

By Way of the Golden Isles: *Ragged Robin III's* Cruise, 2008.

Ragged Robin's (6T, 1951) second owner after Arthur Ransome was another author - Anthony Rushworth-Lund. He wrote a charming book "*By Way Of The Golden Isles*" about his taking her across the Channel from Littlehampton to Honfleur, through Paris and to Corsica and back through the French canals in the late 1950's. During our last season's cruise of over 1500 nautical miles along the UK south coast and back via Brittany and Normandy, we were reminded several times of the book, which has been passed down from owner to owner. For this cruise, though, our *Golden Isles* were not the Isles d'Hyères, but the Isles of Scilly and the Isles de Bréhat.

Our motivation for the cruise was the international Annual General Meeting of the Arthur Ransome Society held in the National Maritime Museum in Falmouth over the late May bank holiday weekend. In preparation, we fitted out *Ragged Robin* in the autumn of 2007 so that she would be ready as soon as there were hints of Easterlies in the weather forecasts in April. By the second week, we were off, and the easterlies started on 15th as we left Eastbourne for Brighton. They continued for well over a month *except* to a head us as we crossed Lyme Bay and across to Brittany! We were pleased to encounter many Hillyards on the way: *Winfrith* in Brighton, *Tashana* in Haslar, *Snoqualmie* and *Vivona* in Mylor and *Dawn II* in St Just Pool. In Mylor, we also encountered a north-easterly gale which threatened to lift us from the visitors berth on to the concrete Pontoon. The harbour staff were exemplary, blowing up large fenders and finally towing most of the visitors inside the harbour for shelter. However, the weather steadily improved and we were able to sample the many delights of cruising in Falmouth: St Mawes, St Just, Trelissick, Malpas and even Truro (by tender). We enjoyed meeting up with Hillyards and their owners for the SW Meet in Fowey.

The Scillies were shrouded in fog most of the time we were there, but the sun shone for Diana's 70th birthday celebrated in style in the Island Hotel on Tresco. Coming back to the Scillies for the first time for 15 years we were greatly relieved to find visitors moorings in profusion in St. Mary's Pool and in New and Old Grimsby Harbours. Early in season is certainly the time to go to the Scillies. We were the only vessel at anchor in Gugh Cove; in the summer it is packed.

The Brittany leg was an opportunity for us to visit harbours we had missed out in previous cruises: Morlaix (where we saw *Santa Maria III*),

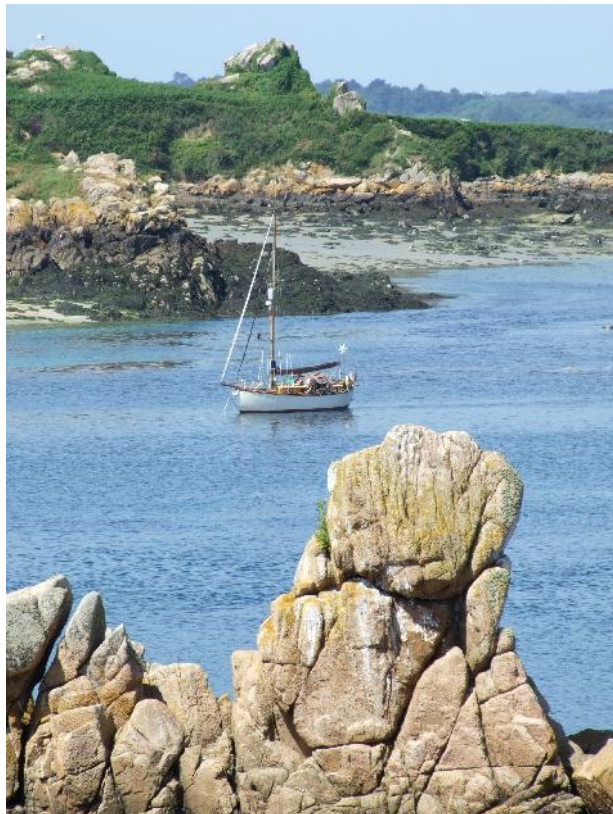


Fig.1

Ploumanach, Paimpol, St Quay and Binic, where we left the boat and caught the TGV and Eurostar to home to catch up on admin (as we had done earlier from Weymouth and Falmouth).

The weather steadily improved, so we made it back from Binic to the Isles de Bréhat, nestling between Lezardrieux and Paimpol. We anchored in the south end of the Kerpont channel at a spot kindly pointed out by a passing fisherman. A quick row to the main island and we were surrounded by flowers and the pink folded rocks of the Côte de Granit Rose (Fig 1).

There are only two other places in the world possessing these remarkable rock formations: China and Corsica. The islands are car-less and once the day-trippers have left on the ferries to the mainland they are almost deserted. They are easily walked in one or two days.

St Malo, Dinan and the Channel Islands were our ports of call for the first time, on the way back. We arrived in Dinan for the two-yearly Fêtes des Remparts where most visitors were dressed up in medieval costumes, some complete with donkeys, chickens and human urchins. The

medieval town, high up on the hillside and approached by a steep cobbled road, is a maze of beautifully restored buildings and so was a superb setting for the Fête and for celebrating our 45th wedding anniversary. Having moored in the only spot we could find alongside the Quay, we found that we were in exactly the same location where Anthony Rushworth-Lund had left her on his return journey through the French canals (Fig 2).

Then on to Normandy, where we were able to enjoy mooring in the centre of Caen (worth getting CEVNI endorsement on our ICC!) and several days in one of our favourite locations, Honfleur. Tied alongside the harbour wall waiting for the opening of the bridge into the 16th century Vieux Bassin, we were accosted by an impressive gentleman with: "You, very pretty boat. We give you free mooring in the Vieux Bassin for as long as you



Fig.2



Fig. 3

like." Up went the flags to dress us overall and in we went, into a perfect location - for us and the artists - outside the medieval Lieutenance (Fig 3). There are *some* advantages in having a funny-looking old boat!

We were reminded of Anthony Rushworth-Lund's words at the end of "*By Way Of The Golden Isles*" as he left her in Dinan, just where we had moored: "I did not like leaving *Ragged Robin* in this way, and, when the bus took me over the high viaduct above the basin, I looked down to where she lay and felt that I was abandoning her. I came very near to tears, for by now I was quite certain that I loved this boat very much indeed."