

## Plymouth Gala Rally, 8-12/8/17

The tradition of organising a MOA SW Rally to Plymouth to coincide with the National Fireworks Competition continued this year, but with an additional twist.

Although the SW Branch of the MOA has existed for many years, it had become inactive until Paul Kennedy, our current Commodore, reactivated it in 2007 at which time he became Branch Captain. We felt it was appropriate to celebrate a very successful ten years of activity since that restart, hence the 'Gala'.



Peter Roberts organised a series of activities for the week which truly deserves the Gala title.

The fun started with a Pontoon party, but not on a pontoon, on the balcony of the Sutton Harbour Marina offices. All our boats were beautifully accommodated in that

Marina, apart from a few with permanent berths in Plymouth. One boat, John and Lesley Oldham's Ellen Marvel, made the shortest voyage of the event. They braved the rough waters of the Cattewater to bring their boat across from Plymouth Yacht Haven!

Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> was a free day. Time for exploring Plymouth (and in our case, its gin distillery – again!) in rather poor weather. In the evening we were guests of Pantaenius. Simon Bowen, their Operations Director, laid on a wonderful 'spread' of food and drinks, whilst we viewed the first three of the Firework displays from the brilliant vantage point of their balcony.

Next morning, in better weather, 22 of those signed up for the Devonport visit boarded our bus. The morning started with tea and biscuits at the museum centre, before leaving for our visit to HMS Courageous. HMS Courageous is a decommissioned, Cold War, hunter-killer nuclear submarine. Split into two



groups, our guide was the brilliant 'Stoker' Terry. This was one of the best guided tours I have ever experienced, with our guide creating vivid images in our heads of what life was like spending three months at a time underwater, much of it in absolute silence. We returned to the Devonport museum for a delicious pasty lunch and then continued with a guided tour of the museum itself. Of the many thousands of exhibits in this museum, the outstanding room has to be that containing the figureheads of bygone, famous warships – bare bosomed ladies, the Duke of Wellington, King William IV, all represented. We noted that several had lost their arms – presumably when their ships were dis-armed (Sorry!).



Peter's Stop Press announcement of one week prior to the rally, invited us all to a rather special Barbecue on the lawn of the QAB Marina. Peter and Keith Bunker, instrumental in getting QAB's support, prepared a most marvellous dinner – together with their ladies and several others co-opted to support. Brisk breeze and sunshine made for a memorable occasion. Then the sun set, wind-chill set in, and it was a dwindling, stoic group who stayed 'put' to watch the final three Firework

displays from that same lawn of QAB. A pity really, since that last display was voted the best from a straw poll of MOA members. (I have just been advised that the judges also voted it the best!)

Friday dawned cold and wet, not perfect conditions for a planned sail to the Yealm, which became instead a brisk beat across to Cawsand for Maui 4 and Oronsay where we rafted to one anchor for a natter and a scratch lunch (at least for my scratch crew on Maui 4!) Then it was time to return to put on our glad rags for the evening.

The Gala evening was the crowning event of the Rally. We had the run of the National Aquarium in Plymouth for the whole evening, starting with drinks as we inspected the premises and the other occupants on the other side of the glass (or

should that be glasses). We moved on to dinner for our 50 plus participants, watched by at least another 50 non-participants swimming behind a huge wall of glass – all beautifully back-lit from the aquarium in the main room of the building. This was a truly memorable meal,



both in location, quality and company. We were assured that none of the fish we were eating had been caught locally – well not that local anyway! Some of us finished on the top floor of the Aquarium for a wee dram or two in the bar – a bar with an amazing view.

Thank you Peter and all those who helped you. That was a wonderful week!

Tony Wildig