



25th July 2010: ten days knocking about on the Crouch and Roach, camping on board "Isis" (thanks to Penny for awning!). Enjoyed the company (and the Ferry Boat Inn) at North Fambridge Yacht Station, had half an hour at HW at Battlesbridge, loved the Mad Max feel of Paglesham Quay and the Plough & Sail's fare even more, inched up the Roach to Wakering YC without going aground and astonished the locals by being keen on Rochford... and then took a deep breath and planned for our great escape into the Thames via the Havengore route...

Isis: from the Roach to the Swale: Havengore **Jane Trowell & James Marriott**

The Big One! The journey through the Havengore Gap.

Waking to a grey overcast morning, a gentle 2-3, westerly. Flannel-washing, breakfasting, packing up, and a 10.30am departure. We to head towards Havengore to see how we feel. It seems stable and do-able.

Jane skippers down Paglesham Creek, and James takes the helm as we turn into Yokesfleet. We pass three vessels moored overnight in the channel, sail past a crowd of orange-pelted seals basking at the mouth of Shelford Creek and enter the Middleway along the coast of New England Island. Passing the entrance to Narrow Cuts, we decide to carry on the good tack we have; and over the top of Rushey Island we can see the top of Havengore Bridge opening up into the sky. Into Potton Creek and over our shoulders is Sutton's Boatyard. We cross the concrete ford marked on the chart, and approach the Shangri-La of Havengore. Nervous. Are we really going to do this? Hours of discussion, couple of years of yearning! All the conditions seem good but what will we find on the other side? There'll

be no turning back. There's no sign of the heavy rain that was forecast. It's now bright sunshine. We are hovering in the pool by the bridge - how to get attention? We ring from the mobile but no reply. After some hollering a woman puts her head out. "Can you let us through?". "Might do!" she smiles in reply... and we're through, heading out and seeing open sea stretching out before us. Tension. Very serious attention paid to navigation, despite it being HW. We are overtaken by a motorboat and we gain confidence, sailing through the withies. Further out we see the posts marking the Broomway, and head for it. The sky is lightening and the day is beautiful, but the sea and wind are picking up, and we're beginning to cream along. Extremely tricky to find the buoys, and the silhouette of Minster and other piloting marks are crucial.

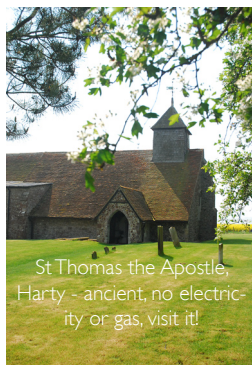
Big discussion starts. The question of how to deal with the estuary on an ebbing tide in a dinghy had led us to plan for two possibilities: a) crab along Maplin Sands eastwards as far as we can, and go aground for a few hours 'til the tide turns in the early evening, then head up to Thorpe Bay or Leigh or b) bomb across the channel to Sheppey and crab up the Swale. The seas on the edge of the sands are really fetching up and bashing eastward with wind over tide held no attractions. Going aground so soon seemed boring. The day was sparkling and the wind was a solid 3. Jane lobbied for Plan B. James

was nervous as it seemed a long way, but Jane argued that with a good wind and HW only just passed we would have a great sail. We pass South Shoebury Buoy and are feeling more confident. But it's fast and furious, and James is making lists of everything we should do and have on board before another such adventure. *[Safety note: we had told key people we were attempting this!]*

We slide up and down big swells in The Warp, and it's hard work at the helm, but while James is a little less tense, Jane is very happy if getting an aching arm. James swaps in. We talk over man-overboard drill and heave to in order to tie a long orange warp with a fender on the end to the transom. The Spile seems to have disappeared, but we know where we are heading. Over The Cant the sea eventually calms. We're through the scariest part! The weather is glorious now and we are deliriously happy, but we have to face the question of the ebb leaving the Swale. Astern, we spy a beautiful bawley heading up the Swale. There's always going aground at Shellness, we comfort ourselves. Then the good solid wind dies off Warden Point, and while it's nice to be sitting calmly, we have to get our new super-duper oars out. We slide along smugly, but in truth we are not really making much headway.

The wind becomes intermittent, and we have some lunch in bouts between breezes. Off Leysdown, the breeze dies, and rowing is now the only thing. We are further away than we had thought but it's more than ok. It's heaven. All around us sandwich terns are wheeling and a huge flock of swallows chase insects over the glassy sea. A seal pup pokes a head up. We settle in for the long leisurely haul, literally. But then, coming up fast behind us is Emma of Faversham, sails stowed and motoring nicely. The bawley

boat we'd spotted earlier. Jane mutters, "I wonder if they would give us a lift!?" We ask shyly, and they are all action: we get hitched up and off we go, punching the tide. It's a laborious business, even under motor, taking well over an hour to get to Harty. We chat about the beautifully restored craft, about the Medway, Swale, Thames...and the allegedly unfriendly folk of Shellness. They don't tease us about our foolish notion that we could get up the Swale on the ebb. They hope to get up Oare Creek but will probably moor up at Harty. They loose us off west of Harty and the wind picks up and we speed across the channel. We douse the main and jib in good time, run aground on the mud right by the end of the hard at Harty Ferry, and throw the painter to two men who had just jumped ashore.



Seven hours sailing. Stepping out daintily onto the hard, we laugh at our great escape from the Roach to Harty, make Isis safe, and join the two sailors - father and son - for many pints and tall tales. They go back to their cruiser and we

enjoy a good dinner. We realise on landing that after dinner the tide would be rising, so spend a lovely few hours periodically moving the dinghy up the beach, talking, chewing over plans, and then having the treat of a night's sleep in the pub's luxurious B&B. And a bath.

The next day, off again, ending our day moored in the splendid and bird-filled isolation found between Fowley Island and the Conyer shore.