **Storm Floris**, when hurricane wind speeds were recorded in the Cromarty Firth, two of our boats dragged their moorings. *Bee Bee* came to rest about 100m to the west of the harbour bridge and for some strange reason that is as far as it dragged. *Asterias* on the other hand did not fair well at all. Her foresail unfurled and the wind strength drove her across the bay and past the outer wall of the harbour ending up on the beach in front of the club compound.



Like many in the club (myself included) he only had her insured for third party liability with Basic Boat Ins.

Graeme had initially intended to repair *Asterias* but on closer inspection he realised she was damaged beyond repair. The keel had become detached with cracks on inside of hull, there was a hole on port side and a large area of fibreglass on the hull had delaminated after calculating the costs involved he realised it would more economical to buy another boat.

Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> October, we were hit with **Storm Amy**, Just before breakfast on the Saturday morning I had a call from Robert Hogg to say that Sea Jay was missing and that Moonshine seemed to be sitting on Sea Jay's mooring, I joined him in the clubhouse to investigate. We could not figure out how this had happened. As the sea state was still too dangerous to get out to the moorings we decided to wait it out. The storm continued all day Saturday. Sunday morning I got a message to say one of our boats was on the beach behind the compound (same place *Asterias* had come to grief) On arrival there I could see that it was Moonshine, a Westerly Centaur belonging to Graeme Findlay, Ronald Young and Ryan McManus were both there, Ryan had been training and dressed in shorts and t shirt. I suggested that he might be able to get aboard and do something. I called Graeme on mobile, determined that there were keys aboard, asked him where battery isolator and sea cock for engine was. I relayed this info to Ryan who did indeed get aboard start the engine and take it into harbour.



Later on the Sunday, there were reports of a boat being found on the beach to the east of Covesea Skerries Lighthouse, Lossiemouth. The boat's name was *Sea Jay*. It had travelled 25 miles across Moray Firth and somehow got through the Skerries without sinking, or grounding on the Skerries.



Robert made his way to Lossiemouth to see what could be done. He organised a teleporter machine to move it up the beach above the HW mark. The following day, Monday, he returned to find that the boat had been broken into and all equipment of any value had been removed by the raiders. After a full inspection to assess the damage it became clear that it was beyond repair with cracks and holes in the hull. Negotiations with the insurer would now take place for the wreck removal.

The club Crane out was the next, it was initially scheduled for Monday 6<sup>th</sup> Oct but with the forecast for continuing strong winds it was moved to Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> October. It was still blowing pretty hard that morning and the Crane driver was doubtful if we could complete the lift without being brought to a halt because of wind strength. As it turned out we did manage to complete the task, although one and a half hours over the time.. The delays encountered were nothing to do with the weather but more to do with boats and cradles not being properly maintained adding unnecessary time to the operation.

There will now be two important items for discussion at club level

1. Moorings, how to improve stability of blocks and gear to prevent dragging.
2. Maintenance of cradles and boats to ensure smooth running of crane in/out operations

# Aragorn – Tour of Shetland and Orkney – Summer 2025

Robert & Caroline Jollye

As ever, another season started late despite best laid plans. A lift out and what should have been a quick clean, ended up in having to have the rudder removed as it had split down the joining seam despite having only been fabricated 4 years ago. So, that needed draining, rinsing and repairing before we could even start. In mid-June we finally left Amble marina in Northumberland and headed north. As this was our first sailing expedition for the year, we took it “easy” and headed the 40 miles to Eyemouth. In fact we had a nice sail, up inside the Farne Islands with lots of puffins around. Next was the overnigher to Peterhead avoiding the enormous wind farms and wait for the weather to get to Shetland. We had planned to go to Lerwick, but on ringing the harbour master, we found out there was a race from Bergen to Lerwick due to arrive the same time as us and there was currently a Dutch regatta filling the marina, so it would be heaving – instead we decided to head to Symbister on Walsay (pronounced Walsa). The Shetland Island Council (SIC) provides piers with huge tractor tyres to tie up to. No electric, no water, no showers and a ladder if you are lucky for the price of £29.04 per night. We felt this was rather steep – almost south coast prices. However they did do a monthly rate of £120 for a 35ft yacht which was valid in any SIC marina including Fair Isle. The toilets were ones used by ferry passengers and the shower was in the leisure centre 30mins walk away. At least you could go and have a swim and then a shower if you were so inclined! Mind you, you can see that the harbour wasn't really for little boats.



Aragorn (the little blue one) was dwarfed by two of the about 8 pelagic fishing boats in Shetland registered at Whalsay and thanks to George, we found out that Whalsay is “millionaires Island” and now we can understand why. There were no obvious manifestations of wealth, but the local shop had some very exotic things for sale alongside the normal basics to be expected. Talking to locals in different places during our trip we learnt more. Apparently the trawlers employ their crews, who are extremely well paid, all year round, but in reality can sometimes work only 3-4 weeks max a year if they have reached their seasonal quotas of herring and mackerel.

The boats are able catch up to 350 tonnes in one haul using a vacuum system to transfer the catch from the net to the boat and the boat to the dock and landing a catch can fetch a £1m, or more and we were told that a pelagic fishing licence on its own would be worth £20m, without the trawler!!!

We stayed in Symbister a couple of days. As there was another weather system due, ahead of it we decided to sail up to Whale firth on Yell, opposite mid Yell which was a deep inlet, past a lot of mussel beds, which we hoped would offer protection. It meant sailing up under jib round Lunna Ness, past Sullom Voe on the west side of Brother Island as the wind was very strong from the east (behind us). We spent a long stressful night under anchor in continuous 35knot winds, torrential rain, thunder and lightning- which apparently they never get in Shetland, hoping that the anchor holding was good after an initial struggle to get it to bite. It did but not a fun time.

We stayed a couple of days as the weather took a while to calm down, but when it did, it allowed us an excellent passage around Muckle Flugga where we took time under engine to go and look at the huge gannet colony.

Luckily the roost (race) around Holm of Skaw was very calm so we were able to take a passage closer to land around the corner to arrive at Balta Sound (another crap SIC pier!) Here everywhere is the most “northerly”..... So we drank in the most northerly pub, basically an industrial unit with a bar in it and had dinner in the most “northerly” hotel – which actually Showers here were in a fabulous newly renovated boat club with an honesty/donation box.



Quite funnily a chap got locked in the toilet and with no window, we had to call the guy who had done the renovation to come and take the door frame apart, that he had only recently put up, to let the guy out.

Taking advantage of the westerly winds we headed to out Skerries, the most westerly Shetland Island, on the inside of Fetlar, hoping to see Orcas. Unfortunately, no Orcas but a good sail out to Skerries (another crap SIC pier) but this time with facilities provided by the local community in a lovely ferry waiting room.



In fact the day we arrived, Caroline got invited to a "Makin and Yakin" session in the waiting room. So despite only being a crocheter, she met 6 ladies of the 36 population of Skerries and had a nice cup of tea, knitting and chatting. The Shetlanders are a very welcoming group of people and probably out of curiosity always want to talk to you! We spent a couple of enjoyable days walking around the island. Unfortunately there is no pub here and we did not discover the shop until the second visit but we had plenty of stores on board.

Finally, Lerwick was free of racing and cruising boats so we headed out as the weather was due to close in a bit for a week or so. There is a southerly exit from Skerries which is quite exciting making sure you kept to the leading lights (behind you ) and missing the huge rocks with channel markers, but we figured it was less lively than the normal NE exit, which is where the swell and wind was coming from. We moored alongside a boat from Poole in the main harbour at Lerwick wher we stayed for the next ten days or so.

After getting out on our pushbike over the island of Bressay to visit the RSPB island of Noss and getting on a bus to Scalloway, we decided to hire a car to visit the rest of the mainland and some other islands as it was clear we would not be sailing anytime soon. We enjoyed touring round mainland and even went back to Whale Firth on Yell by car to see where we had anchored during the storm. On the ferry out from Vidlin to Whalsay, another island we wanted to visit by car, can you believe but Robert saw an Orca, Caroline had stayed in the car for the 20 minute crossing, so she was rather annoyed when I got back. After that we discovered there is a Facebook page that track Cetacean movements around Shetland, so from then on we continued to keep a close eye on that to see if we could find them.

In fact , the next time we went sailing we headed out deliberately under motor along the coast towards Dock of Lingness, an anchorage off Eswick to see if we could see Orcas looking for seals, but to no avail.. However the anchorage was peaceful as described in the Clyde Cruising Club instructions. Our main challenge was in fact to get rid of the plague of flies that had appeared as we left Lerwick. My midge nets being used against flies (Shetland doesn't have midges )

The story was that the incinerator in Lerwick burns rubbish to heat the water for the social housing in Lerwick but Shetland doesn't generate enough rubbish, so they import it from Orkney. Its the transportation of rubbish that apparently brings the flies. We continued on our search for Orcas rounding Lunning to an anchorage at Vidlin where Robert had seen the Orcas hoping they had found a good hunting ground but guess they were all full of seal and didn't need to eat anything else! Robert certainly had his workout getting the anchor up the following morning as we had inadvertently ended up in an are of kelp- Wow what a challenge that was! The first time we have really used the anchor winch rather than body strength to get the anchor up. We don't have an electric windlass.



Back to Skerries again as we liked the island and the boat club and the wind was in the right direction, although the sea was very confused with two different swells. With hindsight, we should have gone directly into the south entrance which would have been more sheltered, but instead we went to the north entrance, had a look but ended up going round the island to the south. In Skerries we met a local who told us about Lerwick Marina at Gremista where it was £50 for a month on a pontoon with water, Electric was about 20p per unit, paid for by feeding a meter with £1 coins. OK they had a basic toilet, but with water on the pontoon and electric, having showers would not be an issue!

For the remaining time in Shetland we wanted to anchor more so went to Fetlar where we spent an uncomfortable night sideways on to the swell because the wind went to the East. However had we put out a kedge anchor to keep us into the swell and original wind direction, the following day it would have been a nightmare trying to get the kedge up because of the change in wind direction to being right up the chuff! Burra Voe on Yell was a nice little place, against a harbour wall (not SIC harbour!) with good facilities as they also had a camp site, and we could get washing done. Just an honestly box for mooring fees.



On our way back to Symbister, again motoring along the coast watching for Orca, Caroline spotted a minke. It was a way off at the start, but Robert cut the engine and we drifted for about half an hour while the minke was fishing around the boat, when it suddenly surfaced right next to the boat. We could see the white of its throat and the ends of its fins as it dived underneath the boat. It was quite scary, but at the same time we also felt very privileged to be that close to a whale the size of Aragorn!

Finally back to Symbister on Whalsay for a couple of nights before heading to Lerwick marina (not Lerwick harbour) at Gremista. We had a bit of a challenge because as we left Symbister, it was getting very foggy. Not a problem we thought, we had radar. Well we thought we did. Motoring on carefully, we tried resetting the system, checking the electrics etc because we had tried out the radar in Amble before we set off and it was working. Anyway it did not want to start up and we were going over our plans for getting into the narrow part of the passage down to Lerwick, when the fog cleared – Phew! Luckily Lerwick marina had a Raymarine agent at the entrance who managed to source a new quantum radar dome for us (nothing of Raymarine's seems fixable anymore and it is always out of warranty!) – ouch!

We stayed a week at Gremista waiting for the radar to catch the ferry from Aberdeen and we were able to get it back on the mast so we could get going again.

We had a nice wind to get to Fair Isle about 35 miles away and there, the SIC wall was even worse than anywhere else we had been, but fortunately there were bigger boats already tied up to the two spaces, so we had to raft. For once we didn't mind! Again no, toilets, showers, water or electric for our £29.04, but there is a bird observatory that was rebuilt after a fire and completed this year, where we could get showers with a £5 donation (each time!!!) The harbour was very open to northerly swells so a bit uncomfortable, but if you happen to be against the wall, the harbour does provide some very big fenders to help give you extra protection. The twice weekly ferry connection to Shetland mainland is pulled out onto a slipway between trips.

Fair Isle offers some good guided walks from the observatory, but the whole island felt a bit more crowded than we were used to in Shetland. As for SIC payment for the berthing, there was a good ruse in that old notices had been left up which indicated that you could pay £30 for any size boat and stay as long as you wanted. Unfortunately we knew this not to be the case (honest that we are), so we apologise in advance for anyone believing this still to be the case as we advised SIC of the discrepancy which they should now have fixed coz we were p\*\*\*\*d off that we had to pay £120 when others didn't! Still the ability to get up right close to puffins made up for the minor annoyance as they were quite used to people from the observatory watching them!



Yet again, another storm was heading our way – Storm Floris, so we needed a safer place to stay. Phoning in advance to Kirkwall in Orkney, we found there was a regatta booked in and there was no space, so we went to Pierowall in Westray. Stupidly we had also warned a big French boat in Fair Isle about the regatta, and consequently they took the nice berth that had been arranged for us in Westray!



The difficulty was the pontoons were east west or north south. We got the east west pontoon and of course the storm was coming in from the east..... at the start. Again local fishermen had offered some very big fenders which we took, as the issue for us having a low freeboard is that we could disappear under the pontoon in the gusts. These fenders were a saving grace. The first part of the storm came in from the east at 40knots and for about 8 hours during the day we were being blown over onto the pontoon. We then entered the eye of the storm (980mb) and had an amazingly calm, sunny few hours where we went for a walk and enjoyed the peace before we knew the second, stronger half would come in from the west. That was the fiercest winds we have been in. The wind strength recorded by the French boat and confirmed at Westray airport was over 70knots. This time we were being blown off and quite regularly there would be a torrent of water come down onto the boat, which we thought in the dark was rain.

We found out later that this was sea water being blown over the harbour wall, which is wide enough for cars, and onto us! The fetch from the beach to the wall was only a quarter of a mile at most... It was ferocious. We were never so pleased to see morning unscathed other than having lost the wind vane at the top of the mast! Thank goodness for the fenders. We enjoyed a day or so to recover before heading down to Kirkwall once we knew that boats had started to move again, so we could get into the harbour.

As the weather in August was being very fickle, we hired a car in Kirkwall to see the tourist sites – Ring of Brodgar, Stones of Stenness, Italian Chapel, Scara Brae etc and had planned to take the boat over to Stromness and into Scapa flow, but the weather wasn't playing. Too much strong westerly winds, so decided to use them to head home. Unfortunately we had a commitment of Caroline's brother's 60<sup>th</sup> birthday otherwise we would have headed into Cromarty, but we ran out of time so scooting quickly from Kirkwall to Wick to Whitehills, Eyemouth and then home in Amble. All in all we covered nearly 1000 miles in just under 11 weeks and saw a lot of Shetland and Orkney, but as always there is more to explore next year starting with Scapa flow and then the Hebrides.

Next year, 2026 we will hopefully be starting in May and finally managing to get to Cromarty, but who knows? After all we are going sailing....

# A date with Amy

By Danny Coutts

From the start of the season, I have been having a constant problem with my Engine high temp alarm coming on. Early in September, I decided to strip my heat exchanger, clean it thoroughly and flush all my pipework. I also fitted a new thermostat and expansion tank cap. After many hours of work and trying to seal the pipework I had removed, the job was complete. I finally put *Tennessee Waltz* back together and decided to make one last attempt to get out to the West.



So on Sunday 28th September the ever faithful Thori, we set sail, departing Muirtown Basin at 09:30 we proceeded towards loch Ness. I found myself constantly watching the coolant alarm. All was well as we entered Loch Ness and the sun was out. You couldn't ask for more. Ian McBay phoned to ask if engine was behaving. At that time, I had approx 6 miles to run to Fort Augustus. No sooner had I said all was well, than the bloody alarm yet again went off. I had invested in a infrared thermometer and all seemed to be within the engine parameters. However with the constant alarm and light on, it caused me concern. I throttled back and nursed it to Fort Augustus arriving at 16:00. There were no lock keepers to be found but the boat in front of me. Informed me they had been told it would be

10:30 Monday morning 10:30 came and went. At 11:30 before a lock keeper came round to say the bridge could not open and as was single handed I could not go up anyway! By 14:00 the bridge was swinging. I was informed I couldn't come up until 09:30 Tuesday. However, they were doing three locking down to clear the boats that were still stuck at the top. So it was 14:30 I finally made it to the top. In the time I was waiting I had read up about spurious alarms on my engine. So I ordered a new sensor for the block. It also said sometimes a bad connection or faulty earth can also bring in an alarm. I spent Wednesday tracing wires and connectors. Cleaning every one I found

Maggieann offered to take the sensor up to me on Thursday morning and duly arrived at 1030, this was the first I had heard about Amy! Maggieann decided to come along to Banavie with me, where Irene, my daughter intended to join us on Friday evening.

The engine ran perfectly with the alarm remaining silent and we arrived in Banavie at 17:30 on Thursday evening after a lovely dry day. I was now checking the wind strengths for Amy by the hour!

Friday was torrential rain and with the forecast Irene decided to delay coming to meet till Saturday morning. By this time Scottish Canals had put out an e mail saying the canal would be closed to all traffic movements on Saturday. Maggieann also decided to stay till Saturday to keep me company.

Friday Night was one of the wildest I have spent on board. When Amy came there was no mistaking she had arrived. We were getting thrown about so much that Maggieann was sea sick.! In a canal tied to a pontoon. When morning arrived I was relieved to find no damage to TW. Irene arrived at 12:00. But we could not move. Maggieann decided to stay as the road from Fort William to Inverness was blocked by fallen trees..



Irene was disappointed we would not be going for a sail and had to head back to Glasgow on Sunday afternoon. Maggieann decided to stay on and help me back to Fort Augustus and we departed Banavie at 14:00 only getting as far as Gairlochy Bridge which was now out of order due to an electric fault caused by electric outage during the storm. Monday 12:00 we were at Gairlochy top !!! Still a strong wind and we were informed Laggan locks were not working due to electric outage..Stayed where I was



I sailed at 10:00 on Tuesday, once power had been restored but Kytra was still out. I had a lovely sail up Loch Lochy and Loch Oich making it to Kytra just as power was restored allowing us to make it Fort Augustus. I stayed at the top Wednesday and locked down Thursday morning and had a wild sail down Loch Ness, making 8 knots at one stage. with just my working jib Wind topped out at 34 knots.

I arrived back on my berth in Muirtown at 16:00. What a trip going nowhere. With all the hold ups Meeting Amy head on and power cuts. However, I still enjoyed every minute.

## Contributions to Newsletter

I am normally struggling to have members submit articles for inclusion in the newsletter, however, on this occasion, I had more than I could use in one edition.

My thanks to Robert and Caroline Jollye and my old friend Danny Coutts for the articles included in this issue.

Thanks also to Jon Priddy, who sent in a very interesting article which I have held over for the next issue.

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Graeme Collard is at present sailing his new acquisition, a Sigma 33. Home from North Wales I will expect an article relating to the delivery trip for our next newsletter

