
The Diamond JUBILEE River Pageant

Sunday 3rd June 2012

A report by Adrian Birtles on the steam launch "KARIAT"



Having been fortunate to have had a seat overlooking the Coronation procession on 2nd June 1953, I was fortunate again 59-years later to be invited to be a member of the crew of the 35-ft historic steam launch "Kariat", built in Cowes in 1897 (and still resident there) and chosen as one of the boats to represent the Isle of Wight in the Pageant. Owned and skippered by SBA member John Power of Cowes, the coxswain was John's son Richard, I was second engineer, and Peter Grimaldi (one of the Island's Deputy Lieutenants) was navigator and radio officer (which was more demanding than perhaps one might think). For the Pageant, we carried the Island's Lord Lieutenant, Major General Martin White, Mrs. White, Mrs. Grimaldi, four

selected members of the Island's Cadet Forces and the CO of TS Osborne, Lt (SCC) Jacky de Bruyne. We also carried very prominently, the Isle of Wight flag.

Preparations of course had been in progress for months beforehand but, for us, things really started on the Thursday before the event, when the crew motored up to London; we were kindly accommodated by the Grimaldi family in Chelsea. On Friday morning, we went to South Dock, Rotherhythe (formerly one of the Surrey Docks, now a marina), where "Kariat" arrived from the Island on a Steve Porter lorry and was craned off into the water and prepared for action. We then steamed the few miles down the Thames to West India Dock, where scrutineering and



security checking of boats and crews took place, and where the boats remained overnight.

On Saturday morning, it was steam up, and a gentle cruise up river to the moorings specially laid for the event off Barn Elms (just downstream of Hammersmith Bridge, and close to Harrods Repository of Boat Race commentary fame). John Power and I stayed on board overnight, to provide an anchor watch and prepare her for action in the morning. Fortunately, we lay alongside “Alaska”, a much larger historic Thames passenger steamer, and we were indebted to Peter Green and his crew, who kindly provided us with food, dry berths for the night and other conveniences.

During Sunday morning, after much polishing, we were joined by our remaining crew and passengers, who kindly brought an excellent sandwich lunch with them. Then at about 2 o’c the real thing started, and we set off downstream in a group of four steamboats abreast as part of the Pageant Procession (From North to South “Alaska”, “Kariat”, “Surta” and “Ursula”). It was dry then, but not for long; but the river banks were

crowded with cheering onlookers all the way from Barn Elms, through the West End and City to well-downstream of Wapping. They seemed completely undeterred by the rain, and there were many calls for our steam whistles and sirens to be sounded (which we always did). We saluted the Queen, just visible through the murk on her saluting base at HMS President, just downstream of Tower Bridge. Then it was on down to South Dock to put passengers ashore and moor the boat overnight. She was craned back onto the lorry on Monday morning for her trip back to Cowes, and we all came home.

When, before the event, I had read the very detailed instructions for craft taking part, I had thought them fussy and over-the-top; afterwards, I could see exactly why they had been issued. The event was actually extremely well organised, and ran like clockwork. The potential for things going wrong must have been huge, but they didn’t, and a great deal of thought had gone into achieving that. For participants, the Pageant was a thrilling and exciting event; and, like the Coronation, unlikely to be forgotten, and very well-worth a wetting! ■





Nuneham (top) and Streatley (lower)



Sultan



Mischief

***A report from Jeff Dickenson who
was on steam launch Ursula***

Daphne and I were privileged to join Julian and his crew on his steamboat 'Ursula' in the Royal Pageant over the Jubilee Week-end. After Julian had spent countless hours preparing the boat and dealing with the mountain of paperwork to enable us to take part, things really started to happen at 5am on the preceding Thursday when we took the boat on her trailer down the M11 to Gallions Point Marina (just at the end of the runway for London City Airport) to prepare her for a trip up river, through the Thames Barrier and on to West India Dock (near Canary Wharf).

the Barrier, past the Millennium Dome and awaiting our turn through the lock into the West India Dock, our mooring until Saturday. Next came an official scutineer to ensure that the boat had passed the essential criteria and to enable the crew to get a wristband that would allow us to take part.

When asked 'what coal are you using?' Julian answered 'Best soft Welsh Steam Coal' - it seems this was acceptable (they were worried that we might be using some smokey coal from overseas!).

We were soon steaming up river through

On Saturday Dave and Penny Harper

assisted Julian and partner Sue Knok to move the boat up river near Hammersmith Bridge. Come Sunday morning our crew assembled near Hammersmith Bridge to take a water taxi out to 'Ursula' and await the final scrutineering that would award Julian with his Pageant Pennant, the photo shows a delighted Julian having passed all the hurdles to take part in the pageant.



After watching the rowing boats go past to take their place at the head of the procession we started preparations for our 2:30pm departure. In the procession we were detailed to keep station with 3 other steamboats.

The atmosphere was fantastic - every time that Julian blew the whistle the crowds on the river bank and bridges raised a cheer - we all just had to wave back to them. Every available space on the river bank and balconies overlooking the river were packed with people.

We managed a few seconds of fame as we passed under Waterloo Bridge when we were caught on the BBC TV coverage. With another blow of the whistle we all waved again.

By this time the rain was starting to dampen things and the river banks and bridges were not so packed with onlookers.

Westminster Bridge was crowded - this time with Police to avert an anti-royalist demonstration. We steamed through the bascules of Tower Bridge (raised specially in our honour!) and over on our port side we could just see the Royal Party - of course we 'dipped our ensign' in salute, along with some of the other boats.

The main part of the event was now over - all we had to do was find our way back to

West India Dock with everyone else!

Life jackets were mandatory for all crew and advisable for passengers, closing the Thames Barrier had substantially reduced the current on the river, just as well given the number of boats travelling in close formation.

After steaming past Greenwich we had to continue down river, almost to the Barrier, before turning to port on our approach to the lock for the West India Dock. Although it is an enormous lock by our usual standards, it still took over an hour holding station on the river before our turn arrived, we could then head for an overnight mooring. By now it was well past 8pm and thoughts were turning to our journey home (Julian and Soon-ok would be staying on the boat overnight).

Come Monday morning Daphne and I traveled back to the West India Dock to assist with the steam back to Gallions Point Marina. At least it had stopped raining as we headed down river through the Thames Barrier. Before long we were lining up for the lock into the marina and heading for our mooring near the slipway.

Many thanks to Julian for a most memorable week-end. ■