
Seaward Squadron

Rally Report - Cowes Yacht Haven I.O.W.- 9th to 11th June 2023

It would be the first rally for Seaward Squadron members since 2019 – what would it be like? And who would be there? The organiser of the past 10 rallies, David Harland, had decided to step down, his role taken over by me (Steph Merry), who had never even been to a rally before, although I did sign up for the 2020 rally to Lymington, which was cancelled due to Covid.

My task was hugely facilitated by support from Nick Ward (Sales & Marketing Manager for Seaward) and advice from David. Nick, Chris Clayton (MD of Seaward) and I met up in Cowes shortly before Christmas last year and put together an outline plan. The next rally would be to Cowes, as it was thought to be a



central location, and also because I was familiar with the local yacht clubs as a venue for the Gala Dinner. The location also meant that Seaward could offer a factory tour. A visit to Osborne House was also a possibility for people attending the rally. Simple...or was it?

I quietly got on with booking venues for the rally meals and berths in the Cowes Yacht Haven. Everything seemed to be going smoothly until Nick, Chris and I again met up at the British Motor Yacht Show just 4 weeks before the rally was to take place, at which point we realised that time was running out very quickly, since we had to distribute the rally programme, collect money for the meals and advertise the new Kimber Cup award, all within the next 2 weeks. Nick bravely took on the task of sending out mass emails to Squadron members during that period. Many thanks to everyone for not complaining about the short notice.

Friday 9th June dawned sunny but with strong winds from the northeast, as had been forecast all week and which had caused 3 boats to pull out of the rally. David Harland had been planning to bring his boat Magic across from Guernsey, but sensibly cancelled the trip and flew over with his wife Ann instead. We were delighted that they could join us for the social activities.

By 5 pm, 11 Seaward boats were berthed in Cowes Yacht Haven.

Boat name	Size	Owner's name	Crew	Last port of call
Alacrity	29	Michael Barron	Gill Barron	Beaulieu
Allora	23	Stewart Wooles	Robin Farey	Hamble
Dear Prudence	23	Mark Paterson	Anne Paterson	Yarmouth
Little Lucy	35	John Gibbins	Gaynor Gibbins	Hamble
Kuonana III	25	Alastair Cameron	Alison Cameron	Bembridge
Louise B	29	Peter Judd	Heather Judd	E Cowes
Merlin	25	Nigel Normington	Peter Burridge	Haslar
Proper Job	29	Arthur Smythe-Wright	Denise and Thomas	Ocean Village
Reveller	29	Mark Huntley	Jan Huntley	Boat delivered
Sea Rider	23	Steph Merry	Liz Harvey	Hamble
Tipanie	35	Jonathan Roper	Diane Roper	Hamble

With time in hand before our BBQ at 19.30, a social gathering began on the pontoon, which soon developed into a 'pontoon party', complete with the glorious evening sunshine.



I was delighted that Mark and his wife Jan Huntley were so amenable to hosting the gathering from onboard their boat Reveller. Owners met up with old friends and made new ones.



What a great ice-breaker and thank you to Mark and Jan, plus all those who contributed to the supply of drinks. By the time we hit the BBQ, there was a very jolly atmosphere.



The “Pontoon View” marquee at the top of the ramp from our pontoon was festooned with Seaward flags. Here the Cowes Yacht Haven Events team served up large quantities of spiced chicken kebab, local sausages and minute steak with various salads, followed by pots of Isle of Wight ice cream.



Someone said that the BBQ was the best thing about the rally, and much better than expected. Further, socialising went on into the night, although I was just relieved that things had gone so well and disappeared to bed.



The next morning (not too early) taxis were sent to the Yacht Haven by Seaward to collect people for the factory tour. It was fascinating to see the hand-crafted furniture, the moulds for laying up and laminating new hulls and the large commercial vessels, including pilot boats for Gibraltar and Spain, and a work boat destined for Hong Kong.



With over 20 people on the tour, we were split into 2 groups, with Chris taking one group and Nick with the other, both being supported by Derrick from Seaward.



Nick said how much he enjoyed showing his group around – he certainly answered all our questions comprehensively. We were treated to a generous lunch afterwards, and many thanks to Seaward for their hospitality.



People enjoyed Cowes in the afternoon sunshine before attiring themselves suitably for the Gala Dinner at the Royal London Yacht Club. We gathered for pre-dinner drinks (courtesy of Seaward) in the lovely first-floor bar of the Club, with a balcony overlooking Cowes Harbour and views across to the mainland in the evening sunshine. We were joined by Alison Kimber, who with her late husband Barry, founded Seaward, and also by Sue and Arthur Mursell. Arthur is the founder and owner of TT Boat Designs Ltd, who are the originators and designers of the Nelson range of seagoing vessels. Although Arthur is now semi-retired, he still mentors two young naval architects who are part of the Seaward design team

Dinner was served in the downstairs dining room, which looked stunning with candles, gleaming glasses and cutlery. The staff quietly and efficiently served our starters of chicken liver pate or tomato salad, followed by deliciously tender lamb or aubergine parmigiana. The dark chocolate truffle cake for dessert was to die for – could that be what Death by Chocolate is about?



Speeches and presentations followed. The new Kimber Cup, donated by Chris Clayton in honour of Barry Kimber, was awarded to the owner who has made the most interesting and/or innovative modification to their boat. The cup was presented by Alison Kimber to Mike and Gill Barron, owners of Alacrity. A full report of the many innovative stowage



solutions, which they have designed and implemented, on their Seaward 29, will be made available to view on the Squadron Web Site.

Then followed the presentation of the “John Hickman Award for Achievement”. This award is traditionally made to the skipper who is considered to have made the most effort to attend the rally, calculated by a complex algorithm including distance travelled from the last port of call, age of skipper and size of boat. I had fun wheedling the ages out of the skippers in order to make the calculation. One person (who shall remain nameless) announced that he was sixteen...until I said that meant he would not win the Hickman Cup!

The winner was Alastair Cameron who with his wife Alison had brought their Seaward 25 Kuonana III from Bembridge – which was the single last port of call outside the Solent for any boat in the fleet.

There were short presentations from Chris Clayton and Nick Ward about future plans for the company, and then Mark Huntley (both a Seaward owner and Chairman of Seaward) closed proceedings by summarising his unique perspective of Seaward as a business moving forward. David Harland was presented with a bottle of his favourite malt whiskey, in thanks for all his hard work in running the Seaward Squadron for the last ten years. Unfortunately, he was unable to take the bottle back to Guernsey himself, since he was flying home with hand baggage only, and so he was forced to trust Mark Huntley to transport it there by sea, on



board his boat Reveller. I was then presented with a bottle of Mermaid Gin – a speciality from the Isle of Wight, and my favourite tippie, somebody got that one right!



The view from outside the Club looking back into the room caught my eye as we left after the dinner – what a tale the empty bottles have to tell.

As the saying goes, “All good things have to come to an end”. Sunday morning dawned warm and sunny, but few people stirred from their bunks until much later. Our time in Cowes had flown by. After a slow start and a chance for a final catch-up with the new friends made over the weekend, people readied their boats for departure, either heading back to their home port or on to another adventure.

As everyone was saying their goodbyes, they all agreed that the Seaward Squadron Rally 2023 had been a great success and were already looking forward to doing it again next year.

The possibility of Chichester as a venue for next year's rally was discussed, but we are also investigating Lymington (cancelled in 2020 as the venue) and Poole. I plan to visit each harbour to compare the facilities and activities on offer. Please contact me if you have any inside knowledge or suggestions.

Further details will follow in due course.

Wishing you a pleasant sailing season on your very special Seaward boats.

Steph Merry

stephanie@seawardsquadron.org

Photos in this report kindly provided by Norman Harrington, Steph Merry and David Harland