

Continuing the story of an epic voyage,  
the spirit of brave men lives on!

# Taming the Thames

Chapter Two: Every new experience is a learning process.

So we got our 14-foot sailing dinghy to Havengore Creek in the early hours of the morning.

Havengore Creek taught me that that you can actually be f\*cked by a swing bridge which doesn't at 4 in the morning.

I kid you not.

To those of you who read the enthralling first part to this epic saga, and are back for episode two.

For those of you determined to read on, despite having read the first episode, I sincerely hope you recover with treatment. Time they say is a great healer.

Anyway, I digress.

We had sailed proudly into Havengore Creek, ready to continue on our journey in a fourteen-foot dinghy to Hullbridge in Essex.

I say sailed proudly, anyone is entitled to a little journalistic licence.

We were cold, tired, soaked to the skin and suffering from third degree burns from that joyous instrument of terror, the Primus Stove.

We had failed to heat the tin of curry, and had eaten it cold, heavily seasoned with a teasing sauce of agua de sea.

Apparently the Americans have devised a method of extracting information from terror suspects enjoying their free holiday in the Hotel Guantanamo Bay.

It's called the water torture, and has caused questions as to its legality to be raised worldwide.

Has no one told them that five minutes with a Primus Stove can reduce a grown man to the status of a well done BBQ sausage.

And it's legal.

I'm lost. Ah yes. The swing bridge that didn't!

We dragged the dinghy through the Essex mud, it is thicker than an Essex girl I promise you, and probably smells worse too.

And there in front of us stood the Havengore swing bridge in all its glory.

And, oh joy, next to it, the bridge keeper's lodge.

Easy, ring the bell, bridge keeper opens the bridge, and we can go back to dragging the boat towards our goal.

That was the theory.

Enter the buggeration factor.

Murphy's law to those who have never been buggered.

The bridge keeper was obviously a lot more sensible than we were, the note on the door informed us that he was at home having his well deserved weekend off.

Nice thought, he signed it "Happy Sailing" Bastard!

"No problem," said my nautically challenged skipper. "We'll step the mast."

"Why do we want to step on the mast?," I asked. "We want to get under the bridge, not climb onto it."

"Git," he said in his normal friendly tone. "Step the mast means take it down, remove it, lower it!"

"And how do we do that?," I whimsically enquired.

"We unscrew it you jerk"

"With what?," I helpfully enquired.

He looked at me just like the wife does when I suggest starting a home repair. A look of aloof disdain teasingly tinted with just a hint of violence.

"With the screwdriver," he advised.

By now his face had gone bright red and the veins were standing out on his neck as he prepared to belt me one.

I wondered if now was the time to point out that the screwdriver was buried deep in the mud of the Maplin Sands. Left where it fell as we dived out of the boat filled with blazing water.

The fate of the screwdriver appeared to seep into his memory as he quickly changed the subject and clambered up onto the bank.

If you remember, I did mention earlier that my geographically challenged skipper had charted our course taking us through War



## The Beach Foulness Island

Department property.

We were smack bang in the middle of Her Britannic Majesty's Atomic Weapons Research Establishment on Foulness Island.

Marked on the charts with a skull and crossbones bearing the legend "Keep Out."

I joined him sitting shivering on the muddy bank as we decided what our next move would be.

In my case it was to find myself suddenly and violently lying on my back with my shipmate attempting to give me a tongue sandwich.

Funny what flashes through your mind at times like that, he didn't look gay and he's got dogs breath, were but two of them.

I opened my eyes to find myself staring at what must have inspired Conan Doyle to write the Hound of the Baskervilles.

This "thing" had one foot on my chest and its teeth but inches from my throat. And the bloody thing was salivating as it eyed its next din dins, me.

Then this voice screams out, "Don't move for chrissake he's new!"

Is he real?. Moving was near the bottom of my

## After Beijing - Chinese / English Guide!

English: He's cleaning his automobile

Chinese: Wa Shing Ka

English: This is a tow away zone

Chinese: No Pah King

English: Small Horse

Chinese: Tai Ni Po Ni

English: Your price is too high!!!

Chinese: No Bai Nut Ding!!!

English: Did you go to the beach?

Chinese: Wai Yu So Tan?

English: I bumped into a coffee table

Chinese: Ai Bang Mai Ni

English: It's very dark in here

Chinese: Wai So Dim?

English: Has your flight been delayed?

Chinese: Hao Long Wei Ting?

English: They have arrived

Chinese: Hai Dei Kum

English: Your body odor is offensive

Chinese: Yu Stin Ki Pu

English: You know lyrics to the Macarena?

Chinese: Wai Yu Sing Dum Song?

English: I got this for free

Chinese: Ai No Pei

English: Stay out of sight

Chinese: Lei Lo



to do list. Controlling bowel movements was my number one priority, that and survival.

"War Department police," the voice said, "And I've lost his handler."

"Oh dear how careless to lose the doggie's handler," I said. Or words to that effect.

"Has it eaten," I asked.

"This isn't a time for joking," said the copper.

I'm sure they only recruit the brain dead. Twelve stone of teeth is about to give me a love bite, and he tells me to stop joking.

Suddenly a piercing whistle broke through the noise of my tears.

Enter one dog handler shaking almost as much as I was.

Fang looked lovingly at my throat, but backed off slowly, much to my relief.

"Had me a bit worried there," said the handler.

"No worries," I said, "It had me terrified."

Anyway once things had settled down, Mr Plod reveals that they had picked us up on their "sensors."

"Is that like KY jelly?," I asked.

"The sound sensors," was the mirthless reply.

What followed for the next twenty minutes was two Ministry of Defence policemen, bored to %%%%, who have come across a sailing boat at 4am with two evil spies in it.

"No I don't have a passport, identification, a camera or a police record."

"Yes I am British"

"No I didn't know I was trespassing."

"No this is not camouflage cream covering my entire body, its mud."

"Yes I did realise that the mud is wet."

"I'm very sorry for upsetting your nice dog."

"No I do not have a nervous tic, I'm shivering."

"Yes it was silly to wear wet mud at night."

And so it went on.

Eventually we managed to convince these idiots that they had not stopped a Russian invasionary force of two from taking control of their "patch."

"You'll have to sign the official secrets act confirming all you have just told us."

"Fine, where do we sign?" They had no idea.

It soon became clear that nobody had ever made it through the obstacles below the water line designed to sink boats like ours before.

And we did it at low tide too!

Anyway, our two new best friends took us back to their Police Station, known aptly as "The Coppers Rest," and produced the official looking documents to sign.

Give them their due, they also filled a thermos flask with coffee for us to take with us, and gave us coffee and bickies while we were there.

So now we go back to our boat, faced with the problem of getting a twelve-foot mast under a five-foot clearance bridge!

But that's another story!



English: Phew! Does this bathroom stink!

Chinese: Hu Flung Dung?

English: That's not right

Chinese: Sum Ting Wong

English: Are you harboring a fugitive?

Chinese: Hu Yu Hai Ding?

English: See me ASAP

Chinese: Kum Hia Nao

English: Stupid Man

Chinese: Dum Gai

English: I think you need a face lift

Chinese: Chin Tu Fat

English: I thought you were on a diet

Chinese: Wai Yu Mun Ching?

English: Our meeting is scheduled for next week

Chinese: Wai Yu Kum Nao?

English: Staying out of sight

Chinese: Lei Ying Lo

English: Great

Chinese: Fu Kin Su Pah

Apparently, 1 in 5 people in the world are Chinese.

There are 5 people in my family, so it must be one of them. It's either my mum or my dad, or my older brother Colin, or my younger brother Ho-Cha-Chu. But I think it's Colin.