

## Royalist sails away to the Channel Isles

Report by Stephen Chapman

Mariners International it seems is an eclectic mix of people united by a common interest. This could not have been better realised than by a voyage on the TS *Royalist* from Fort Blockhouse, Gosport to the Channel Islands starting on 2 May.

With a rising barometer we were a crew of 26 full of expectation and with safety drills and yard bracing exercises completed to the tunes of a rehearsing naval band pacing the dockside we set sail after sundown.



The passage plan took us to the east of the Isle of Wight from whence we set course for Guernsey, initially under engine power but soon with all fore and aft sails set. For this long weekend Tim had chartered her and with the support and not a little patience on the part of the permanent crew put her through her paces, or was it she put us through our paces? With high pressure moving in behind high winds earlier in the week we were set to enjoy a rather unspectacular voyage, from the sailing point of view, but as we approached the Channel Islands passing initially south of Alderney we experienced the full force of the tide race, which even in a light south easterly breeze accelerated our speed over the ground to over 11 knots according to the satellite technology!

Flocks of passing Gannets, all adult birds in flocks of 10 or 20 flying close to the water were spectacular. Other seabirds noted on this passage by two crew from the [Royal Naval Birdwatching Society](#) (Frank and Stephen) included two Cory's Shearwater, Fulmars and Guillemots.

At St Peter Port some chose to take the RIB and run ashore for a hot shower or to discover what goes on in Guernsey on a Bank Holiday Saturday, others took the opportunity to catch up on sleep.



On Sunday we weighed five shackles of cable and anchor at 06.40, set sea watches and we negotiated again the fierce rising tide rips with all sail set, sighting the red and white striped Casquets light house. On the short run Alderney the wind demonstrated its quicksilver nature. With all the fore and aft sails set just about full, close hauled on a starboard tack it veered 180 degrees to SW and strengthened to force 3-4 in an instant, driving the boat forward and taking the sails aback until the deck watch could man the sheets. No sooner done the breeze died again and we motored on through the breakfast hour before dropping anchor Braye. Clean ship was the order before the RIB started the shore runs. Ashore and up the hill to the cobbled town square at St Anne revealed that the only places open in this Norman town were the pubs and off licences. Shops along Victoria Street were firmly closed. The retort from the bar lady at the Marais Hall, as she pulled a pint of Guernsey Best, was simple and direct in response to an enquiry if there might be shops open over the holiday weekend: "It's Sunday". The off licence down the street at the Rose and Crown had a special offer for the sailor ashore: three bottles of *Goats do Roam* for six pounds twenty. Always save something for next time, I thought.

We quit Braye Harbour in a freshening breeze. "*Securité, Securité, Securité*", a warning rang out. Crossing the east bound traffic rounding the Casquets we encountered a constant stream of tankers, bulkers and a ferry headed for Ireland. Our look-out soon spotted the reason for the warning: the front half of a Capesize bulk carrier (literally) under tow.

After a quiet night passage we anchored before dawn in Sandown Bay half a mile off the beach. After breakfast we weighed anchor and headed towards Portsmouth with every stitch of canvas set trying to find some wind on a fine sunny morning. For the birders there was excitement on this final leg. Our track clearly crossed a wave of spring migration. While on lookout duty headed toward the Nab Tower the morning watch saw a total of 11 Swifts and three Swallows.

An enjoyable way to spend a long Bank Holiday weekend. And the vote once alongside was, when can we do this again?

