

Threading the Needles July 2019

What makes a great yacht (or sailing) club? A distinguished tradition and history? A significant contribution to the sport? Major racing success?

Well perhaps these and other qualities, but what could be added is many members who go out of their way to organise sailing activity, which many other members enjoy.

The Royal Lymington Yacht Club has a large fleet of Lymington River Scows (well over 100). Over 40 can turn out for a Monday evening race, and many potter in company on a Thursday. It's great fun to be part of!

One of the highlights of the pottering programme is 'Threading the Needles'. A sail from Lymington to the Needles that rise around 30m out of the sea off the western extremity of the Isle of Wight, with a passage between the Needles. In a typical south-westerly, the course is Goose Rock at the western end of the Needles to port (inside the notorious wreck of the Varvassi!), then through the gap between the outer two and the inner Needle, the distance one-third from the port and two-thirds from the starboard Needle (observing the rocks on either side!). Then it's back through Hurst Narrows to the Keyhaven River spit, where the fleet lands for a picnic prior to returning to Lymington.

Quite a challenge in a small dinghy, and quite a challenge to organise and ensure safety for the many want to do it. It requires a comprehensive plan and sailing directions, many volunteers to man safety and marshalling boats, and a slice of good luck with the weather!

The RLymYC scow fleet has the good fortune of having many enthusiastic members. The pottering programme is headed up by Graham Neal, he is able to call upon the many volunteers he needs, and many partake in the programme.

Graham has to limit the number sailing to the Needles, but he liaised with Keyhaven Yacht Club who also wanted to do it, and 34 scows experienced the thrill of threading the Needles on a glorious summer's day, today, 11th July 2019.

(The Needles, incidentally, are not particularly needle-like. The chalk rock formation takes its name from a fourth pillar which allegedly was needle-shaped and collapsed in a storm in 1764.)

It was quite a sight to see so many scows sailing together and subsequently pulled up on the spit while their crews enjoyed their picnic lunch.

Good as that was, extraordinarily a Spitfire flew over the fleet several times in the cloudless sky and barrel rolled over the island. We watched transfixed and were prompted to reflect on that famous air battle which started almost 80 years ago to the day, the Battle of Britain, which started on 10th July 1940 and was such a crucial turning point in the Second World War.

When we returned exhilarated, if somewhat fatigued, to Lymington, Graham and his team were there to help pull our boats up the slipway!

Threading the Needles qualifies you for the purchase of a unique souvenir polo shirt (embroidered with a silver needle with red thread), courtesy of the Honorary President of the Lymington River Scow Class Association, Sebastian Chamberlain.

My daughter Abigail helmed my boat with me as crew, threading the Needles for the first time, and loved it. She was not the only one with a constant smile on her face. Midri

Claridge and Carol Canning were sailing near to us on the return and were clearly thoroughly enjoying themselves.

We sometimes wonder how to get more people into sailing. Well the RLymYC has the answer. Better get some more shirts made, Sebastian, there'll be a demand...!

Gordon Stredwick
Marian, 340

