

Dragonade – Easter 1889

Good Friday, April 19th.



2.30. p.m.

“Dragon” lying under Folly Bridge.

Crew came on board consisting of

C.C. Lynam, M.A. - *Skipper*

R.B. Lynam - *Rossall* (Dick)

W.F. Cooper - *Dragon* (Will)

J.M. Falkner, M.A. - *Hert. Coll.* (Tom)

Folly Bridge, Oxford

Cast off and started down stream. Wind, west; blowing fairly fresh; stream medium. Made good progress till about one mile above Abingdon, when we determined to land and make tea. Found large assortment of Sunday School scholars on treat on towpath side, so ran under right bank and got gear out for tea making.

At first experienced some difficulty in understanding theory and practice of cooking stove. Fire went out once or twice, but at last it was discovered that this was due to T. (Falkner) standing in front of it, in ulster, and shutting out wind. Removed obstruction and made tea – of Thames water. Discovered there was no milk, also that Thames water has too much “body” for tea-making, and leaves very rich scum on tea. Examined kettle, poor boiled tadpole inside.

At six, got gear back into boat, and cast off again. At Abingdon wind dropped entirely, and had some difficulty in taking “Dragon” through town. Reached Culham lock about 7.30. After this lock wind dropped, and we had to resort to sculling. At dusk, passed a brick-kiln; very picturesque effect of glowing furnaces, which looked snug in the chilly evening air.

Soon after this it got dark altogether, and we prepared to lay to for the night. Wishing to avoid the towpath side we looked for suitable anchorage on Berkshire bank, where there seemed however to be a row of polled willows. T. was sculling on slowly and the rest looking out for a berth, but the willows seemed endless, and we could find no gap in them, when suddenly a railway train rushed across the river over a bridge only a few yards below. This bridge we did not know of. Realized risk we were running in sculling in the dark, as our mast would not clear any bridge; pulled up at

once on the towpath side, anchoring with the punt pole and two ballast pigs.

It was pitch dark, but on looking for boat lamp we could nowhere discover the oil can; after fruitless search, W. and T. set off to walk back to Culham lock for fresh supply. Dark walk but very nice, by river very still; heard sounds of queer birds; at last reached glowing brick-kiln, and procured some oil at turnpike, after spilling a pint of paraffin over the good-wife's best table. Returned swinging burning light. Found S. and D. had got up tent and made fire for supper. Fried ham for supper and turned in.

S. and D. slept forward. T. and W. aft.

Found bottom boards awfully hard, but dosed off at last. All night had a series of startling alarms, everyone thinking in turn that boat had got adrift; trains also were very troublesome, as we were lying only fifty yards off main line railway bridge. About 3 a.m. everyone jumped up thinking they heard a steam tug's warning whistle; it turned out to be only a donkey braying in proximity.

Saturday, April 20th.

Woke up finally about seven, and on looking out found we had moored in perilous proximity to a railway bridge by small village called Appleford. Morning very cold and grey. T. was deputed to get fresh milk, so set off to Appleford. *En route* bathed under railway bridge, but found water deadly cold, and wind afterwards cut like knives. Determined not to bathe again this expedition. Got milk with some difficulty, and got breakfast of sausages (not done); afterwards weighed anchor and dropped through railway bridge.

Found that no bridges would clear our mast (23' 922) but managed to shoot most of them. S. and T. lowering mast just on passing, and keeping enough sail on right up to bridge to take her through, D. steering and W. managing jib.

In Clifton Hampden reach found wind freshened so much that we took in a reef in mainsail; shortly after wind still stronger, and took in second reef and hoisted storm jib instead of large one. Still found wind very strong, being due behind us as we pushed on at great speed, and reached Wallingford about one o'clock.

Determined to lunch there and purchase necessaries. Lunched at "Lamb", fared well and paid correspondingly. Bought provisions, amongst other things a quantity of mutton chops; and set sail about three p.m.



Wallingford Bridge c.1870

Shot Wallingford bridge, but soon after wind began to drop, and sun came out. Turned out a lovely evening, but no wind to speak of.

Passed Streatley and lay-to for tea in a very beautiful reach of the river above Pangbourne. Banks very deep and richly wooded. Made tea on green sward by side of road; fat old woman's horse shied at fire. Main line passed in cutting close by, so after tea climbed to top of cutting and smoked and watched trains.

Got out sweeps and pulled down through Pangbourne lock, bringing up on left bank. Moored to some willows about 200 yards below Pangbourne.



Pangbourne c. 1885

Found we had gone on rather too late before mooring, and that it is difficult to select good berth after dark sets in. Determined to lie-in earlier in future. Made supper of tinned soup bought at Wallingford. Soup was voted a failure, and completely upset crew. It was also found that a cow or sheep had committed suicide by drowning very near, a fact of which there was strong olfactory evidence; it was however too late to alter moorings. Fine night, but wind sprung up again and blew tent about towards dawn. No alarms and slept well.

*Sunday, April 21st. **Easter.***

Weighed anchor about nine. Morning overcast, wind very fresh and *squally*. Went down stream mostly before wind at great pace;



passed Hardwicke House and Maple Durham, both splendid old houses, mainly Tudor.

Mapledurham House

Wind freshened much, and made sailing difficult and dangerous in head-wind reaches; skipper however was equal to the occasion, and kept on course manfully. 10.30 – took in two reefs and hoisted storm jib. In head-wind reach below Maple Durham. During violent squall and very lumpy water just touched sandbank under Berkshire bank, but skipper let go everything and avoided what must otherwise have been a smash and capsize.

Met one reach in which there was a regular *sea*. Shipped a little water, and through a bit of mishandling of jib “Dragon” missed stays in slop and grounded hard on mudbank in centre of stream; tried hard for some time to get her off; some obliging fellow-watermen in a pair came down and volunteered to take a tow-rope to the shore and lug us off. This we were glad to accept, but just as the boat shoved off by a violent effort we got the “Dragon” clear; so held on to Reading.

Shot Reading bridge. There were a hundred or more people watching on the bridge. Just below, violent wind and stream took us broadside towards landing stage before we could get sail up. Got sail up and shoved off. Started up stream, and had to make a tack towards Berkshire bank with very insufficient room; skipper did this and just cleared some stakes by landing stage, with scarcely a foot to spare. This was a very masterly manoeuvre, as our situation was very critical. We all felt great relief, and dashed off down stream with applause from spectators. Shortly after, the wind increased to gale, and to make boat manageable, about 2 p.m., had to take in three reefs and reef small jib. Went on at great pace, all sitting well on gunwale, and brought up opposite quay at Henley.

To save time and utilise splendid wind determined to get cold provisions at hotel and take them with us and eat on board. Did this, and found a sumptuous hotel where we got all kinds of cold meat, bread, butter, etc.

Put off again, about 3.15. Wind began to slacken, and rain to fall; ten minutes later, a steady downpour set in. Resolved to run ashore and eat lunch if possible under shelter. Ran under the shore at a boat-house landing. All were very wet (especially shoes) and uncomfortable. Boat-house was locked. Could find no shelter except by creeping underneath a rick where there was only about 2' 6" height. Ate lunch; were very wet, meat and bread also wet; place terribly draughty. After a while, as rain showed no sign of abating, settled to press on to Medenham and lie there until rain ceased.



Reached Medmenham Abbey about 4.45 p.m. Moored boat and went up to hotel. Asked for fire and room to change.

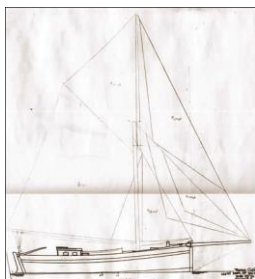
Medmenham Abbey

At first they seemed rather disinclined to give us a fire; T. who was suffering from complicated toothaches and several swollen faces, and was therefore somewhat short of temper, got rather exasperated and waxed indignant with landlord. Result was they provided us a fire in a comfortable servants' hall. Went there and dried as much as possible. Changed boots and socks, and put boots to dry on top of kitchen range. Consumed hot whisky and water and felt better. Later on evening began to clear, but decided boat was too wet to sleep on board, so got beds at Medmenham Abbey.

Evening turned out lovely, but wind dropped. Took ramble round Medmenham Abbey, and got sails up and dried them. Went to bed fairly early, and sat and smoked in T.'s room, where there was a fire. Got a good supper and slept well. Most comfortable beds.

Monday, April 22nd.

Got up pretty late, about 9.15. Lovely morning. Soft spring air, but clouds and storm passing over. Found Dick's boots and Will's were absolutely ruined by being put on the stove the night before. Will's were burnt and twisted inside out, and went out into an acute point like old court-jesters'. Had breakfast and paid bill, and went out to get sails up.



On Medmenham lawn saw cutter going down under full sail. Found she was "Venture", with Smith on board. They had left Oxford half-day later than us. Hailed them, and agreed to race down. They beat up and down until we were ready.

A Thames cutter

We put off. After going 200 yards, found "Taunt" (1) and two water and milk kegs were left behind. "Taunt" absolutely indispensable, so ran to shore and sent Will and Dick back. "Venture" could not wait, as they wanted to do thirty miles a day, so they sailed on. W. and D. could not find "Taunt", so came back with milk and water kegs alone. T. then went back, and after long search found "Taunt" in coffee room.

Started off at last. Fair breeze, but stormy. Sailed on to Bourne End. T. then determined to forage in Cookham. Went up straggling village, and got some lovely farm eggs and fine cream, also flask of whisky which turned out to be mostly water.

Tropical storm of rain on return to boat. Got sail down and rigged up jibs over boom to keep out rain. Determined to scull and tow down to Maidenhead. Clivereach was simply perfect, but much rain. Many depressed holiday makers and wet lovers on banks. Ran in under trees on Buckingham shore, and got lunch. Sun came out very warm, so lay and basked for an hour.

Pushed off about 4.30, and towed down to Maidenhead. Just before Maidenhead river narrows very much. Very strong stream between island and concrete quay wall. Dick towed, but "Dragon" got unruly and rammed quay wall with her bowsprit. Carried away bowsprit stay; bowsprit dropped into water. Then swung round and came broadside on to dingy lying

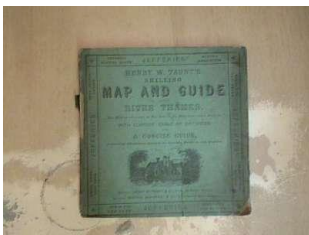
between us and wall. Gave dingy *awful* scrunch, and broke her from moorings. Dingy drifted down stream, crowd of bank-holidayers on bank much amused. Caught dingy with boat-hook and tied her fast. Came to at Rose's landing just below. Rose said he would make damaged stay good. Crossed stream and lay to under island for night. Got good tea on island. After tea, were punted to mainland, and took beds at Thames Hotel.



Then strolled up to Maidenhead Station to see "Flying Dutchman" go through. *En route* Will and Dick took six shots at travelling cocoa-nut Aunt Sally booth; three shots successful; carried off three cocoa-nuts in triumph – two good one doubtful. Saw two or three fast trains go through, then to bed early, and to sleep.

(The voyage continued down the Thames for another four days; the intrepid adventurers, still bothered by winds and rain squalls, managed to visit Windsor Castle, Hampton Court Palace Gardens and reached Westminster Bridge on Friday afternoon. They asked a group of bargees whether it was safe to leave "Dragon" on the mud for the night. They replied in the affirmative. Just then a Thames river police boat appeared. A courteous officer assured them that it was most unsafe to lie there for the night as the boat would be rifled by bargees, an exceptionally bad lot, who scrupled not to break heads in pursuit of greed. So they moved off amid execrations of bargees. On Saturday, Skipper sailed on down to Erith with a kindly waterman, while W., D. and T. visited the Tower of London and the Zoo, before catching a train to Oxford from Paddington.)

Sic explicit feliciter prima aureae Draconis peregrinatio. Laus Deo.



Taunt's pocket Guide

(1). Henry Taunt was one of the most innovative and prolific of Victorian photographers. Working mainly in and around Oxford, he found his favourite subject in the River Thames. He went on to capture its astonishing variety in thousands of glass plate negatives, portraying the natural beauties of the river itself and its landscape, the historic houses, bridges and other riverside buildings.