



# Magda's Flotilla

Liverpool

06/03/2019 – 18/03/2019

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Pictures are by various flotilla members.

## **FROM THE EDITOR**

On the 6th of March 2019 five boats, accompanied by Freya and Gareth, leave their secure mooring in Scarisbrick Marina to go on an epic cruise into Liverpool's Salthouse Dock.

The flotilla consists of a mixture of old and young(ish), experienced and nearly novices, old and brand new boats, narrowboats and widebeam.

Everybody is in for a steep learning curve. The novices: locks, swing bridges, strong winds, heavy rain. The more experienced ones: nearly capsizing.

It's also a steep learning curve, dealing with the various personalities of the flotilla members. Freya and Gareth being the most difficult ones.

We manage to achieve more, besides getting safe into Liverpool and safe back to Scarisbrick marina. We succeed in beating Phileas Fogg, and go around the world in twelve days.

But the best of all: we make friends for life.

I hope you'll enjoy this account of a very special trip.

Scarisbrick Marina

20 March 2019

Magda Wensing



## 7 MARCH 2019

Nine o'clock, we said, that's when Bob and Linda will start opening Bridge 10.

Nine o'clock, we don't have a choice. Storm Freya is blowing a 45 m/hr wind, and it's pouring down with rain. But we've booked a passage into Liverpool, so we have to go!

Nine o'clock Linda starts doing the bridge. Bob goes through and moors up, the others try to cast off in the gale force wind. I'm on the tiller, Lawrance is busy helping everyone to un-moor. Then, of course, there is nobody to help us, to get two sets of two pins out and get pins, ropes and us safely back on the boat before WRT sets off on her own. In the end Lawrance stays ashore to help Linda to 'lock' the swingbridge, i.e. secure the bridge with a rope...

In the meantime I'm passing Bob who shouts: "Slow down, there is something blocking the canal just around the corner." Indeed, I see four boats in front of me, not moving forward but going all over the place. Mind you, it's 45 m/hr winds, and we're just in open countryside. It turns out it's the place of the breach of last summer, and they are still doing things. They are positioning two (wide) barges on the towpath side and banksmen tell us to wait.

Isn't this silly? CRT knows we will (and have) to start at 9 o'clock to get into Liverpool. Why not wait half an hour until we're past? Especially with one of us being a wide beam. Two barges and a widebeam, that just fits in the Leeds&Liverpool at that place.

That obstruction mastered, we're approaching bridge 9, the first of the bridges CRT used to do for us, but we have to do now ourselves. By the time I'm getting nearer I expected the bridge to be open and three of us going through. But the bridge is still closed, so Lawrance says: "Just let me off, and I'll do the bridge."

So that's what's happening. He does the bridge, and, although we should close the bridge after three boats, we all go through at once. No chance for us last three boats to moor up or hover, in this kind of weather.

The bridge is very slow, so closing takes hours, I'm waiting around the corner (where there is head-on wind, so WRT kind of stays where I want her to stay). With Lawrance finally back on the boat we head for bridge 6. We can just contact Bob on the two-way radio's to say we're on our way, but he's nearly out of reach.

When bridge 6 comes into view we see the woman from the added (sixth) boat in the flotilla, just closing the bridge. She sees us to, and starts the procedure to open the bridge again.

What exactly goes wrong none of us will ever know, but the bridge stops working at all. In the still very high winds I manage to get Lawrance ashore. He can't get the bridge going either. So I sign-language to them: *Shall I phone CRT?*

After telling WRT to behave I get my phone from inside the boat, and phone CRT. Get's this stupid message about everything I can do online, and something else I can hardly understand, I get a real person. I tell her I'm on nb WRT, on the Leeds&Liverpool Canal, and I'm stuck at Netherton Swingbridge, bridge no 6, which can't be opened. She says she will set me through to the local branch.

I explain the situation again to the next woman I get on the phone. First she asks me if I can go somewhere else, where it is not so windy, I'm hard to understand.

"No, I can't. I'm on the boat, trying not to end up diagonal in the canal."

"Why are you stuck at the bridge?"

"Because we can't open it."

"So you can't go through the bridge?" (*I'm not sure where this conversation is leading to...*)

"What bridge are you at? Oh, there is no swingbridge number 6."

"Sorry? It's right in front of me!"



The non-existing bridge

Then she asks a (sensible) question, that makes me loosing it completely (mind, it 45 m/hr winds, rain, and we have a time schedule to keep):

“What city are you in?”

“I’m in f\*\*\*g Liverpool.”

Long story short, they connected me to the Leeds Office. She promises me the North-West branch will phone me back asap (they still have to, by the way...).

After 15 minutes I decide to call CRT again, and ask for the Wigan Branch. Explain the situation, and that woman says: “I’ll phone you back asap with an ETA for when help will be there (they still have to phone me back...).

That’s half an hour gone. Everybody else is way ahead of us. But we still have to be at Stanley Locks around 1-ish. Half an hour later a CRT van turns up. With five men! One of them fixes the problem straight away: he resets the system. As we’ll find out later, the other four men are the volunteers for the locks we have to go through...



Help has arrived

We're now an hour behind everybody. So I have lunch (and try to get dry-ish and warm) while Lawrance is on the tiller. We arrive at Stanley Locks just as the lock is ready for the last two boats. The other boat has never done a lock before, so while we're slowly going down I explain to the skipper the do's and don'ts. I tell him we're going out as a pair, slowly, going as straight as possible, right into the next lock.

“And whatever happens, DON'T USE YOUR BOW THRUSTER!”

Very slowly we move out, trying to go as slowly and straight as possible in the horrible wind. Everything goes fine until... he uses his bow thruster and WRT cannot but hit the lock. Luckily we are going slow.

The other three locks are a piece of cake, and then we're out in the docks. It's a bit like being in *The Perfect Storm*, but WRT behaves perfectly.

he rain finally stops, and I must admit: the wind is a lot less than this morning.



Entering Sid's Ditch (Picture by G. Marsh)

Still we fly through Sid's Ditch, with the wind at the back. After that the wind just comes from every direction. WRT is going diagonally, which is not a problem in the large docks, but getting from one dock into the other I have to straighten her up, and try not to hit any stone walls.

The rest is kind of easy. The wind drops significantly while we're in the tunnels (*how strange*), and hits me with renewed force in the open parts between the tunnel. I just never know from which side it will hit me. At the last lock the whole flotilla is back together. Waiting for the volunteers to show up.



Nearly there

Out of the last lock I'm so used to cruising in this wind that I just perfectly sail into Albert Dock and into Salthouse Dock. Only mooring up onto these short pontoons is a bit of a problem. I need speed to keep WRT straight in this wind, and I can't go too fast or I'll end up like King Richard: under the car park.

Bob, our inexperienced widebeam skipper, has to reverse right into the corner of Salthouse Dock, the most horrible mooring of all. The only thing I can say: he's a natural. He just does it! Brilliant, Bob!

## 11 MARCH 2019

This trip to Liverpool will be an extreme steep learning curve for our novices. We're all knackered, after seven hours on the tiller.

Seven hours is a long time, especially in this kind of weather. We have only done two seven-hour days in 2018 (out of 126), and in 2017 one day of 7½ and one of 6¾ (out of 114). I'm used to cruising, but even I need some time sitting down and staring into the void, after seven hours on the tiller.

And me and Bill, are the only ones that are still more or less dry. Landlubber's waterproofs are waterproof for a couple of hours, not for standing still in the pouring rain for seven hours.

And they all are absolutely freezing. Well, I'm wearing: woolen socks, thermal long Johns, thick jeans, waterproof trousers, thermal vest, poloshirt, woolen jumper, thick fleece and Lawrance's fisherman jacket. Only my hand are cold (and wet). I still have to find the perfect glove.

Steep learning curve, I said. We all have to check the weed hatch. Bob has enough clothes and bedding around the prop to start a second hand shop. Did WRT slow down a bit, at the end of the journey, Bob couldn't even get properly into the last of the Stanley locks!

And all our fires are backfiring. Too low down, too many high buildings around us, and, of course, that bloody wind.



Salthouse Dock

Except for the widebeam we're all on pontoons. Except for Bill, all the pontoons are too short. And again except for Bill, all the T-bollards are in the wrong place. So nobody is tied properly to the pontoon. So our boats go from left to right, forwards and backwards, and up and down with the waves. Everything bangs, and you hear squeaking sounds all over. And we all know: there is five metres of water beneath you...!

The weather doesn't help either. One moment I open the side doors to let the sun in. Ten minutes later I sit in the well deck with a cigarette and all the sudden hell breaks loose. They start throwing stones on the boat. And more stones, and bigger stones. Time to get my camera.



Hell breaking loose

When I get into the boat I see a complete wall of hail going straight into the galley. I should have ran inside to close the side door, as soon as I heard the hail, but I was just mesmerized by that amount of hail.

We'll survive.

But we might have to endure it longer than we planned. Did we came in with wind speeds of 25 m/hr? The weather forecast for Wednesday is about wind speeds of 54 m/hr! CRT won't let us go out at wind speeds over  $\pm 25$  m/hr. There is no way we can get through the outer docks in winds like that...

**14 MARCH 2019**

I just hear people think: and she didn't do anything cultural, while being in Liverpool?

Of course I did!

I went to the Walker Art Gallery to see two things.

An exhibition about 18th century fashion items. With two video's about how middle class men and women were getting dressed in the morning.



*Bit awkward to wear when on the tiller*

The video's were the most interesting. They make very clear that without servants a middle class woman could not get dressed. And it would take about half an hour at least to get presentable. And that's without doing her hair. It's the same for the man. Just imagine living on a narrowboat...

I once made a dress like that. Made of cheap curtain material. For a dance project. Can you imagine me, dressed like this, on the tiller of WRT?



Dresses to Impress?

The other cultural thing was going to the Cavern Club.



Beatles fan? in 1963

Although dressed like a Beatles fan, I actually never really was. It was just that my neighbour worked in a textile print factory. This fabric was actually never for sale in Holland but went straight to the UK. This top is made of cut-offs that would have been thrown away.



A couple of years later

The rest of the flotilla stays at the Cavern Club most of the day. I preferred to go back to the boat and knit.

I would have spent a whole week there if it was about Pink Floyd, or ELO...

## 15 MARCH 2019

Then, finally, on the Friday Sid tells us that we are allowed to go. Storm Gareth has calmed down. The wind is well within the limits (20 m/hr, with gusts up to 40 m/hr).



Bringer of good(?) news

So at nine o'clock Bill and Marc head out of Salthouse Dock, to Mann Island. We follow fifteen minutes later, to find Marc moored up just after the lock. He has metres of wire around his prop, so Lawrance gets his tools and gloves and jumps over on Marc's boat. I continue on my own, basically to show our novices where to go.

Once out of Princes Lock I certainly get the 40 m/hr gusts that CRT promised us. But it's just delightful to be on WRT, she sails so easy (albeit diagonally).

Then, after Sid's Ditch, we get the unexpected 60 m/hr winds. Suddenly WRT starts to capsize, blown over by the wind. I'm in the middle of a huge Dock, what can I do?

We're tilted to starboard anyway, so a wind from the left, and everything on the shelves on the portside of the boat now on the floor, WRT will start tilting even more!

I must say, it is one of the few occasions so far that I am scared while cruising on WRT.

I managed to both stay on course and to counter-balance the tilting (doing about 2500 revs), but after a while turning right towards the Tobacco Warehouse (and having the wind at the back) felt very relieved!

The journey from here is kind of uneventful. Until we get to bridge 9. Sid told me we would be able to go through this bridge until 16:00 hrs. It's 15:30 hrs when we get there, so that should not be a problem.

But no, the bridge doesn't work between 14:00 and 18:00 hrs, so we're all stuck.



Stuck till 6 o'clock

After 18:00 hrs another hour sees us to bridge 10. Most of us just moor on the bridge bollards. It's a ten hour day, with very strong wind, and rain, so...

**17 MARCH 2019**

After our cruise into Liverpool, Bob says: “Let’s go to Chinatown for supper.”

Chinatown, China, flotilla... it sets my mind thinking: Can Magda’s Flotilla go around the (culinary) world in seven days? Beat Phileas Fogg? Shall we give it a try?

So our first stop is China. In restaurant Jumbo City we have an excellent Chinese meal. And drink Tsingtao and Tiger beer.



In China

Our next stop is the Caribbean. Turtle Bay, to be precise. After some of us have done a sightseeing trip for about an hour, we enjoy cocktails, the Jamaican beer Red Stripe, and delicious Caribbean food. I have a Vital Veggie Platter: sweet corn fritters, crispy okra, jerk pit grilled mushroom & peppers with spicy jerk, halloumi, mango flatbread, plantain and a super green salad.



## The Caribbean

From the Caribbean we go back to the west, to South-East Asia. A buffet restaurant with food from Thailand, Singapore, Hongkong, China (and Italy and England). I stay mainly in Japan. I have a go at teppanyaki, with squid, scallops and lots of garlic, followed by sushi. After a quick trip to Singapore and Hongkong, I temporary end up in England. In Eaton, to be precise. Other flotilla members visit Italy, Germany and the USA. The beer of the night is Cobra.



## South-East Asia

Our next stop is Mexico. Mexican Street Food, Brazilian beer(!) Brahma beer.

I have a sweet potato & feta taquito with caramelised onion, salsas & chipotle mayo in a crisp blue corn tortilla (on the right), cornbread & whipped goats' cheese freshly baked, with chipotle chilli jam, and Frijoles: creamy black beans served with crumbled cheese & crema (middle). Absolute delicious!

Lawrance's Duck Croquetas and Bob and Linda's Buttermilk Chicken are to die for as well.



Food to die for

The only problem we have so far: we seem to hang about in the Pacific Ocean. Is it still possible to beat Phileas Fogg?

Probably not. Especially if the next stop is England. The Pumpout (sorry, but that's what my mind makes of the name Pump House.

The Pumpout, because it's close to the dock, and tomorrow we are scheduled to leave Liverpool early in the morning.

The whole flotilla enjoys an excellent typical English meal.



*At the Pumpout*

Our initial itinerary was to leave Liverpool on the 13th of March. But due to storm Gareth that doesn't happen. We're sent back to bed by CRT. So another chance to finish our world trip. But since the food at the Mexican restaurant is so good, and it is Marc's birthday, we go back to Mexico.



*Mexico again*

This time nearly everybody has the Duck Croquetas, even I have them. Together with the sweet potato & feta taquito and an absolute huge green salad, I have no room for any desert.

Since we're still here on the 14th, we decide to end our trip around the world there were it began: in China. Same restaurant, more or less the same food. And no picture...!

But this is not the end of our trip around the world. Once we're on our way back to the marina, we make a stop in England, at the Bootle Arms, and in Portugal (New Scarisbrick Arms).



The Bootle Arms (with roadies)

Around the world in twelve days. I think we did fine. And definitely beat Phileas Fogg!



Around the world in twelve days

**18 MARCH 2019**

Finally a day that we have at least a change to get back in the marina. No storms lurking around the corner, only light rain.

Everybody is so eager to go back, that at 9:30 hrs they are all gone, bar us. Although we had agreed about leaving at 11:00 hrs.

But if one does not keep to agreements, one gets punished. About a quarter of a mile from where he was moored, Bob breaks down, and Marc stays with him for support. I steer WRT right next to the widebeam, to enable the mechanic (Lawrance) to step across.



Broken down

After that it's a clear run. There is no wind whatsoever, so WRT glides effortless onto het jetty. I don't even touch our neighbouring boat or the jetty.

That's everybody safely back at the marina. We've done 42 miles, 18 bridges, 12 locks, much of this in the most horrible weather.

Well done, everybody.

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