

# A LONG WEEKEND ISLE OF WIGHT

*The buzz of yacht racing at Cowes contrasts with tranquil anchorages nearby, making this part of the island perfect for a short cruise*

Words: Katy Stickland









Cowes has four marinas for visiting yachts, making it a popular destination



**T**here was barely a breath of wind. The sun was already strong, even though we had just finished our first coffee of the day, and apart from the odd call of a seabird, it was quiet and restful. We had arrived in Newtown Creek the previous afternoon and were fortunate enough to find space in Clamerkin Lake. The

estuary at Newtown provides excellent shelter and, as part of the Isle of Wight's Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, is a haven for nature. It wasn't too long before we spotted the bright orange legs of a redshank scuttling along in the shallow water looking for its breakfast. Around us, the occupants of the other boats were beginning to stir. It looked set to be another gloriously sunny day on the Solent.

Newtown is popular in the summer months with sailors seeking some peace and is a far cry from the hustle and bustle of Cowes, a place synonymous with yacht racing, where our cruise had started. We had arrived there just ahead of the Round the Island Race, and were keeping our wits about us as we motored slowly into the Cowes Harbour. We did glimpse the pink frontage of Commodore House, the waterfront home of the late yacht designer, sea shanty enthusiast and sailing character, Uffa Fox. The port was busy, with the odd commercial vessel and ferry, as well as many of the race entrants arriving. The chain ferry, which links Cowes with East Cowes operates on the narrowest part of the River Medina, and we made sure to give it plenty of room. We had booked a visitor berth at East Cowes Marina, and once alongside and checked in, headed to the The Lifeboat, the on-site pub for a much

deserved pint of the locally brewed Fuggle-Dee-Dum.

Refreshed, we decided to walk the short distance to the chain ferry and across to Cowes. We headed for the High Street, making sure to stop and admire the photos in the window of Beken of Cowes, one of the most famous names in marine photography. The pictures of classic yachts didn't disappoint.

We wandered past the myriad of shops - from chandlers to cheese - flags and bunting fluttering above us, until we reached Cowes Castle, home of the exclusive Royal Yacht Squadron and, for many, the birthplace of yacht racing. We looked at the row of brass cannons in front of the club, glinting in the sun, which are still used for starting races.

Our wanderlust satisfied, we returned to the boat, picking up a pie at The Food Hamper delicatessen on the High Street en route.

### ESCAPING THE CROWDS

The next morning we were awoken early as the crews taking part in the Round the Island Race prepared their yachts ahead of making their way to the start line. We watched their departures, before deciding to motor the short distance to Osborne Bay, looking out for a glimpse of Norris Castle on the way. Usually extremely busy on summer Saturdays, we took the chance we might be able to find a space in the bay. We were in luck. After anchoring, we settled in the cockpit and took in our surroundings. Perched on the hill overlooking the bay is Osborne House, one of the favourite homes of Queen Victoria and her beloved Albert, who built it in the grand Italianate style because this stretch of the Isle of Wight coastline reminded him of the Bay of Naples. Alas, the beach where the queen and her consort swam is privately owned so isn't accessible by dinghy. But it was a pleasure to watch the maritime comings and goings,

Starting gun: one of the cannons at the Royal Yacht Squadron, The Castle, Cowes



**This magical estuary has been reclaimed by nature, with meadowland, woodland and mudflats waiting to be explored by dinghy, canoe or paddleboard**



## HIDDEN GEMS

### 1 NEWTOWN CREEK

A National Nature Reserve, Newtown Creek is one of the most tranquil anchorages this side of the Solent. The main one is at Clamerkin Lake. Make sure your anchor is properly set as the tide is quite strong. There are also a number of paid-for visitor moorings here, although the majority are in the estuary leading to Shalfleet. Explore the channels by dinghy.

### 2 SIR MAX AITKEN MUSEUM

This former 18th Century sail loft on Cowes' High Street houses Sir Max Aitken's personal collection of nautical artefacts including the gaff from the Royal racing yacht, *Britannia*. Open May to September, Tuesday-Saturday. Appointments are available outside of these opening times. 01983 293800

### 3 TIFFINS OF COWES

If overnighting at Cowes Yacht Haven, don't breakfast aboard. Instead, head to Tiffins on the High Street for the best bacon sandwich around. You will have to arrive early to beat the queues. 01983 292310

### 4 THE BARGEMAN'S REST

With its extensive menu and real ale selection, this hostelry at Little London Quay, Newport



Harbour is the ideal place for lunch after exploring the upper reaches of the River Medina. 01983 525828

### 5 THE LITTLE GLOSTER RESTAURANT & BAR

Gurnard Bay outside Cowes is another pretty spot to visit. The walk to Gurnard village is well worth the effort, especially as it is home to The Little Gloster. The restaurant is open Wednesday-Sunday and has an extensive lunch and dinner menu, as well as its BBQ Friday. It can cater for crews. 01983 298776

### 6 PONTOON VIEW POP UP BAR

Run by the much-loved former landlady of the Pier View, the Pontoon View Pop Up Bar is held every Friday and Saturday night on the terrace of Cowes Yacht Haven. Enjoy sundowners, gourmet burgers, seafood and cheese boards while taking in Solent's spectacular view.

### 7 COWES-NEWPORT CYCLE PATH

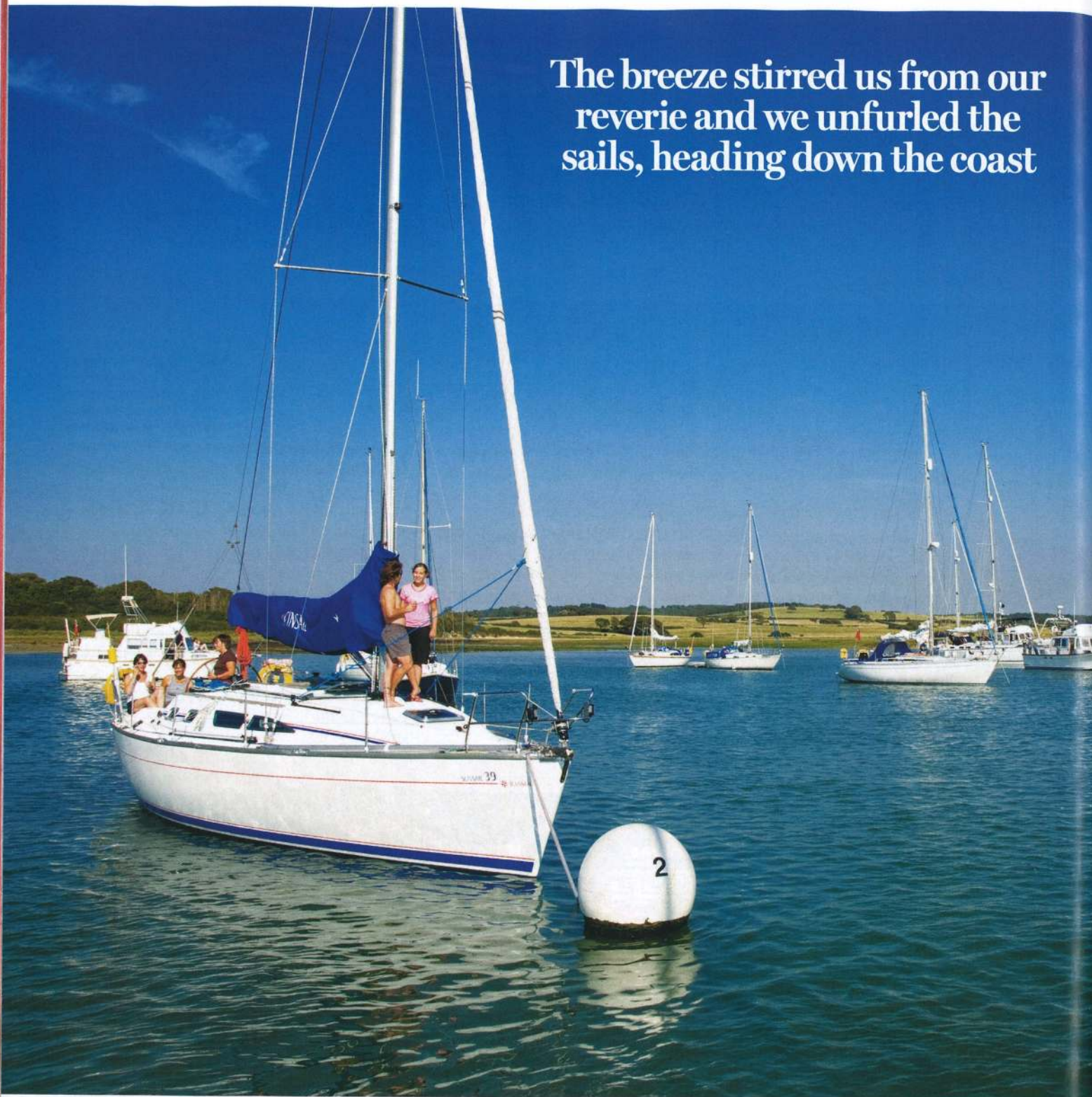
One of the best ways to explore Newport, the county town of the Isle of Wight, is via the cycle path, which starts in Cowes and runs along the River Medina to Newport Harbour.



All boats are limited to 6 knots in the inner harbour at Cowes



The breeze stirred us from our reverie and we unfurled the sails, heading down the coast



**ABOVE:** Newtown Creek is a National Nature Reserve  
**BELOW:** Cowes High Street bustles with activity, shops and chandlers



albeit a little uncomfortable at times when the wash from a passing commercial ship reached us. The increasing breeze stirred us from our reverie, and, with the conditions looking more favourable, we decided to unfurl the sails and head five miles down the coast to Newtown Creek. We motored gently into Clamerkin Lake, where we found a vacant white mooring buoy designated for visitors. Newtown was once a busy medieval port due to the saltworks and oyster beds. Now this magical estuary has been reclaimed by nature, with meadowland, woodland and mudflats waiting to be explored

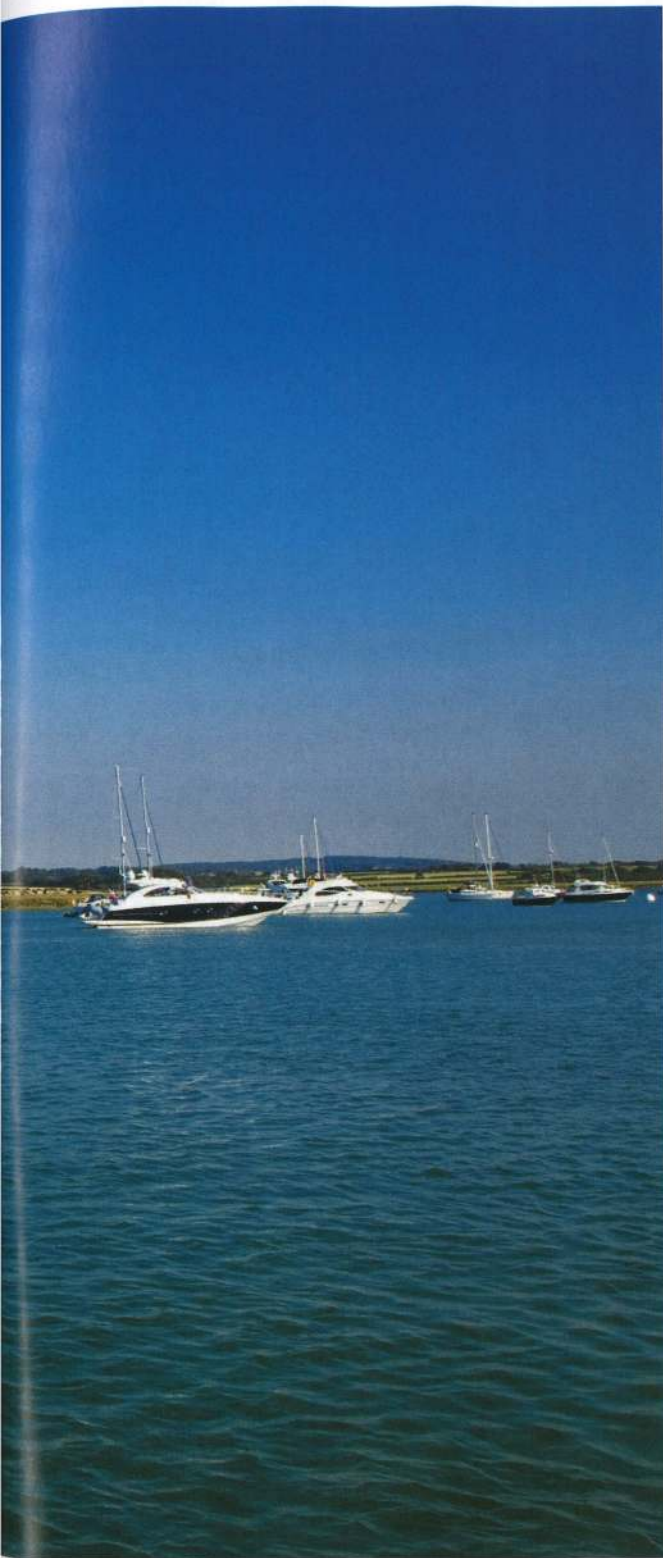
by dinghy, canoe or paddleboard.

The heat meant we were content to stay on board, taking the occasional cooling dip, and listening to the chatter of the nearby bird life until the sun started descending towards the horizon and peace shrouded the anchorage.

The dawn chorus was our alarm clock the following day. We set off early, retracing our route around the coast to Cowes, and then motoring into the tidal Medina, passing the marinas, sailing schools and boatyards that line this stretch of waterway, a clear reminder that Cowes is very much a working port as well as a racing hub.

Keeping our speed below 6 knots, we motored for around 20 minutes, until we arrived at Folly Reach, which stands in stark contrast to the busier river





**TOP:** Osborne Bay is an ideal lunch spot  
**CENTRE:** It is advisable to book a berth if visiting during summer  
**BOTTOM:** The River Medina past Folly Reach becomes shallow and tide bound



entrance. We had booked a space on the visitor pontoon opposite the rustic and ever popular Folly Inn. Once safely alongside, we decided to explore these quieter stretches of the waterway by dinghy as the river is a lot shallower here at Low Water, and dries out completely upstream of the Folly.

Past the Island Harbour Marina and the MHI Vestas factory, the riverbank becomes wooded and was almost deserted apart from a flock of seagulls bobbing on the water. This stretch of waterway is a Site of Special Scientific Interest and is certainly an enchanting spot to navigate. A few miles further

Boats with a draught of up to 2m can reach Newport, depending on tide



upriver and the landscape begins to change, signalling that you are entering Newport Harbour. We found a space alongside the visitor pontoon and then explored this once thriving port. Some of the old

warehouse buildings still remain, having been attractively converted into an arts centre and housing. Little London Quay is where the bulk of goods in and out of the island were once handled, and the aptly named pub, The Bargeman's Rest seemed a good place to stop for a late lunch. Inside, it has an eclectic mix of nautical knickknacks. Once replenished, we walked back to the dinghy to catch the tide back down the river to Folly Reach.

With special thanks to Philippe Wines and John Thornback from Cowes Corinthian Yacht Club, Harbour Master Capt. Stuart McIntosh and the Cowes Harbour Commission.



# THE LOCAL PILOT

Cowes and beyond



## PILOTAGE

Approaching Cowes from the west, restrictions apply north of the line between Gurnard buoy and Prince Consort buoy, where there is a Precautionary Area for large commercial vessels. Be aware of strong cross currents up to 3 knots in the Outer Fairway. The main entrance into the Inner Harbour is marked by the No. 1 Q.G and No. 2 Q.R buoys. Col. Reg. 9 – Navigation in Narrow Channels – applies. The channel is well-marked with lit port-hand buoys as far as the Red Funnel car ferry terminal in East Cowes.

If coming from the east, keep 200m north of Old Castle Point leaving Shraper Beacon to port. Go north of the swinging moorings and the Cowes breakwater before turning to port into the Inner Fairway. Alternatively, use the Small Craft Channel from Shraper Beacon, which connects to the Inner Fairway opposite Town Quay. There is a limited depth of 0.2m below chart data. Avoid the channel if your draught is more than the current tide height. The channel is marked with lateral buoys. Again, there can be strong tidal streams. It is advisable to check the Cowes Harbour Commission's website for the latest notices before arriving. There is a 6-knot speed limit within the harbour and River Medina up to the Folly. The chain ferry has right of way over all traffic. The Medina is buoyed and dries upstream of the Folly. Boats up to 2m draught can navigate to Island Harbour. Newport

Harbour can be reached up to 2hr before and 3hr after High Water, depending on tide and draft.

## MARINA FACILITIES

### COWES YACHT HAVEN

Located in the heart of Cowes, the marina has 260 fully serviced visitor berths, on-site engineers, electricians and boat repairers.  
www.cowesyachthaven.com  
01983 299975

### EAST COWES MARINA

100+ visitor berths with electricity, WiFi, shower and toilets included.  
www.eastcowesmarina.co.uk  
01983 293983

### ISLAND HARBOUR MARINA

Located just above the Folly Reach on the River Medina, the lock marina has 125 visitor berths offering free WiFi, water, power, and lighting. Full yacht services and a chandlery on site.  
www.island-harbour.co.uk  
01983 539 994

### COWES HARBOUR SHEPARD'S MARINA

Close to the centre of Cowes, Shepards Marina has 130 visitor berths. Free WiFi, inclusive showers, and site-wide CCTV.

www.cowesharbourcommission.co.uk  
01983 297821

### NEWPORT HARBOUR

There are 40 visitor berths on the pontoons, which have water and electricity, waste facilities, showers and toilets. There are nearby boat repairs and a chandler.

Newport Harbour Office:  
01983 823885.

Fuel is available at Lallows Boatyard fuelling station, 01983 292112, and the Cowes Harbour Services Fuel Berth 01983 200716/ VHF Channel 69

## MOORINGS AND ANCHORAGES

There are plenty of visitor swinging moorings and river pontoons in Cowes Harbour/River Medina operated by the Cowes Harbour Commissioners. Call HM1 on VHF Ch 69.

The ever-popular Folly Inn also has a visitor pontoon. VHF Ch 72

### OSBORNE BAY

Although offering good protection from southwesterlies, anchoring can be uncomfortable due to the wash from large commercial ships. It does, however, make a pleasant day anchorage for lunch. Landing is not permitted on the shore as the beach is private.

### NEWTOWN CREEK

Managed by the National Trust, there are paid-for visitor moorings, and you can anchor with a donation to the charity. Harbourmaster:  
01983 531424

## CHARTERING

Island Charters offers bareboat and skippered chartering  
Islandcharters.co.uk

## CHARTS AND GUIDES

UKHO 2038, 2793, SC2793  
*The Shell Channel Pilot*, by Tom Cunliffe (Imray, £37.50)



The Royal Yacht Squadron is one of nine clubs based in Cowes and East Cowes

