

## **Chepstow Bridge**

On the 25th March 1989 around 20.00 hours and just after last light, Wye Invader came up the River Severn on a rising tide then turned to Port (left) and passed over the 5 metre sandbar into the River Wye and on up to Chepstow, the start of the 75 miles navigation to Hereford where Wye Invader was to become a floating restaurant.

In a meeting held in early Summer 1987 with Pat my former business partner, it was decided that a list of priorities were to be made and the first on that list was to establish what size boat or barge could navigate to Hereford, this was to include photos of all the bridges and measurements of the navigation arches and a copy of the rainfall and water levels over the last 20 years in the Wye Valley. I spent almost a year walking the banks of the River Wye with a camera and notebook, the photos and details were put on a map in my former office. I also undertook to arrange meetings with Hereford Rowing Club and a number of other interested parties including Hereford City Councillor's and to search the City Records Office to acquire copies of the Acts of Parliament covering navigation and in particular the ownership of the various wharves and quays in and near the City bridge.



Wye Invader had an air draft of 4 metres and it was important to be at the bridge no later than half-tide to be able to move through Chepstow and under the road bridge without having to remove the Cabin as the roof had a large spot lamp mounted on the left forward side and, as we had no moon it would be required.

The street lamps and bridge lamps reflected down onto the river surface and the bridge arches seemed to be a lot narrower than they actually were. When the spot lamp on the wheelhouse was switched on this improved the situation and we passed under the bridge into the Wye Valley with Chepstow Castle on our left high on its limestone cliff, followed by the woods on the port side and the fields and woods and high limestone cliffs on our starboard.

Above Chepstow Castle the River Wye is about 75 metres wide on a rising tide, it was decided to point the beam of the spot lamp onto the bank about 100 metres forward to the port side, by keeping the beam on the bank and following the bank as we move forward up-stream this assisted us in keeping the bow fixed just short of the middle of the river. From Chepstow Bridge, we spent the next 3 hours feeling our way along the Tidal Lower Wye on a rising tide. On 3 occasions Wye Invader scraped the top of a weir as we passed over the remains of what was left on the river bed after the Weirs had been demolished in around 1727. The Act of Parliament of 1727 allowed for all the Weirs to be thrown down (demolished) or breached making it a Free and Common River for all to use free of charge and obstruction.

## **Tintern Rail Bridge**

About a mile ahead, the street lamps of Tintern began to illuminate the River Wye and the Rail Bridge crossing the river and we were almost at the top of tide, the tide times and heights are almost the same as Sharpness, the river has a deeper channel close to the bank on the starboard side, but any more than 6.5 metres plus the air draft would be too much to pass under the rail bridge. The 6.5 metres tide height from Sharpness, transposed to Tintern Rail Bridge gives enough depth of water to cover the weir just above the bridge as the tide times are the same as Sharpness.

We intended to moor up on the right bank just above the bridge where we would be sheltered from flood water on its way down River Wye, boats have moored there for many years and this was confirmed by Jim Simpson a local Boatman we had met some time ago on Brockweir Bridge.

Tintern Rail Bridge was about 200 metres ahead, as we closed on the bridge we passed through the right-hand arch, almost at the same time we started to lose the tide, the weir just ahead was losing its water, we put the bow of Wye Invader into the right bank, dropped the starboard anchor onto the river bank and we were left almost high and dry, we put a bow spring to a hedge 20 metres forward and turned off the engine.

We thought we might be in time to have a pint or two in the Crown Inn on the opposite bank in Tintern, however, there was a party going on for some of the locals who I think were about to go to Australia, Wye Invader's engine and searchlight was something not seen too often and some of the customers thought we were a Russian trawler trawling for elvers and expressed their displeasure!



At first light, there was a knock on the hull and to my surprise we had an H.M Customs and Excise officer asking for permission to come aboard, I said what If I say 'No' and he replied "we are coming aboard anyway" so I said, "Good morning" and lowered the ladder for access, the hold was searched and they left, then at 10.00 hours a reporter from Radio Wales popped in from Cardiff to interview us.

When we came through the Bridge the night before and, as we lost the tide, Wye Invader hit a rock and damaged it's propeller, on further inspection a blade was missing, we also found that the propeller was cast iron but should have been made out of bronze. I can only surmise that when the Wye Invader had its survey before the sale, the propeller was changed so Pat set about finding a spare. In the meantime, the outstanding issues were Wye Invaders mooring arrangements and the removal of the ballast from the hold to reduce the draft for the journey up to Hereford.

To solve the problem, I phoned the Vehicle Workshops at Stirling Lines in Hereford, I explained the situation and asked for volunteers to assist with shovelling the ballast by hand. They arrived the next morning, the first job then was to reposition the anchor and the mooring ropes fore and aft, securing Wye Invader in her temporary mooring so she could move up or down with the tides, the next job was to remove the ballast



and this was completed by 17.00 hours, finally the damaged propeller was removed and replaced with a 26 inch pitch prop acquired from F A L Propellers in Glasgow, this arrived overnight and we set about removing the damaged one and replacing it with a balanced second hand one, in a very cold River Wye.

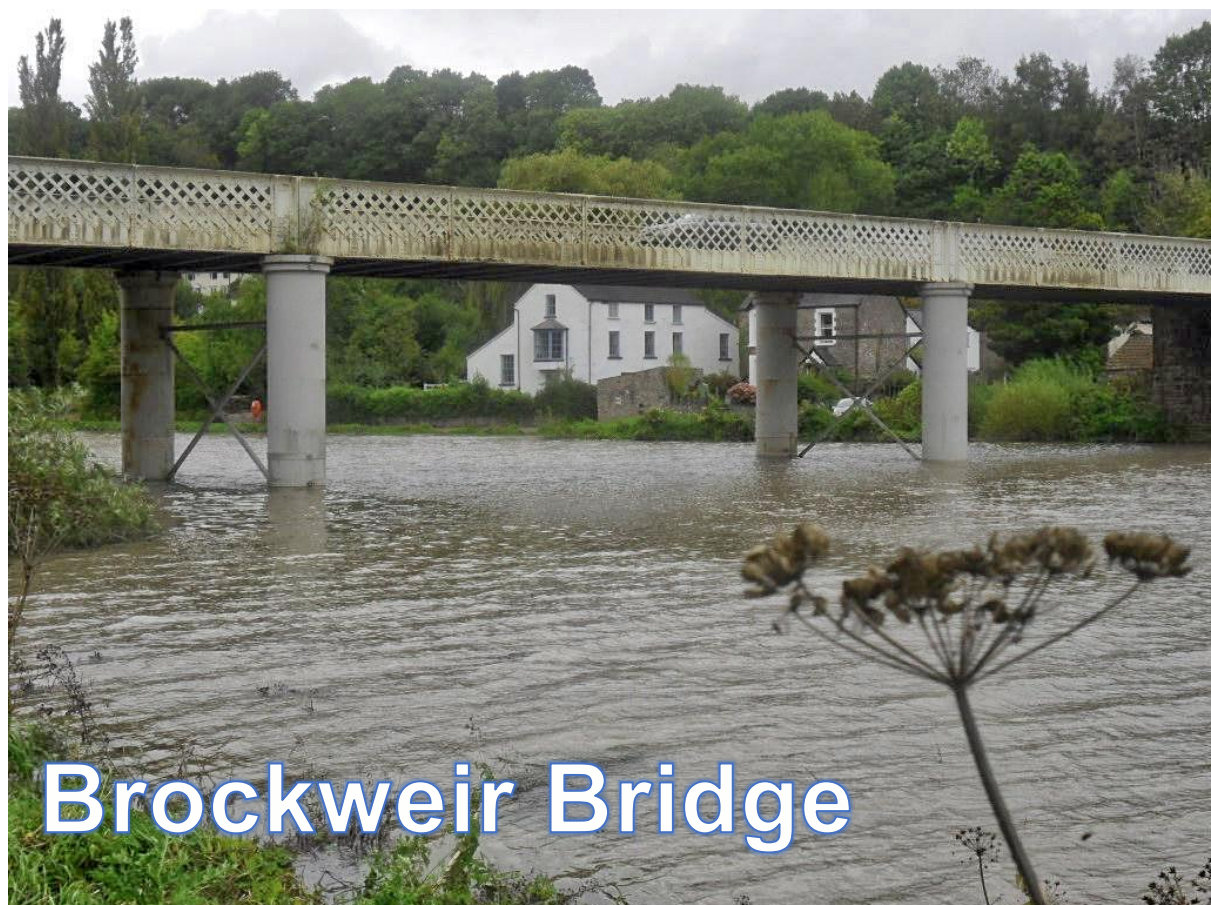
We had to wait for a high tide of about 9 metres at Sharpness and about 3 metres of flood water in the Wye Valley, measured on the Water Level Gauge at Redbrook, backed up with 2 metres at Monmouth and 2 metres in Hereford, this would give enough volume and depth of water for long enough to get past and over the rocks and shallows on the corner below Redbrook before we moved up to Monmouth.

### **Friday 7th April 1989**

The River Wye had 2 metres of fresh water on and more was forecast for the evening, we also had a high Spring Tide forecast for midday, the crew was on-board and we cleared the Mooring.

### **Brockweir Bridge**

We had two weir's to pass over before Brockweir, firstly between the remains of Tintern Rail Bridge and another just before Brockweir bridge, each weir lifts the water around 5 to 6 feet, and was in total, a distance of about 1 mile.



High tide was at midday and the rain in Wales had filled the River Wye to over 3 metres above normal at Redbrook and 2 metres most of all the way to Hereford. We left Tintern an hour before the top of the tide to be sure of passing under Brockweir Bridge, the flood water and tide were covering the quay, which meant we had plenty of air draft and a draft under the Wye Invader, so we were not concerned about the weirs. The 9 metre tide should give the Wye Invader a lift to above Biggsweir, the limit of tidal navigation.

## Biggsweir Bridge

There was now only Biggsweir Bridge to navigate and 20 minutes later we cleared it with space to spare. Half a mile ahead was the new weir, it had disappeared under the flooded river, we moved from the middle of the weir to port to avoid the large rocks sat on top of the weir just to the right of centre.



We were now on the non-tidal River Wye, a 3 mile straight leading to Redbrook, ahead were 3 large boulders at about half mile intervals in the middle of the river and several fishing concrete walkways out into the river, all of which I had marked on my large scale map the previous year.

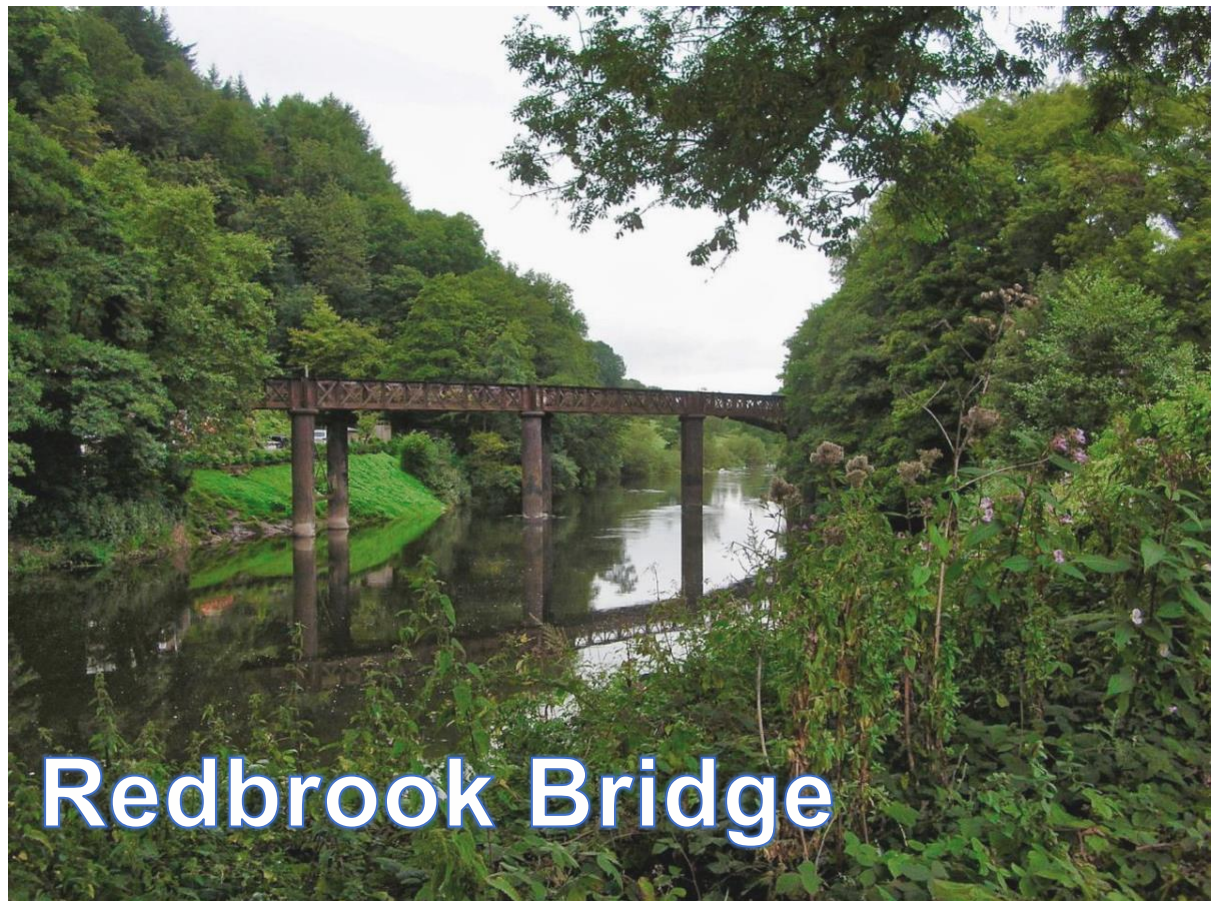


## Redbrook Bridge

At 16.00 hours we were about 100 metres below Redbrook Bridge adjacent to the left bank looking upstream, we could not go any further, the amount of flood water was too much, I had phoned the National Rivers Authority river flood-line and there was a large wave of water on its way which would be clear by the morning.

Although we didn't know at the time, this was to be the last rain we had for 6 months and the start of the 1989 summer drought!

As we moored up for the night a BBC Radio Wales crew came on board and did a live interview, after about a 30 minutes they left. By this time there was such a volume of flood water in the River, the propeller was turning without any assistance from the engine. I spoke to the crew and at 18.00 hours, we secured Wye Invader to several large trees, put the gangplank ashore and walked the 100 metres to the Boat Inn for what turned out to be a rather long night!



**Saturday 8th April 1989, 10.00 hours.**

The river had lost more than a metre of water overnight, there was now just over 2 metres available, we cast off and followed the left bank through Redbrook Bridge then moved to the starboard so as to be able to follow the channel close to the bank and squeeze past some large stones that were still submerged a few hundred metres upriver.

## Monmouth Bridge

In the week prior to Wye Invader going through the Monmouth Road Bridge, I'd received a phone call from Gwent County Council Chief Executive Officer Michael Perry to ask if we were really going through the bridge. I informed him that we were, he then said he would stop us, I explained that there were four Acts of Parliament and one in particular that he should read - the 1727 Act. I finished by telling him we had half a million pounds of Third Party Insurance cover and, if Wye Invader could not make it under her own power I would have her towed through on a wire rope.



### Saturday 8th April

Monmouth was 3 miles ahead, as Wye Invader moved up the river into the outskirts of the town and just below the Sewer Works on the right, there were loose rocks formed into what looks like a fishing weir coming downstream from the right bank almost all the way across and stopping about 10 metres short of the left bank leaving just enough room for Wye Invader to squeeze past. A few hundred metres further upstream on the left bank is what was left of Troy Bridge, a 20 arch stone rail bridge and about half a mile ahead we could see Monmouth Road Bridge.

## **12.30 hours.**

There was still over 2 metres of water above normal in the river plus the Wye Invaders air draft of 4 metres, we made 3 attempts that afternoon to go under the bridge and on each occasion we almost got through with the wheelhouse in the middle bridge arch, each time there seemed to be too much water so I put her in astern gear and came out of the arch, back down the river for about 100 metres and dropped the starboard anchor. It was now about 18.00 hours, we moved over to the right bank and secured Wye Invader for the night. At around 20.00 hours the crew and all the helpers, I think there were 8 by this time. We went ashore for a few beers and we all got back to the Wye Invader by 00.30 hours.

## **Sunday 9th April.**

We had 2 attempts at going through the Bridge again, both failed and we then moved to Plan B which was to moor Wye Invader downstream of the second arch on the port side near to the Town, I then phoned City Spares in Hereford and asked them to come down to the Rowing Club in Monmouth with their recovery truck, this they did and I used the small boat we had on board with 100 metres of rope and set off downstream, through the second arch towing the rope astern to the Wye Invader, this was secured to the recovery truck winch and then to the Wye Invader. It was now getting dark, half an hour later we were slowly pulled through the arch by the recovery truck and we moored up above the bridge and reassembled the cabin.

## **Sunday 9th April 1989 till Sunday 23 April 1989.**

The following weekend and with the help of Jim Simpson, we acquired a 30-inch pitch propeller and replaced the one that was too small on the Wye invader, Pat and myself changed into wet suit bottoms, then into a very cold River Wye. 2 hours later the propeller was changed, the larger propeller would give us more power when going through the rest of the bridges upstream to Hereford.

## **April 23rd 1989.**

Sunday afternoon we set off for Symonds Yat, then ran out of water on the river bed by Dixon Embankment where we stayed until Saturday 21st October 1989.

## **Summer 1989**

About halfway down the dual carriageway towards Monmouth, running between the River Wye and the road is a Nature Reserve called Dixon Embankment. Downstream of that is a Smallholding that shares the access road down to the river and the bank, the owner was good enough to loan us a set of keys to the gate and the road down to where Wye Invader was moored, as a result, the crew and friends spent many pleasant hours working on the boat including lifting a half ton winch using a steel cable and pulleys onto the roof of the forward cabin of Wye Invader.



In those days it was possible to see the river, the Wye Valley and Wye Invader because the trees that had been planted as a screen had not grown enough to obscure the view of the Wye Valley from the Road. On one occasion we were having a barbecue and we had 2 police officers who had seen Wye Invader from the road and parked in the layby and walked down to have a look, I explained the situation and they left.

When the rain that had fallen in Wales the week before raised the water level to 1.5 metres this ended the 6 months of drought and allowed us to move the 4 miles up-river as far as Symonds Yat and winch ourselves up and over the rapids.

## **Symonds Yat, Saturday 23rd October**

The journey to Symonds Yat was easy enough, it took about 45 minutes to cover the 4 miles, as we approached the rapids we moored against the starboard bank, we spoke to some of the people canoeing and explained that we needed them to keep clear and asked them to take down the Slalom gates over the rapids as the gates obstructed the river channel, this they refused to do, so as we winched ourselves up the rapids, the gates we could lift over Wye Invader we did, and the rest were cut down. It took about 2 hours using the hand winch with a change of 2 crew every 5 minutes. For the first time since 1828, when the lock and weir were thrown down and demolished, a barge had passed up and over the new weir. After we secured Wye Invader to a large tree at the top of the rapids, the Crew, 8 in all, squeezed into the main cabin and we opened several bottles of wine and drank a toast to all the people who had said, "it was not possible to pass the rapids at Symonds Yat," and then we adjourned to the Saracens Head pub for a few more drinks. The next day we moved to just below the Saracens Head waiting for the water to rise for the next leg.

Over the following week, water in the River Wye stayed at between 1 ½ and 2 metres, by Wednesday afternoon the river levels had started to drop above Hereford but the River Lugg was still putting a lot of water into the Wye at Mordiford, so it seemed to me that Friday would be the last chance for a least a couple of weeks. I organised a crew for Friday midday, this was sorted and I made an addition of 2 Boatmen, Tony and Gerald from Symonds Yat who had helped me earlier, and who came along for the ride.

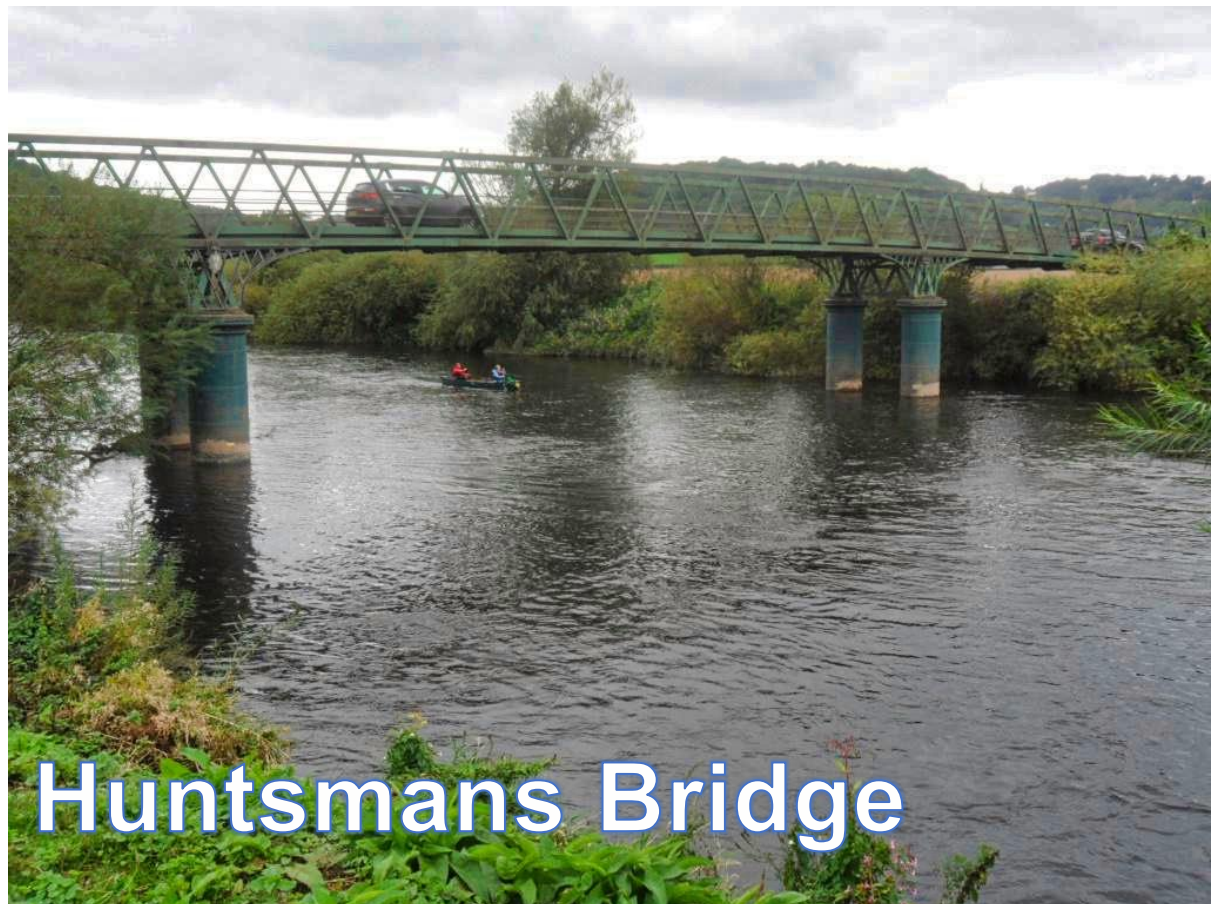
## Huntsman's (Huntsham) Bridge

**Friday 28th October 1989.**

The main bridge over the Wye leading to Symonds Yat East, the bridge was rebuilt in about 1982 with less air draft.

For the past 7 days, the River Wye had been about 1.5 metres above normal, this was just about enough depth of water with the air draft of the Wye Invader, to clear the underside of the bridge and have about half a metre of clear draft from the river bed of the Wye.

We departed Symonds Yat at About 14.30 hours and spent about an hour trying to get under the ferry rope, in the end, the rope was lowered into the river and we passed over the top of it. 30 minutes later we were on the last bend on the starboard side of the Wye about 300 metres below Huntsham Bridge, Gerald had the wheel and was trying to avoid the piles of rocks and concrete, almost to the mid-line in some places for the fishing, this we did and we cleared the underside of the bridge by about 30 cm, I think it was a new experience for Gerald as his own boat was only 60 feet long not 130 feet like Wye Invader!

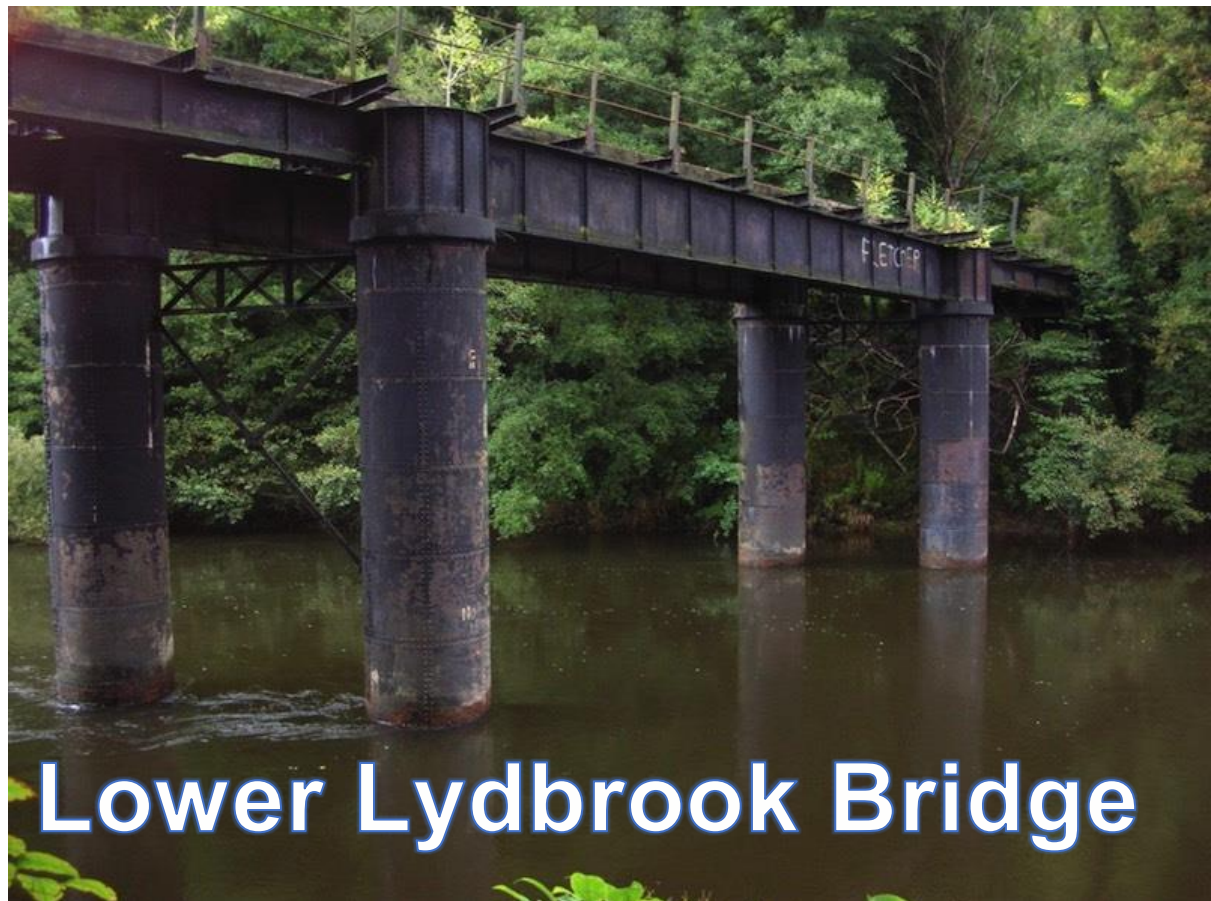


Half a mile ahead the Limestone sides of the Wye valley begin to close in with Coldwell Rocks on the starboard side.

## Lower Lydbrook Junction Bridge.

We were about 250 metres downstream of the old Wire Works Factory on the starboard bank side of the River Wye, as the bridge came into view we had sight of the centre arch supported by 4 cast iron cylinders, the centre arch is almost 23 metres across.

The bridge crosses the Wye as the river bends to the right on the upstream side, the flood water coming downstream hit the left bank and was forced across the upstream side of the bridge, because of this and the length of Wye Invader, we kept to the port side and let the current assist in turning us into the bend. As we passed under the bridge there were people on the walkway above us so we said "Good afternoon" to them, it's was now 15.45 hours as the stern cleared the top side of the centre arch and bridge.



Half a mile ahead was Lower Lydbrook weir, as we started to climb up the weir, most of the water is on the starboard side and we soon passed over the top and the River Wye is now not as wide. On the starboard side there is a house with its garden running down to the river, a friend Chris lives there and I had promised to stop for 10 minutes, it was now 1600 hours and his children and a couple of their friends had just finished school Gerald eased Wye Invader to a stop we secured to some trees, put the gangplank down and welcomed our guests onboard for their visit At 1630 hours it was time to say goodbye as we raised the gangplank and got underway.



## Kerne Bridge.

It was now 17.15 hours, Wye Invader was about 300 metres downstream of Kerne Bridge, it was almost last light, we had just climbed the 2 metres up and over Lower Lydbrook Weir, from this point on the River Wye gets narrower and we had another 2 metres of what remains of the weir below Kerne Bridge to pass up and over.

We were now 100 metres below the bridge, the river started to get wider and more shallow with trees in the middle to the starboard bank. About 50 metres short of the bridge you could just see the top of the weir. It was at this point that we began to see the river bottom, we had just enough draft to clear the weir and pass under and through the centre arch of the bridge, from this point on it was now dark, we used the large roof mounted flood lamp to illuminate the river bank to the port side and carry on to moor at Ross-on-Wye by Wilton Bridge later that evening.



## Wilton Bridge

Friday - the water depth at Wilton bridge was just over a metre, I phoned around and managed to get John, Madeline, Paul and myself down to Wilton to have a few drinks in the White Lion Pub just across the bridge and to stay the night and, if Wye Invader was still afloat Saturday morning, take her through Wilton Bridge so as to be ready to take advantage of future flood waters.

### Saturday morning 3rd October.

Wye invader was still afloat so, by 11 am the engine had been checked and left to warm up while all the mooring ropes were removed, lastly we removed the bow spring, as Wye Invader started to ease out into the river the underside ran on to a sandbank that we had no idea was there, Wye Invader was stuck with the bows about 45 across the River and held by the current. When Wye Invader had moored up the previous weekend, the river had more water in it with a greater depth and we had passed right over the high spot and moored in a trough with a hollow running parallel to the bank.



To solve the problem, I waded ashore with a rope attached to the steel winch rope and secured it to a tree, we then spent the next 2 hours pulling Wye Invader back to the bank, then we moored her and adjourned to the White Lion pub.

Rob, the landlord had an upstairs restaurant, so as a feature he illuminated Wye Invader with floodlamps for the time she was moored there and the crew were always welcome.

### **Friday 10 October.**

For the last few days it had been raining in Wales, the river had started to rise, we now had enough depth of water at Wilton Bridge to float Wye Invader, we removed the wheelhouse cabin because there would not be sufficient clearance. Wye Invaders air draft without the cabin is 3 metres and we were all most there. The only other option was the arch nearest to Wilton but that was full of trees which only left the centre arch and what made it more difficult was the bridge is askew and not at right angles across the river.

As I lined up the Wye Invader, her beam was just over 5 metres, and she had a 30 metre length, forward of the ship's wheel, the arch was between 7 to 8 metres wide so the starboard forward bow had to be almost touching the bridge on the starboard side as we exited the bridge, the port side of Wye Invader had to be as close to the downstream side as we entered the bridge arch.

As the bow cleared the upstream side of the bridge, the river current started to push the starboard bow to port, the wheelhouse was soon clear of the bridge arch. The river was fairly wide at this point and Wye Invader cleared the bridge upstream by about 75 metres, with the bow sat on the bank, so we passed through and under the most difficult bridge on the river with no bow thruster and no damage to the crew, bridge or Wye Invader!

Wye Invader now moved up river to the Hope and Anchor Public House in Ross-on-Wye, where we had been told by the Landlord on 2 previous occasions in meetings with him that we would be welcome to moor against the bank adjacent to the Pub. When we arrived he stood on the bank of the river and said that we were not to moor against his bank, that was a complete surprise, so we moved Wye Invader a few hundred metres further upstream and moored. That evening the crew and I walked past the Hope and Anchor and on down to the White Lion where we received a welcome from the Landlord, Wye Invader being there nearby had boosted his trade at least for a week and he said we were always welcome!

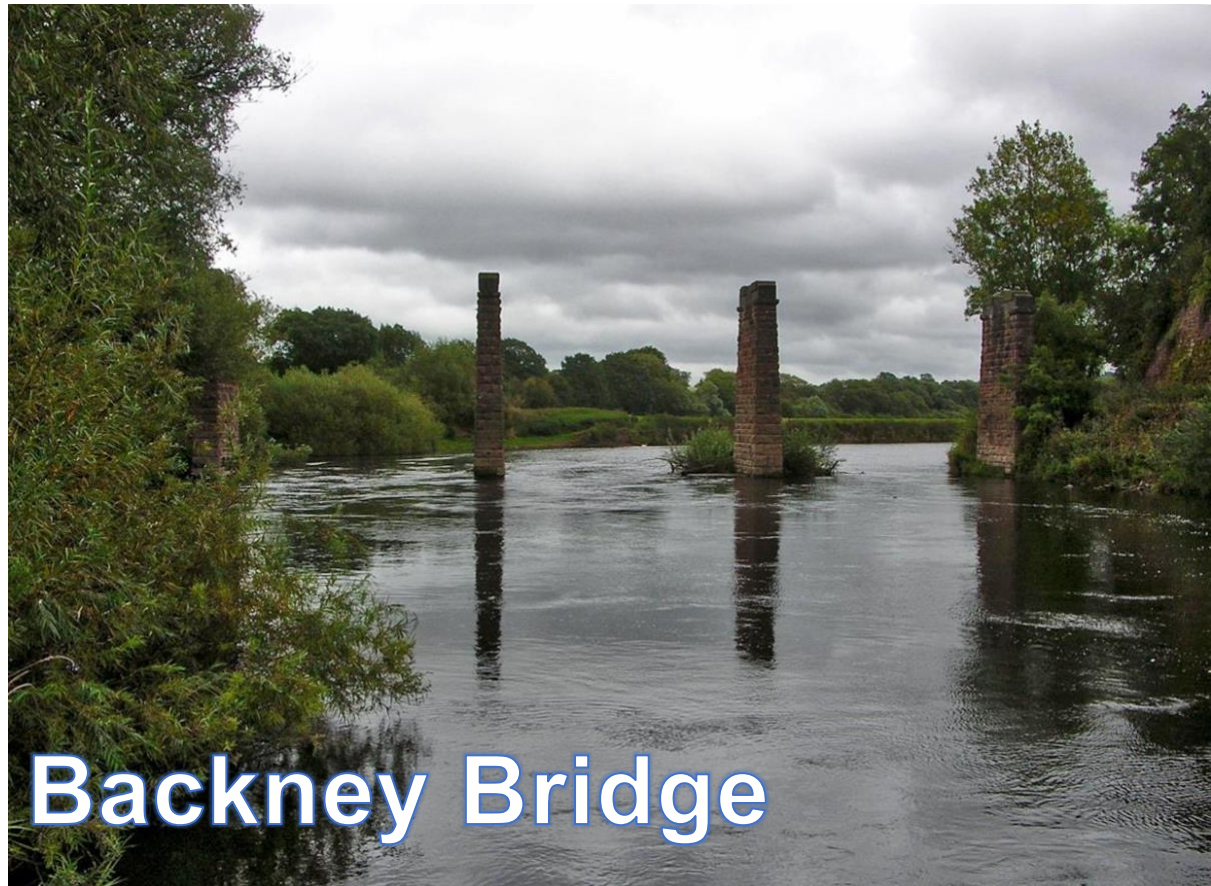
### **Saturday 11th November.**

There was a large wave of water on its way down the Wye Valley, it was expected to pass through Hereford at between 2300 hours and 0100 hours with localised flooding so Wye Invader needed to be in or just below Hereford by 1700 hours that afternoon. It was time to cast off from Ross-on-Wye and ease out of the tree branches and clear the wheelhouse. 10 minutes later Wye Invader passed under the main access bridge for the M50 Motorway, 30 minutes later, in the distance, we saw Backney (disused) rail bridge.



## Backney Rail Bridge

We were now about 2 miles above the main access road bridge for the M50 Motorway, about 200 meters ahead Backney disused rail bridge came into view, the River Wye is fairly wide at this point, the bridge platform had been removed leaving just the bridge buttresses standing out of the river, the 2 arches to the left had trees in or just under the water so were blocked to the path of Wye Invader, in addition, the buttresses' are on a bend leaving only the right arch navigable, the river level was about 1 metre above normal because of the recent flood water.



On the left, the river bank was dry for the next 250 metres, up to the next corner. I had only the right starboard arch open, almost as soon as we were halfway through, the current took hold of Wye Invader, as we cleared the stone buttresses, we were far enough forward from the bridge for the stern to clear, I put Wye Invader in astern gear to lessen the impact, the bank at this point ran down to water level, so our Bow ran up the bank field and Wye invader stopped and were soon off the bank and allowed the current to push the stern towards the left bank, this had the benefit of allowing the bows out into the oncoming flood water and into mid-stream and deeper water, away from the shallows and back to the middle of the River Wye, keeping to the centre until we passed the next left corner.

## Hole in the Wall and Foy Suspension Bridge

The River Wye was now fairly straight and wide, about 300 meters in front of us the river narrowed, as we passed an island on the right, just ahead we saw the Foy Suspension Bridge at Hole in the Wall. As we got closer, I slowed down so I could stop if we didn't have sufficient air draft. An hour later and the river flood would have been too high and held us up until it had passed, as it was we had about a 30 centimetres to spare. As Wye Invader cleared Foy Bridge, 750 meters ahead was the remains of the Old Mill Weir at Hole in the Wall.

This was a problem as the fishing rights owners had altered the course of the river and put several large boulders into the river, some quite large, in or on the river bed from the left side of the weir out towards the mid-line, so as we moved to the right and were pushed onto the shallow side of the weir, fortunately for Wye Invader, the extra flood water had provided extra draft, which has allowed us to sail over the top of most of the boulders. The last thing we needed was another smashed propeller, although we still had the repaired one from Tintern on-board, having found a Blacksmith with the skill to weld cast iron.





As we cleared Old Mill Weir, the River Wye runs straight for about half a mile, it then turns through 90 degrees left, running alongside the river is a single track unfenced road, following Wye Invaders progress was a small convoy of about 6 vehicles, all belonging to various fisheries owners. One of these gentlemen tried to tell me we could not pass along the river over the fishery by Hole in the Wall in case we damaged one of the fishing structures in the river. I told him to return to his boss and the fishery owner to fill in the locations of all the fishing platforms, concrete or otherwise on my map, if he did not, and we damaged Wye Invader on any of their platforms, I would pass the information to my insurers at Lloyd's, an hour later he returned with the details and I thanked him. Wye Invader then made good progress past the fishery.

## **Sellack Suspension Bridge**

The next 5 to 6 miles were a series of large loops and tight corners and then the final right bend before we saw Sellack Suspension Bridge in the distance with a few people stood on it. The flood that was on its way down the river had arrived by the time we got to Selleck, Wye invader passed under the bridge with about 30 centimetres to spare. The river was about a metre short of the top of its banks and later that evening would spill over into the fields, however the bonus for Wye Invader was we then didn't have any weir draft problems and, with only two more bridges to go only a possible air draft problem at Holme Lacy Bridge.





As Wye invader passed under Sellack Suspension Bridge we went into a long right-hand bend, 100 meters to the left, the road into Hoarwithy runs parallel to the river and by now, people living in the houses were lining the road or stood in their gardens and probably could not believe what they were seeing!

## Hoarwithy Road Bridge

A few hundred metres ahead, Hoarwithy Road bridge had crowds of people leaning over the bridge to get a better view and we had no problems with air draft, we slowed as we passed under the bridge then, about 100 metres upstream we pulled in to the bank to check the engine and fuel level, some of the crew went ashore for a walk and to talk to the locals, 15 minutes later we were underway again.



As Wye Invader departed Hoarwithy, the River Wye was wide with fields either side, about a mile upstream on the starboard side it begins to close in and was overgrown with trees, just before we reached the trees, we passed through the remaining buttresses of Ballingham Rail Bridge.

### **Ballingham Island and Weir**

Passing what was left of the weir, the main river channel was about 10 meters wide, Wye Invader had a beam of just over 5 metres, it was tight on either side and overgrown with trees against the left bank. As we exited the channel we steered about 30 degrees to starboard and out into the main river, then hard to port before the river current (flood water) in the Wye had time to turn Wye Invader downstream onto the weir and into the trees.



As we left Ballingham astern, the River Wye started to get narrower with more fishing obstructions under the water, as we turned to starboard Wye Invader turned onto what was known as the Golden Mile Fishery, almost immediately on the starboard side and out to the mid-line, we were sailing over the top of a line of concrete blocks and, if there had not been a flood on, we would have done some serious damage to the bottom of Wye Invader.

The River Wye was then straight for about a mile, as we approached the sharp left bend at the end of the straight, the bow was pushed almost into the starboard bank, for the next 2 miles we had to manoeuvre through a series of sharp bends, on the final corner it was just too tight, so I eased off and allowed Wye Invader to be pushed into



the bank sideways, starboard beam on, and then used the tree branches that we had been pushed into to push the bow back out into the main current, then I increased the engine speed to overcome the river current and put us back on course.

## Holme Lacy Bridge

As Wye Invader cleared the last corner, in the distance Holme Lacy Bridge came into view, the last bridge before we stopped for the night. The River Wye is now 3 meters above normal, Tony was on the bow he stood with his arm above his head and that just clears the underside of the bridge, we knew the rest of the Wye Invader would pass through, we could see lots of people on the bridge mainly from Fownhope, some of who we knew. The middle arch had the greater clearance, not by a lot, just a few centimetres but enough to make a difference, I eased off the engine, Tony's arm and hand cleared the underside of the bridge and I increased the engine speed and Wye Invader cleared another impossible bridge!





## **Fuel**

About 100 meters above Holme Lacy Bridge I eased off the engine and John who was in the engine room topping the prop-shaft oilers up and checking the fuel levels, shouted up "we need about 50 litres to cover the last 5 miles into Hereford". Wye Invader had been moored for about 10 minutes when Mr Price, a local farmer whose field we'd moored by, stopped by, he offered to loan us 50 litres of his own red diesel, I said I'd repay him with 50 litres of road diesel from Rotherwas Service Station 2 miles away when he was passing.

15 minutes later his son, turned up on a quad bike, the fuel was passed onboard and down into the engine room, the cans were soon empty and handed back with a big 'thank you' and we got underway, it was now 1630 hours and would soon be dark.

## **Carrots Corner 2 Miles up the River**

The last big corner before Hereford with a large flood bank on the starboard side, as we got closer to the corner, the flood bank had a standing crowd along its top cheering and waving, Wye Invader started to turn into the corner, we got about halfway around when a large eddy on the right side and close to the bank, pulled us across the corner and sat Wye Invader very neatly on top of the Carrots Deep Fishing Hole and alongside the flood bank. Tony asked if we were going on to Hereford? I replied, 'No, secure the bow to that large No Fishing No Mooring sign, put the gangplank down, we're all going to the Bunch of Carrots Pub and I am paying'.

The gangplank was secured and everybody adjourned to the bar, the Landlord asked if this was something that was done every year, I replied "No, just one in every 150 years" Much later, some of the crew fell asleep, others walked or got a taxi home, the rest were asked to leave just after midnight, as we walked back over the flood bank Wye Invader was surrounded by water, some got their feet wet, others got a lift it, was now 01.00 am and the River Wye was on its way back down.

## **Hereford Rail Bridge**

### **Next Morning 1030 hrs.**

All the crew were back onboard, the River Wye was now about a metre below bank level, by the time we had lifted the gangplank and removed the rope from around the sign, it was 11.00 am, we cast off, about 500 metres upstream Wye Invader passed an island, we also passed Ken Goodwin a local Farmer and Simon one of his workers, I eased off and said, "Hello". About 800 metres in front was the mainline rail bridge, 10 minutes later and about 100 metres below the bridge, I moored Wye Invader alongside the left bank to have a few minutes to talk to Ken Goodwin, I then walked up the bank to check out the bridge and by the time I got back onboard, the river level had dropped and the bow was aground.

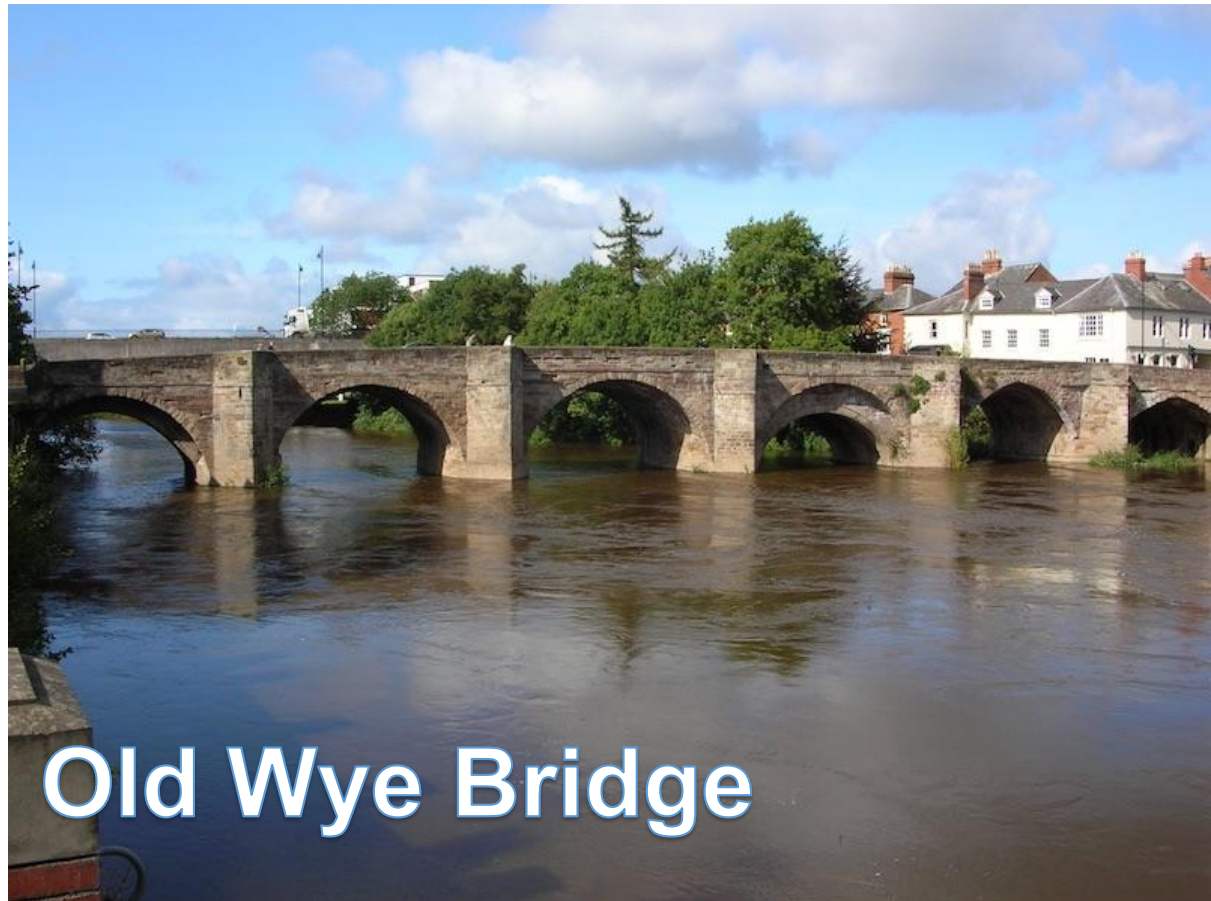
The stern was clear all around, I tried going astern and side to side, the only other option was to put a steel cable 45 degrees across the bow to the other side of the river and use that to slide the bows forward out into deeper water.

Secured to the stern was a small boat with outboard engine, Paul, one of the crew bought it along the starboard side, the crew lowered the winch rope and Paul took the rope across the river to a tree on the opposite side of the river, the crew started to take the slack out of the rope, I started the engine and go to the left with the stern, the rope went slack and then was wound in, I then go the other way to the right and astern in a short time Wye Invader was floating free, the winch cable was wound in as we moved to the starboard side, it was now 1330 hrs.



The crew were all back onboard, the winch rope was pulled from around the tree and I eased Wye Invader under the rail bridge using some tree branches to spring the bow out into the river current, as the bow moved into the river current it allowed me to bring the stern mid-stream and Wye Invader was on the last half mile to her mooring at the back of the Wye Inn. 200 metres upstream, Wye Invader passed under the last bridge, another 100 metres further upstream we saw a gap in the trees, I eased off the engine speed and went astern to slow Wye Invader to a stop, we glided slowly the last few metres until Wye Invader touched the bank, at that point we sounded the ships horn and that in turn empties the Wye Inn where lunch was just about finished, 'Little John' jumped off the bow onto the bank and put a rope around a tree, we secured the stern, put the gangplank ashore and friends and family came onboard.

Wye Invader stayed moored at the rear of the Wye Inn until Boxing Day, mainly because the river levels were to low and Hereford City Council had made some unhelpful comments in the local press about taking Court action against Wye Invader if she was moored within the City limits, moored at the Wye Inn we were just outside those limits but the downside was the mooring was out of sight and secluded.



Within a week Wye Invader had been broken into, marine radios and other equipment had been stolen, the only thing I could do was have a few beers in the Wye Inn and park my car in their car park and occasionally, stay the night on board.

As far as the Council was concerned I made point of seeing and explaining my vision to use her as a floating restaurant to Councillor David Short, the Leader of the City Council at that time along with Councillor Basil Baldwin and Councillor Colin Rumsey (who later became Chair of Planning). As a backdrop to this, The River Wye Preservation Society who counted amongst its members anyone with Salmon Fishing interests and various other Conservation Bodies, held their meeting in the Bishops Palace in Hereford and, top of the agenda was Wye Invader.

In the meantime, November soon became December and a Christmas Fancy Dress Party was organised for all the crew and friends or who had helped in one form or another. This was to be a Barbeque on Wye Invader with hatch covers removed from above the barbeque itself, there was also an offer to 'camp over' to those who wished to erect a tent and stay the night in the forward part of the hold.

The party was held on the 20th December, the Saturday before Christmas and to ease the car parking we all would meet in the Wye Inn for a few drinks and vehicles could be left overnight with the permission of the Landlord.



## Victoria Suspension Bridge

On Boxing day 26th December at around 1130 hours we started Wye Invaders engine, checked the gearbox oil level and moved off the mooring, the water level was about one and a quarter metres above summer level and Wye Invader should clear the underside of Victory Suspension Bridge. We came round the last right-hand bend, 100 metres ahead was the Victory Suspension Bridge, the river shallows on the right and there is a V in the river channel to the left of the shallows, I pointed the bow of Wye Invader to this point, where the water was deepest.

The bow cleared the underside of the bridge and the rest of Wye Invader followed through, the channel was mainly on the starboard until the bow passed the start of St Stephens Wharf, I turned to port, out of the current and on to the shallows to moor alongside the Old Wharf ready for the final leg through the Old Wye Bridge a few days later, when some of the rain falling in Wales would increase the water depth enough to enable Wye Invader to clear the concrete bridge supports that were laid early in the Second World War by American engineers as the A49 and Herefords Ancient Bridge was the main supply route from Liverpool to the troops in the South of England.

On the 1st of January, New Year's Day, the crew of Wye Invader assembled at 1100 hours, I checked the oil levels and fuel then started the engine, when it had warmed up, the mooring ropes were pulled back onboard.

I then went astern on the shallows, eased the bow out enough for the current to move the bow out to starboard, when Wye Invader had lined up on the centre arch I increased the engine to just above tick over and we eased forward with the bow left of centre in the arch, as Wye invader moved through, the bow had to move to port to allow the stern to stay central so the bridge support on either side did not foul the propeller as we cleared. I increased the engine speed to clear the bridge, Wye Invader then moved up to moor just downstream on the port side, opposite of the Rowing Club.

The 75 Miles from Chepstow to Hereford Bridge took 20 hours over 8 Months, without the crew, what seemed like an impossible journey could not have been accomplished.

