



**2014**  
**Boat Owners !**

**by**  
**WRT**

**and**  
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## **FROM THE EDITOR**

In Holland, going to Grammar School in the seventies usually meant visiting Rome. So did I in 1973. One of our duties was to write a travel journal. This was the start of the numerous travel journals I wrote over the years.

So when the word 'narrowboat' entered my vocabulary I immediately realised: this is going to be a journey as well (but not as we know it). I kept track of everything narrowboat-related after that. And when I finally moved to the UK I decided to keep a weblog. Primary for myself, but also for 'the folks back home'.

Reading a weblog on a day-to-day basis is one thing, but reading all posts about one subject in one go is very awkward. Reading it as a pdf or as an e-book is a lot easier.

This document contains all the posts of our adventures in 2014.

How we booked a holiday on a narrowboat, ending up getting our own, and live on it.

If this book is unreadable on your e-reader, please tell me, and I will try to correct it.

Enjoy reading.

Magda Wensing



## MAIDEN VOYAGE – 14 MAY 2014

After a night in the Premier Inn in Nantwich (because the work on the boat isn't finished), a night with family (because our car needs to be at our home marina in Scarisbrick) and two nights on Wea-Ry-Tired (still at Overwater Marina) we are finally ready to rock and roll.



The start of the learning curve

Although it is our boat, I give Lawrance the honours to sail his boat from the jetty to the pontoon where the fuel pump is. Not because I'm such a nice person, but one: I'm scared to death, and two: I don't want to make a fool of myself in front of all the people in the marina. In order to get to the pump, Lawrance has to reverse out of the jetty the boat is in, turn her around, and try to get to the pontoon. It is sunny, but also very windy, so it's needless to say that we (he) don't look like experienced boaters during this manoeuvre. Luckily Dave, from Overwater Marina, is there to give us a much needed hand. Then, fuelled up, we think we need a rest, and go for a delicious breakfast at the cafe.



At the pumps

But at 13:00 hrs we are away on our maiden trip. Lawrance manages to get out of the marina and onto the canal. The people at Overwater Marina suggested first to go around the island that's in the marina, but Lawrance feels confident enough to exit the marina straight away.

Off we go. It's all a bit scary, because it's almost a year ago now, since we were on a narrowboat, and Wea-Ry-Tired is also two feet longer than Sienna, our hire boat from last year. But she acts perfect. In fact, when I get at the tiller, she kind of tells me: "Don't worry, I'll take you anywhere".

Since I can't remember how to operate locks (old age?) it's me at the tiller, and Lawrance doing the first two locks, Hack Green Locks. I manage to get Wea-Ry-Tired (WRT) into the lock without damaging boat or lock too much. But as soon as Lawrance lets the water out of this (deep) lock, and me and WRT are going down fast, I hear a screeching sound from inside the boat: the fire alarm. There is nothing I can do but tell Lawrance, after I manage to pick him up. The same happens at the second Hack Green Lock. In fact, every time the boat gets in the shade, the fire alarm goes off. And sometimes even when I walk underneath the alarm. So we do the only thing we can do: take one of the batteries out.

We happily cruise towards Barbridge Junction, where we turn right onto the Middlewich branch of the Shropshire Union. After about an hour we get our third lock: Cholmondeston Lock. Knowing this time my ears won't get damaged in the lock I'm not worried. But while Lawrance is yapping away with another boater, and I put WRT in forward gear for a short moment (to stay away from the cill), I suddenly have a major problem: I end up with the throttle handle in my hand. OK, I know, that's where it should be, but preferable with the other end of the handle properly attached to the boat... Since this situation is not covered by the Boater's Handbook I can only think of one solution: switch off the engine, and shout: STOP. To Lawrance of course, who is opening the paddles, not to the boat. She's not voice operated yet.

It turns out to be a grub screw that came loose, and after Lawrance fixes the throttle handle back onto the boat, we continue our journey. We see some Black Prince hire boats, and I wonder what happened to Sienna. Would she still be in the fleet? Probably not. No doubt last year Black Prince gave us, novices, the oldest boat they had. When another Black Prince boat is heading towards us, I mention all this to Lawrance, and when passing this boat I look at the name: it actually is Sienna! We consider this to be a good omen.

After 6½ hours of cruising we safely park up at Church Minshull. We have a well deserved meal at The Badger, and after that are fast asleep as soon as our heads hit the pillow.

## **IT GETS EASIER – 15 MAY 2014**

Today, the second day of our maiden trip, the start is a lot easier. It feels as if we have done this all our lives. With Lawrance at the tiller (except for the locks) we head for Middlewich, where we stop to do some shoppings at Tesco. And have lunch. Then it is time to negotiate the Middlewich T-junction.

Last year it was windy, and as soon as I came out of Wardle Lock then, and wanted (needed) to turn left, the boat was blown sideways. It took a lot of effort to get Sienna to turn her head in the direction of Anderton Boat Lift. But today there is no wind, so I'm not worried.

Wrong! I'm doing better than last year, but the turn still won't win a beauty contest. And we get even more stressed, when the guy from the boat behind us, is running after us and shouts: "You forgot to close the paddle!"

Only after I manage to pass between tripled up hire boats at both sides of the canal I find time to breath again. The three Middlewich Locks (with the dog leg in between) is a piece of cake, as is Middlewich Big Lock.

We stop at Anderton Services to get rid of our galley and other waste, and moor at the visitor moorings at Anderton Boat Lift. We don't have a fridge yet, so we can't store food. Therefore we have to stop at places where we know there is a pub that does food. Tonight's pub is The Stanley Arms. We have a drink (me and Lawrance) and a smoke (me) outside. Once inside I decide to have something from the specials board instead of a vegetarian dish from the menu. Lawrance chooses something from the menu. We'll find out later that, if I had chosen the vegetarian dish, we both would have had the same meal as a year ago...

## TUNNELS – 16 MAY 2014

It's my day at the tiller today, and I am a bit nervous. There are three tunnels between Anderton Boat Lift and Lymm, our next stop. I steered through them a couple of times, last year, but now it's a bit different. We're on our own boat now, so WE have to repair any damage caused by hitting tunnel entrances or walls. The boat is also two feet longer, and this time has a cratch and cratch cover. The fact that the guy of the boat next to us tells me to take the cratch cover off when going through the tunnels, doesn't really add anything to my confidence. So better safe than sorry we remove part of the cratch cover, and start heading for Barnton Tunnel. At least we know we have a good working tunnel light. Or, in fact, we actually have two...

Barnton Tunnel (572 yards), and the one just after it, Saltersford Tunnel (424 yards), are some of the first tunnels ever made. And one can tell that the engineers were still novices: these tunnels are absolutely crooked. There is light at the end of both tunnels (just), but don't ask what awaits you inside. With Barnton Tunnel not being a timed one, and with no oncoming traffic I plunge into the deep. Or should I say: steer into the black?

After a few metres we realise: we could have left the cratch cover there, where it belongs. In fact, the cratch is an added extra: keep the front upper part of the cratch in the middle of the lights and you're doing fine. You only have to react quite quickly when the lights suddenly seem to move. That's where the wall isn't straight.

Without touching the wall in Barnton Tunnel, nor in Salterford Tunnel, we stop for a cuppa at Black Prince's base at Acton Bridge. Lawrance buys himself a boater's hat, which suits him well.



At Acton Bridge, before the boater's hat

After about an hour it's time to face another tunnel, Preston Brook Tunnel. And the b\*\*\*\*y Dutton Stop Lock, just in front of it (that takes hours to fill). Preston Brook Tunnel (1239 yards) is timed as well, but not crooked. The last time I went through this tunnel it took me 22 minutes. Today I break that record: it only takes me 12 minutes, once again without hitting the wall.

Now we are no longer on the Trent & Mercy Canal, but on the Bridgewater Canal. A canal, entirely without locks, and wide; where bridges have no numbers but names. It's busy on the towpath and, as before, people look at the boat, see the name, and start smiling. Then, with me at the tiller, I get the usual question: "Are you?" My usual answer: "No, I'm not retired, but he is..."

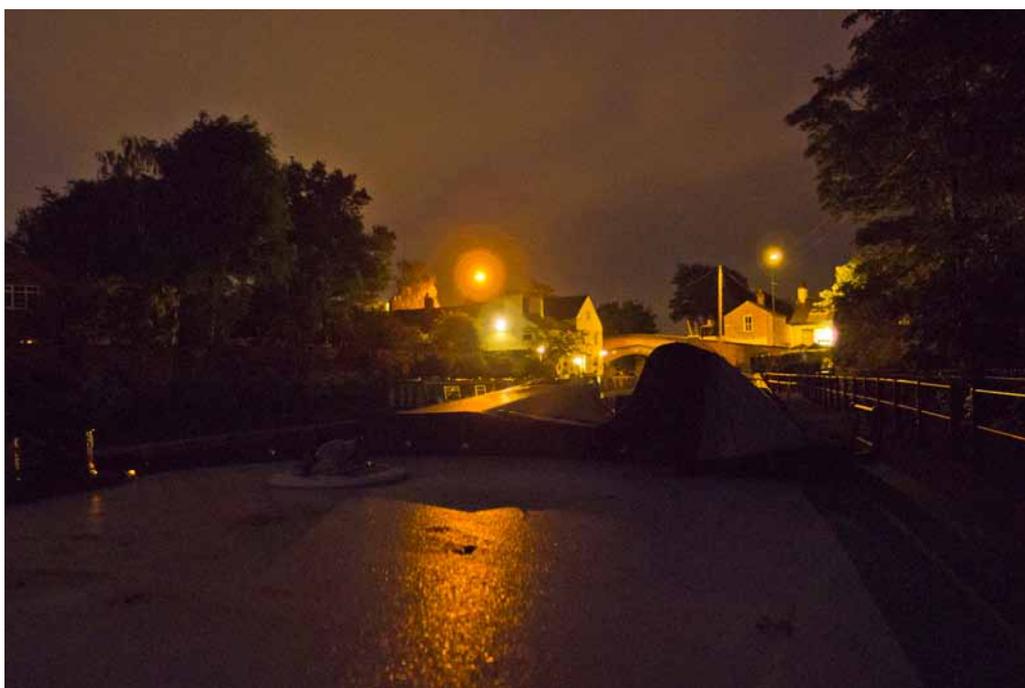
This part of the Bridgewater Canal is familiar territory, we did this last year as well. So we know of The Golden Fleece in Lymm. And although it's a bit late when we get to Lymm, there is still a space left. One space, and it

is small. I think we won't fit, but I don't have (what we call) a carpenter's eye. Lawrance is sure we will fit, and presto, I park the boat (without hitting anybody) between two other boats, with two inches room left, both at bow and stern.



What you call parking

Time to do some shoppings at Sainsbury and then to The Golden Fleece. We have Chicken & Mushroom Pie (Lawrance) and Red Pepper and Brie Cheese Cake (me) in the beer garden, now very upgraded, modern and sterile, amongst heaps of families with heaps of children.



Lymm at night

## MULTIPLE WATER PROBLEMS – 17 MAY 2014

Once again it's sunny and warm today, and Lawrance is at the tiller. So he has to do the daily pre-cruising checks. He discovers a lot of water in the engine compartment, and when checking the cooling liquid of the engine, he finds out that the header tank is nearly empty. There is obvious something wrong here, but there is nothing we can do at the moment, except for refilling the tank with water. And start cruising

We don't have a water hose to fill our water tank, so we stop at Altrincham (Broadheath Bridge) to buy one at B&Q, pass through Sale (where we moored last year, next to The King's Ransom) and turn left at Waters Meeting. Just before Ashburton Road Bridge we stop for a late lunch.



Late lunch, with boater's hat

After this lunch we are faced with a problem: the canal ends. There seems to be a gate in the canal. Which in fact is the Barton Swing Aqueduct. Build in 1894, still operating, and now clearly open. I wonder how to explain that in Holland. "The bridge was open", is a common excuse in Holland when one is late for school. But now we are on a boat, and should cause a bridge to be open, not being faced with an open bridge...!



A gate across the canal

Forty-five minutes we have to wait, until the passenger ferry turns up. Closing the aqueduct doesn't take a lot of time, and soon we're on the move again.



The canal swinging back

Worsley is the next village, with a sharp left turn in the canal, just where the entrance to the coal mine is. It is the birthplace of the canal system, so to speak. Today, with a much better handling boat, Lawrance doesn't make a fool of himself, but takes the bend effortlessly.



Sharp left turn

We stop at Bridgewater Marina for the night. The supper at The Moorings is OK, but the boom-boom-boom music till late at night certainly is not.

## MORE WATER PROBLEMS – 18 MAY 2014

I'm at the tiller, and Lawrance is windlassie. Not that there are any locks. But there is Park Lane Swing Bridge. This time I stay with the boat, while Lawrance opens the bridge. Once the bridge is up, I push the boat off the bank, jump on the stern, and steer her through the bridge. I park up nicely, just after the bridge, so Lawrance can jump back on.

We're on the Leeds & Liverpool Canal, and bridges have numbers again. After Dover Lock Inn we are in unfamiliar terrain. Dover was the furthest point we got to last year, not willing to do the locks at Wigan.

Just before the Poolstock Lock 2 there is a guy walking on the towpath. He's dressed in a blue shirt, with a red life vest over it. I think: Canal & River Trust. When he motions me to slow down, I think: Did I cruise too fast? Will I get a speeding ticket? But no, we have the biggest problem a boater can face: no water in the canal. We know we are on a steep learning curve, but it is getting steeper and steeper.



Stuck at Poolstock Lock 2

Overnight someone drained the canal in the Douglas Valley. The someone either being kids, and angry boater or maybe an angry former C&RT employee. The result: not a lot of water left in the canal between Poolstock Lock 1 and Pagefield Lock. We have to moor at Poolstock Lock 2, and might be stuck here for a couple of days. Luckily there is a pub nearby, unfortunately though they don't do meals. But the landlady provides us with addresses of restaurants in Wigan. A taxi (£3) takes us to Franco's Italian Restaurant, where we have a absolute delicious three-course meal for only £11.95. I can almost 'drink' my salmon in white wine sauce.

## WIGAN, PART 2 – 19 MAY 2014

Since I only had half a day at the tiller yesterday, it's my turn again. For a trip that takes us an hour and 45 minutes. C&RT managed to fill the canal between Poolstock Lock 2 and the second lock in Wigan, and they want us to move to Wigan and moor at the C&RT office, for safety reasons. We still can't go any further, filling up the rest of the canal till Pagefield Lock takes a lot of water and a lot of time.



Behind Poolstock Lock 1 yesterday...



...and today

Time for us to go to the supermarket, getting rid of galley waste in all the litter bins we come across. And since we're at a C&RT office we also manage to get our licence for next year. Another job off the list. In the evening it's Franco's again, which is now in walking distance.



Moored across C&RT, with 'our' C&RT guy in the picture as well

## BEER FOR SUPPER – 20 MAY 2014

At ten o'clock we are allowed to start cruising again, as long as we try to conserve water. This means sharing the locks. With two long narrowboats and one small narrowboat ready to move, the two long ones, 5G and WRT, will share the locks. Did I say: steep learning curve? When we passed nb 5G, down at Park Lane Swing Bridge, Terry was painting the boat, so I'm a bit afraid of damaging his fresh paintwork when entering the lock. But I don't have to worry, he only painted the hand rails.

The first part of the journey, between the last lock in Wigan and Pagefield Lock, the water level in the canal is still a bit low. I scrape the bottom many a time. But I make sure I follow Terry exactly, with my foot on the brake, so to speak. If he makes it, I will make it. If he gets stuck, I'll slam on the anchors.

Appley Lock is the last lock; after that, and after lunch in Parbold, it's only swing bridges. Lawrance is at the tiller, I'm doing the swing bridges (How I love to stop those b\*\*\*\*y cars...!).

We stop at Heaton's Bridge for the night. There is mooring space and, even more important, a pub. Nicholson tells us: a friendly, unspoilt canalside pub. Real ales, together with inexpensive, traditional pub food served all day, every day. Terry and Lynne from 5G must have the same guide, because they moor here shortly after us.

But unfortunately the every day is not correct; no food on a Tuesday. So we end up drinking, and all the results of it.

## **JOB DONE – 21 MAY 2014**

An easy half an hour trip takes us to our home base, Scarisbrick Marina. I manage to get into the marina without any problems, the entrance isn't as tight as I thought it would be. We moor at the pump, fuel up, and, with a bit of difficulty, finally end up at 27 St Job's Walk, our new address.

Job done...

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*Wea-Ry-Tired at Scarisbrick Marina at sunset*

## **STICKY TAPE – 23 MAY 2014**

Job done, I said? No, cruising from Overwater Marina to Scarisbrick Marina was only the smallest and easiest job. On the way up we found a lot of things have to be taken care of. But, except for the engine loosing water, and the circulation pumps of the central heating not working, it's all minor things.

The former owner left us with 90% of her stuff. Most of the things that were still usable (but not to us) we left at Overwater Marina, for their charity day. So all the pictures, cups and candles hopefully get a new life. The rest, like a pair of socks, and a whirley, end in the skip.

What is left for us, is also a heap of remains of sticky tape. WRT must be a very cold boat in the winter, because the former owner taped off everything. With wide, brown tape, which leaves dark, sticky remains. It's all over the boat, and one of the jobs is to remove it.

On the other hand, she took away a lot of screws. Many things that are to be fastened with two screws (like the bars that hold the curtains in), lack one screw. So both yesterday and today you find us at Halfords, B&Q and Tesco in the shopping centre in Southport. Buying screws, tools and food.

Not too much food, though, because we still don't have a fridge. The fridge is on the list for Crick Boat Show.

## CRICK BOAT SHOW – 23 MAY 2014

And Crick Boat Show is where we are on the Saturday, Sunday and Monday. This was all planned with the boating holiday on the Black Prince boat in mind. When we got WRT we decided we still would attend the boat show, but now with a list of things for our own boat. The tickets were paid for, and a nearby hotel was already booked.

These three days are definitely part of our learning curve. It is the chapter: How to cope with rain and excess mud. As for the rain, I also buy a boater's hat (and I think it suits me), which keeps my hair and my glasses dry. And for the mud... Well, we learn to ignore it.

We achieve a lot for WRT:

- 1 We buy a fridge that fits. It will be delivered to Scarisbrick Marina next Thursday.
- 2 We attend a RCR seminar about engine maintenance, realise that (being a member of RCR) we are entitled to an engine check every year, and book an appointment with Trevor, to check the engine, also next Thursday.
- 3 We order Venetian blinds for the bathroom and the galley, to replace the roll-up blinds that, when rolled down, hang somewhere in the middle of the boat. And have a look at a system for the side doors, that has a flyscreen for the summer and a perspex panel to keep out the draught for the winter.
- 4 We buy a whirley that sits on the tiller, a trolley to transport our toilet cassettes to the Elsan points, brass polishing material, tools for the solid fuel stove (my old ones are almost twice the height of our stove) and speak to Caldwell's (the manufacturer of our windows) about the broken down catches.

Except for a proper boater's hat I achieve something else: I start drinking real ale, instead of red wine. The music marquee is the place for a real ale and cider festival, and since the scrumpy cider (the kind I used to drink and like at Sidmouth Folk Festival) is sold out, I turn to real ale. It's also a lot cheaper in an UK pub than red wine. The music marquee reminds me of Sidmouth anyway. I really enjoy the performances of a Cajun Band; I even teach my neighbours how to dance a Cajun Twostep.

And I go back in time on the old working boat Raymond, standing at the tiller, and sitting in the boatman's cabin, wondering how we, modern house wives, even dare to complain about things...



Going back in time

## QUIET DAYS AT HOME BASE – 04 JUNE 2014

Wednesday last week, around noon, we were back at WRT after a trip to Scotland. In the car were fourteen of my banana boxes; mostly books, kitchen stuff and clothes. After emptying the boxes there is still room in the kitchen, but certainly NOT in the wardrobe. And that's with my clothes only! So I decided to put half of my clothes in a box for a charity shop. Even extra cupboards above the bed won't make any difference.

It's strange to see my books and some other small things on the boat. And to see this year's calendar and certain pictures on the walls. It's even more strange to realise that some of the things I took with me for the boat, are definitely out of place on WRT.



Last Thursday was a busy day. First Trevor from RCR visited us, telling us all about the engine of WRT. He explained how to do our own maintenance, and discovered a major problem with the engine: we have a leaking water hose. Hence the water in the bilge, and the need for topping up with water every day whilst cruising. He told Lawrance how to fix it. Other than that, the engine is fine.

Just as Trevor was about to leave, we got a phone call from the cafe: they just got a fridge delivered. With the help of Stuart, our nearest neighbour, we managed to get it inside the boat. Lawrance connected it to the 12V system, and presto, we have a fridge!

And just as we have installed the fridge, the Fire Brigade turned up. No, don't worry, we were alright. They were on the marina to tell boaters about smoke and CO alarms, and when we told them about our recently fitted but too sensitive smoke alarm they provided us with two new ones. Free of charge. Another problem solved.

Then we were off to Tesco to buy proper food. After a delicious supper (and the non-avoidable dishes) it was getting a bit cold. So we lit the solid fuel stove. And although we think the chimney might need sweeping, the inside of the boat got cosy warm, and in no time fleece and jumper were off, and the fan of the ecofan was happily turning round, and round, and round...



Well before the alarm goes off, the next morning, I wake up; I needed the toilet. I had a quick glance into the saloon and saw to my surprise that the ecofan was still working; there was still some glowing coal in the stove. Being sure we will manage during the winter I went back to bed.

The alarm woke us up at six o'clock. Lawrance needed to take the car to Lancashire Ford for it's annual service. And after the car was ready, we went to Midlands Chandlers in Preston Brook. We bought all the parts for repairing the engine, and also got a coal scuttle, a chimney brush and polish for the solid fuel stove.



Evening at home base

Today is our last day on WRT for a while. Tomorrow we're going back to Scotland, and, after the weekend, back to work and/or back to Holland. Neither of us really wants to leave...

Over the last days we've done a lot:

- The leaking water hose on the engine is repaired. The water is out of the bilge, and the bilge seems to stay dry.
- The fuel stove is emptied, hoovered and polished. The chimney has been swept. The brass on the outside part of the chimney is cleaned and polished.
- My winter clothes are in a plastic bag, which is made vacuum, and stored in one of the seats of the dinette. So are my party and folk dance clothes. Once I have more of these bags my Dutch national costume will follow (without the hair dress, of course).
- The storage spaces in the front step and in the dinette are cleaned. The former owner had used them for storing coal, so they were absolutely dirty.
- We did our laundry... in the laundrette, because we can't get the washing machine working. We think we might have to run this Sterling High Power Alternator, that's in one of the cupboards in the engine room. But we are not sure (and don't have a manual for it either) so we have to try and contact the couple that originally had WRT build in 1999.
- Various brass parts are polished.

Still today, but an hour later:

On the Saturday I put all the laundry in the washing machine. Put in detergent and softener, and pressed the ON/OFF button. Nothing happened. No sound, no lights whatsoever. Hence the laundry done at the laundrette. But Lawrance just found out something that could be very important: it helps to connect the washing machine to the mains...

On the wall, behind the washing machine, is a two plug socket. In the left socket is a plug, which I assumed was for the washing machine. I did switch it on at the socket (something I often forget, because we don't have that in Holland), but, as I said, nothing happened. Not surprising: the connector must be for something else. Lawrance just found another plug behind the washing machine, not connected to a socket. He plugs it in, presses the ON/OFF switch on the washing machine and presto: a yellow light is on, under the word READY.

At the moment we try to find out if this other plug is for the heating system. We switch it on, and on the display of the Alde 3010 suddenly appears a mains plug. I definitely remember seeing that on the display before, when we still were at Overwater Marina. So maybe we get the heating system working as well.

Another hour later:

Bingo! I turned the heating onto electricity, put the desired temperature inside on 30°C, and we sometime later we know for sure that the 230V circulation pump does work. All three radiators are getting warm. From the moment on the heating didn't start properly, after being switched off because of the nice weather, I had the feeling it would be something silly that causes the Alde to malfunction, like a couple of contradictory instructions I gave it. I know from my programmable thermostat in Doorwerth how easy that is done. I still think that this is the case, but at least we know that we won't need the stove, or the electric blanket tonight. To get the Alde running on LPG will be a task for when I (or we) will be back at WRT in July.

As I said before, it's a steep learning curve...

## WHAT A LIFE... – 29 JUNE 2014

The day begins rather unpleasant. It's overcast, grey, and the drizzly rain doesn't make things better. I do my usual morning rituals: porridge and a mug of milk, finishing off with a cup of coffee and a cigarette. As agreed last night I phone Lawrance at 07:00 hrs. He's in Holland at the moment. But he doesn't answer the phone.

I suddenly realise that, thinking of him, I automatically take off an hour of the current time. So, no, he won't answer the phone, it's only six o'clock his time. But then I remember that the 7 o'clock we agreed, was UK time, and where he is now, it is already 8 o'clock (my old time). Well, he should be up by now...

After I finally get him on the phone (trying NOT TO SHOUT, for obvious reasons) I make my way to Southport. My new dual SIM phone can only take a micro SIM card, so I need to visit the Vodafone shop. I'm not trying to attempt to find a parking space in town, I'm using the Park&Ride bus, which, as I find out, stops just around the corner from Vodafone.

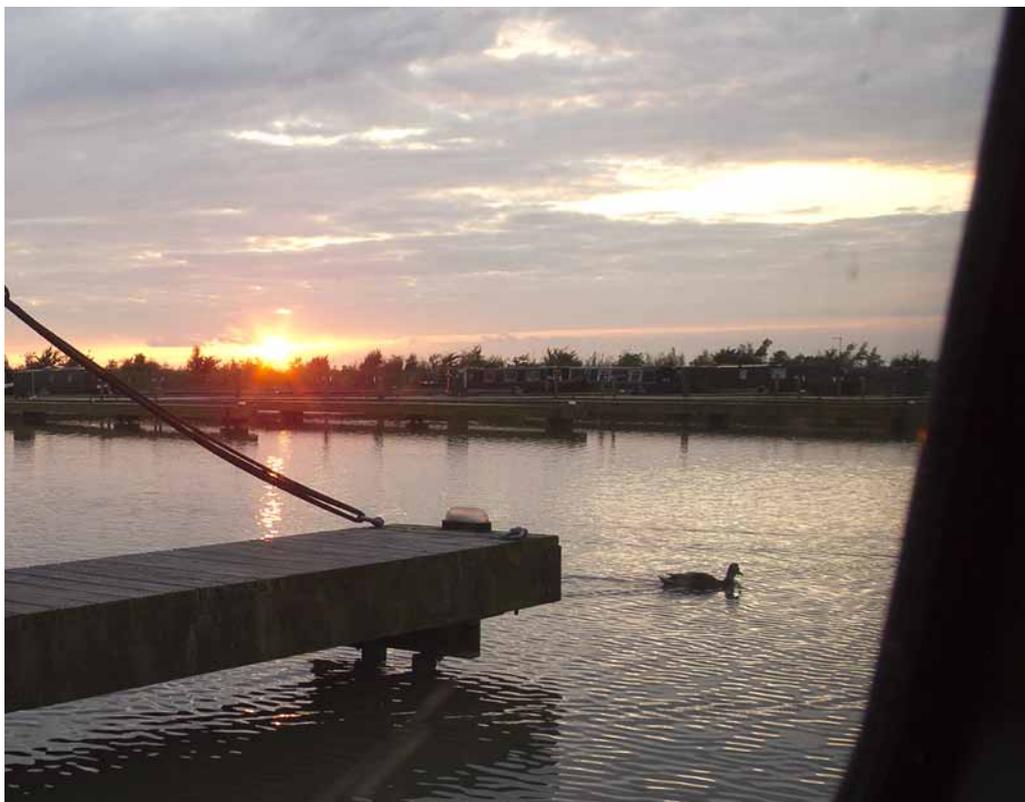
When the SIM card is changed, I have a little stroll on the main street. It's funny, one moment I live in a wooded area in the east of Holland, the next moment I live close to a seaside resort in the UK. With an esplanade, and a pier. And lots of restaurants and tearooms. that, even at this hour, are visited by people twice my age! Eating and drinking things for twice the price I would be willing to pay. So no tea and cake for me. I take the bus back to the car park and go to Tesco for food for the weekend.

Back on Wea-Ry-Tired I rearrange the towels in the bathroom. I've seen that many times in the boat magazines: rolled, instead of folded. It certainly looks a lot better. I also manage to sort out some 'sloping' shelves, and read the newest Tillergraph.

Supper is, as always, salad starter, pasta with veggie's, this time with smoked salmon. It's getting cold again, but since it is nearly 20:00 hrs I consider it too late to light the stove. Central heating will do.

Then it is reading time again. A book where I don't have space for, so I decided to read it once again, and then throw it away. It's too worn to take to a charity shop. But, being half ways through the book I realise I still like it very much, so I might have to find space for it.

At 21:00 hrs I force myself to stop reading, and do the dishes. Standing in the galley, filling the washing up bowl with water, the clouds suddenly break. And out comes the most gorgeous sun I've seen for ages. A bright orange-red line appears on the water of the marina. Only disturbed by a couple of ducks that can't decide whether to go west or east.



Evening sun

I have my belated desert (Greek yoghurt with blueberries) and resume reading my book.

What a life...

## NATIONAL INSURANCE NUMBER – 07 JULY 2014

You always considered yourself to be a decent member of the Dutch society, and all the sudden you find yourself amongst asylum seekers, fake marriages and lots of Eastern Blockers, Chinese and other people, who don't speak one word of English. The only other person present that does speak English, is a woman, about my age, who is accompanied by her husband, who's name is Mohammed and who is not a year older than 20. When they get the question "Did you marry abroad?" her answer is: "Yes." (Do I need to say more?)

Anyway, this is me at the Jobcentre Plus in Liverpool, trying to get a National Insurance Number. I'm twice the age of all the other applicants, speak English very well (I think), and carry all the necessary paperwork (I hope).

The interview starts.

"When did you leave Holland?" is an easy question.

"Have you been in the UK before?" is easy as well.

"How many times?" is a little bit more difficult. I honestly don't know how often I came into the UK on holiday, or with the morris team, or on trips with Lawrance. But no, I've never stayed more than 30 days.

"What is your address in the UK?" is the question I fear the most. My only proof of address is the mooring agreement with Scarisbrick Marina. But to my surprise the lady easily accepts it, saying with a smile: "We don't get THAT very often...! When did you move onto the boat?"

Since the Dutch government registered me as being divorced (and I'm not sure if the UK will contact Holland) I can only answer "Divorced." to the next question. And I'm very glad that I took my divorce papers with me to the interview, because the lady wants to know my ex husband's full name (with all three first names, that won't even fit in the space on the form), his date of birth, our marriage date and when we got divorced.

"Do you have proof of all this?"

"Yes (phew)..."

Do I have a job? No, we will cruise six month of the year, and I will try to find a job for the other six months. To apply for a National Insurance Number while being self employed is next to impossible. I would have to proof so many things, even in my Dutch situation (being self employed for 20 years) I would not have been able to proof all this.

Then, after some silly questions like: "Are you going to apply for a student's loan?" (do I look that young?) I have to sign the interview form, and I'm told to go back to the waiting room and wait for a couple of minutes. After that I would get my passport back.

After the promised couple of minutes the lady indeed is back. Not with my passport but with: "I think we have a little problem here..." So it's back to the desk.

I told her that I left Holland on the 24th of June, and that I moved onto the boat on the 26th. Then comes the question: "Where was you during these two nights?" Well, I left Holland on DFDS, so the first night of course I was on the ferry between Holland and the UK. And for the second night... At that very moment I decide to bend the truth a little. Imagine the reaction if I would say (truthfully): "I spent the night in a lorry."

Yeah, right! Immigrant, lorry, that would probably set off every possible alarm in the Jobcentre's office. And Lawrance paying a hefty fine for bringing illegal immigrants into the UK. So I tell her that I spent the night at my partner's place. Which is the truth (kind of). We did go to his place in Newmacher (to load half my belongings into the car) and we spent the night in Kinellar, in his other place, i.e. the truck.

After this intermezzo it's back to the waiting room again, and this time I do get my passport back after a couple of minutes. And I get a form, to give to my employer, should I find a job before I get my National Insurance Number. Which is due in six to eight weeks time.

## TIME, AND TIME AGAIN... – 08 JULY 2014

When God creates the heavens and the earth, and up till 2003, there only is **Time**. This time sometimes changes for a while. When summertime starts, or when you go on holiday to far away destinations, like Australia, or the UK. But the situation is kind of straight forward.

Then, as the result of pure luck (unluck???) me and Lawrance meet. Soon after that, time is divided. Into **My Time** and **Your Time**. Things get a bit complicated. Now I have two mobile phones. One for Vodafone NL, which is on Dutch time, and one for Vodafone UK, which is on UK time. There is suddenly more wear and tear of lips, tongue and muscles around the mouth, because every time you mention time you have to add My Time or Your Time. But again, most of the time it works well.

Until the moment I move onto Wea-Ry-Tired, and Lawrance is still working. Then things get really complicated.

I'm in the UK, Lawrance is in Holland. Which means: now My Time is his time, and his time is My Time (are you still with me?). So time gets divided once more: in **My Old Time** and **My New Time**.

But as a contrast, the separation of the phones is past time. Now there is only one phone, which can hold two SIM cards, the UK one and the Dutch one. So a lot more room in my handbag, no need to charge two phones (AND my very first smart phone). Two SIM cards, but unfortunately only room for one clock on the display. It works, but...

Today I wake up because I need the toilet. I have a look on my (new) phone, to see what time it is. Well, it's 05:30 hrs. I'm usual up around 6 o'clock, so I decide not to go back to bed. It's overcast, it's raining, and it's awful dark. Even the lights on the jetties are still on. And it's cold, so I decide to switch on the central heating for a while, just to heat up the boat.

Eh, no. Once again the heating system isn't working. I'm a bit puzzled, because the last time I used it, it worked fine, and since then nothing has changed, except for the temperature outside and the temperature inside WRT. Once again I'm going through all the settings of the controller, and suddenly see: the current time is wrong. If the heating is on, I programmed it to be on only between 05:30 hrs and 22:00 hrs. And according to the controller it's 04:39 hrs at the moment.



Not a problem, I think. If I change the time everything should be honky dory after that. But just as I am about to press the Time Change Button, I realise what is wrong. It's ME (silly cow). For the first time I took my new phone with me to the cabin, to check the time when I wake up during the night. And it is hardly a surprise that it is still dark when I get up. I got up at 04:30 hrs My New Time! Because my new phone is still on My Old Time!

I think it gets time to perform some kind of time ceremony. It will be first on the to-do list when Lawrance stops working, and we're on the boat for good.

## THE COMPLETE GROUSE – 20 AUGUST 2014

It's weird how your mind plays tricks with you. I just went to the toilet, and I'm walking back to the saloon. When I'm at the dinette I suddenly think: I didn't flush the toilet. What? is my next thought, is this the beginning of dementia?

But no, I'm on the boat, and there is no toilet bowl to fill up. So one doesn't hear any water flowing through pipes. In the same respect, the last time I was in Newmachar and used water to rinse a cup, I was counting to ten, and waited for the water pump to start. Which, of course, didn't happen.

Other, more practical things, apparently take a little longer to learn. Although the light switches are all at a logical place, I still can not find them in the dark. And don't ask how many times I tried to switch the light in the bathroom on... with the controller for the central heating!. Which is just next to the light switch, but is completely flat.

I also found out that Wea-Ry-Tired gives and takes. While a heap of people have to deal with a lack of money, we have to deal with a lack of space. So to deal with that problem I have a map in my mind with possible locations of things. Papers we might need to refer to are in the saloon. Office stuff is in the dinette, under my seat. All kitchen equipment is in the galley, and all toiletries are in the bathroom. Clothing and shoes are in the cabin, and everything for the boat, and for cruising, is in the engine room.

I'm pretty sure I used this map, when we put everything in the boat. And I know for sure that there is nothing left in Newmachar, Doorwerth or in the truck (except for some stuff Lawrance still uses). But still there are things that I can't find. I **know** they must be in the boat. They were in a banana box or a bag, and I put them away myself.

But no, there not in their logical place. So I end up searching the entire boat, with no result. I never thought that would (and could) happen in such a small space as Wea-Ry-Tired. In my house in Doorwerth, yes. But not here. Needless to say that the next day the things **are** in their logical place, right in front of my eyes. I didn't move them, and currently I'm the only one on the boat. So it must be Wea-Ry-Tired, who's playing tricks (Bitch!).

I must admit it's all a bit crammed on the boat, at the moment. We basically combined three 'houses' in one boat. Which means that, for example, I now have enough shower gel for the next ten years, because I had some in my house, some in Newmachar and some in the truck.

The same goes for Lawrance's whisky. The good thing with the latter is that one now can see the entire black grouse on the picture that is wrapped around the box. It's a pity that the other two bottles are of a different brand...



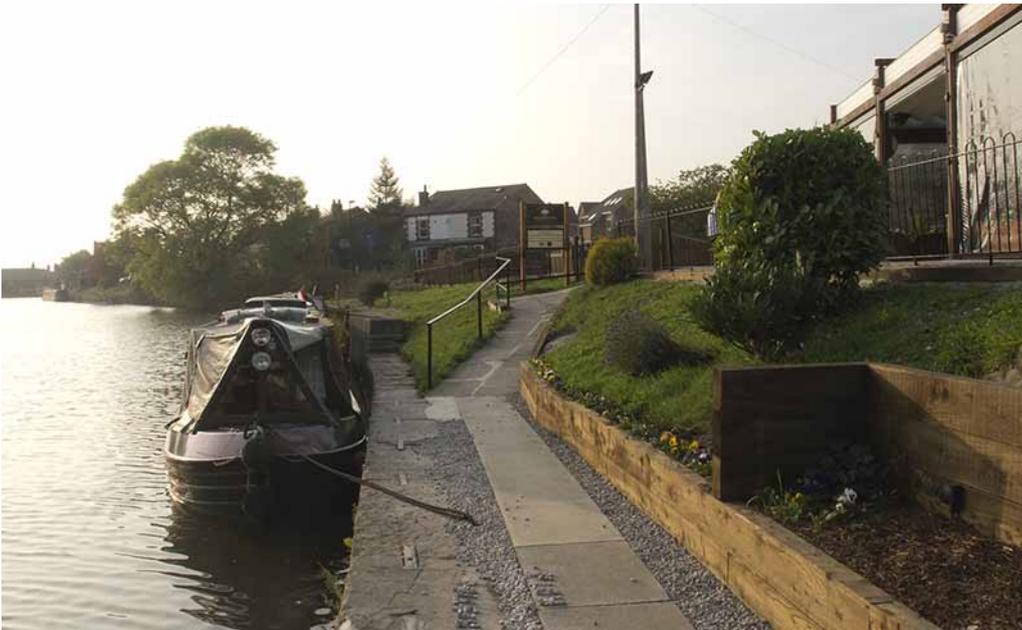
## IT'S A BEAUTIFUL DAY, THE SUN IS SHINING – 20 SEPTEMBER 2014

The perfect day to start our cruising life. Everything is checked. Water tank full, cassettes empty. Chimney removed.

At 10:00 hrs it's my turn to (try to) get out of the marina. When I reverse off the jetty my neighbour steps onto her well deck to say goodbye. The way she is dressed, she reminds me of the Goddess of Avalon. I feel blessed. And without touching any jetty or any boat I take us out of the marina, onto the Leeds & Liverpool Canal.

Yes, this is how life should be. Happily we cruise away. At Burscough we think it's time for a little snack. We have tea and something, sitting outside the tearoom, in the sun. And after a yap with a couple that's moored here, we are on our way again. Taking turns on the tiller, so that I can do my favourite swing bridges.

But, unbeknown to us, WRT decided this should be an educational trip. When I go to the bow, to jump off when we get to Appley Bridge Lock, I hear the water pump. Strange. No one is using any water. And the water pump keeps pumping. Something is wrong here. And while I keep the boat to the bank, Lawrance investigates all the water taps. Galley is OK, bathroom is OK, but when he opens one of the storage compartments under the bed... WATER! Not knowing what is wrong we switch the water pump and calorifier off, do the lock, and moor up at The Boathouse, just after the lock. If we have a serious problem, at least we can have a drink, and food, and use the toilet.



At The Boathouse (Appley Bridge)

Something is wrong, under the bed. Did the calorifier start leaking? Or the small tank next to it (whatever it is)? We don't know. When we lift the mattress off the bed we realise: we now have a water bed. At my side, that is. The bed bottom is wet as well. But there is not too much water on the floor under the bed, so I assume it's not the calorifier.

We decide to phone River & Canal Rescue. Unfortunately, even with a gold membership, they only cover 'propulsion' problems. But they can ask someone to come out and look at the problem. He'll be with us tomorrow morning between 10:00 and 11:00 hrs.

Well, first lesson of this trip learned: always expect troubles. But WRT, our teacher, is nice. We're stuck at the best canal pub ever, with very friendly staff, and excellent meals. And we will find out that we only have a minor problem.

But for now we need to rearrange our bed. Lesson number two: the dinette makes a very comfortable double bed.



I wake up around 7 o'clock. I hear the fridge. Nothing unusual, but it works on much higher revs than normal, and when it kicks out, it immediately starts again. That's weird. Another problem.

When we try to start the engine we have the next problem: it starts... just. All batteries drained? We try to locate this problem, but don't get any further than: the water pump must have drained the batteries, and with us stopping cruising immediately after we discovered the problem, the batteries didn't have a chance to recharge.

With the engine running, the fridge is back to normal. Just after 11:00 hrs a guy from PB Mechanical Services in Heath Charnock shows up and solves our water problem: a loose pipe. He tightens up all the other joints, we switch the water pump back on, and everything is OK. We even still have  $\frac{3}{4}$  of our water left. But where did the other  $\frac{1}{4}$  go? Some is in the mat, that is in front of the storage compartment. But not  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the tank...



Dutch Tiller with Scottish Steerer

Anyway, we're up and running again. Still worrying about our electrical system. According to the Battery Management System one of the circuits doesn't seem to get charged, but is it the starter battery or is it the domestic ones? At that point we decide to book a course: Get to know your boat with Cheshire Cat, next week in Overwater Marina.

It's locks today, and me on the tiller, most of the time. We get more lessons from WRT. Locks sometimes look like Manneke Pis in Brussel, so don't leave windows or side doors open in locks. And another lesson: water has a lot of force. In one lock a gush of water hits the front of the boat, and smashes the boat against the lock wall. I'm OK, WRT is OK, but a lot of stuff inside got dislocated. Most of the books on the shelf are now on the floor, the internal telephone off the hook...

And again one lesson regarding water: if I see water coming into the canal from the side, just when I'm about to enter a lock, I should not only look at it, but also realise that it will push the boat sideways. Leaving me entering the lock like a complete novice.



Same place, different weather and... DIFFERENT BOAT!

But other than that this again is a good, but tiring day. Every passing boat warns us about the Pagefield Lock Pond being extremely low, but we just sail over it. We do know how it feels when it is really low... Finally, weary and tired, we moor at Dover Lock Inn. We have a meal, and are asleep at 21:00 hrs.



Not surprisingly I wake up as early as 5 o'clock. And I don't believe what I hear: the fridge, in overdrive again, and continuously. I decide to switch it off at the switch board, and go to sleep again.

While having breakfast/tea (and after starting the engine without problems) we're discussing the differences between the situation on the boat when we came up from Overwater Marina to Scarisbrick Marina, and now. The only differences being a fridge and an alarm clock. Or either the batteries or the alternator(s) are on their way out. Hopefully they can tell us at Overwater Marina. And with that in mind we start our cruising day.

## THE BEAUTY MARINA – 02 OCTOBER 2014 – BYWRT

I know there are things called Beauty Farms, but I'm not sure about Beauty Marinas. Not that it matters, though. I'm in one anyway. I will get some brand new features, and I'm looking forward to it!

I already have my glasses removed. I'll get one of those modern things, without a midsection.



New glasses

I also get my face repaired. And my make-up will get a touch-up. Oh, I will look so stunning again, after all this is done...!



Touching up my make-up

They will change some of my body parts as well, a nip here, and a tuck there. Something I'm NOT looking forward to. I hope it is not too painfull. Yes, I know: No Pain, No Gain.

And although I'm not on my own here, in this part of the marina, I won't get any support of my neighbours. The one to my left (you can't see him on the pictures above), he's Greek and doesn't (want to) speak any English. The one to my right is a grumpy old bastard, who thinks he's posh, because he has a satellite dome, and solar panels. To his right you have the four harlots, who go out with everybody and anybody. Not exactly 'our kind of people'.

Luckily I do get all the support from Magda and Lawrence, and I know even my first owners think of me.

## OH, I FEEL LIKE A PRINCESS – 19 OCTOBER 2014 – BY WRT

Well, it took some time, but I think I look awesome now!

First of all, my front doors are repaired. There is no cat flap anymore. The doors just need a touch-up with varnish, which (I hope) will happen some time next year.



Front doors with...



...and without cat flap

I got my new glasses, the ones without a mid-section. (A bit like Lieutenant Commander Geordi La Forge is wearing in Star Trek?)

And I also got a new 'robe'. Not a prêt-à-porter, but real Haute Couture. Gary White from All Seasons Covers in Atherton ([www.allseasonscovers.co.uk](http://www.allseasonscovers.co.uk)) made a 'muslin' (well, sort of) to perfect the fit, before even touching the final fabric. The end result is stunning, and fits to perfection. I even get compliments for it, from fellow boaters...



Making the 'muslin'



Stunning end result

The changes inside were not too painfull. In fact, I didn't feel them at all.

But one thing I know: I have a lot more energy than before the operation. And the disorderly feeling I had inside me, is gone as well.

So, in one word, I feel like a princess...

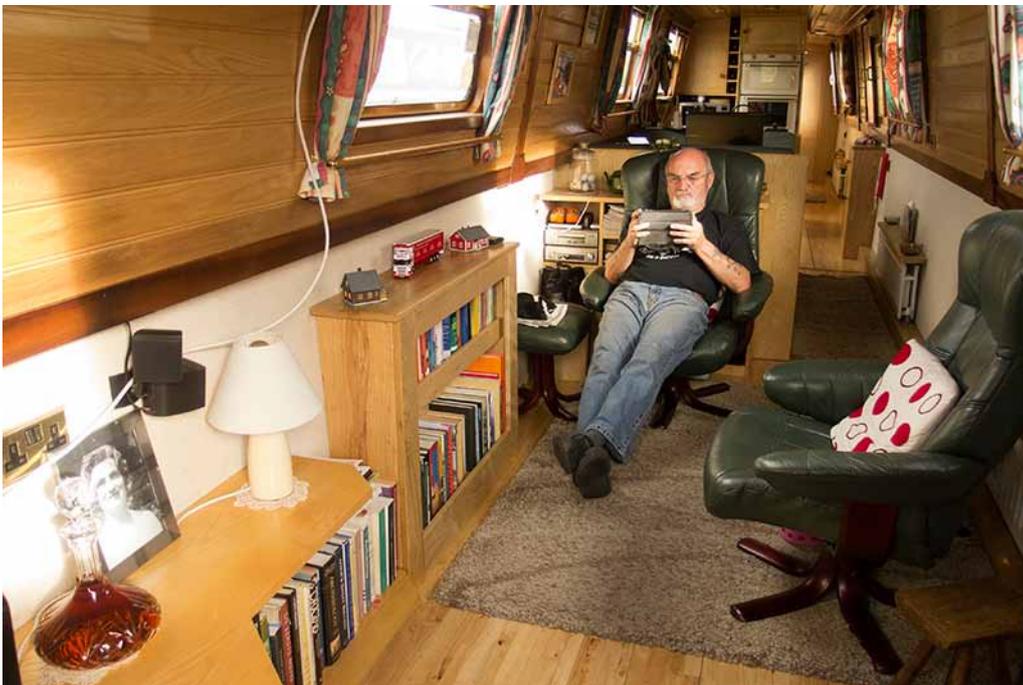
## B.O.A.T. – 19 OCTOBER 2014

Do you know what BOAT stands for? Bring Out Another Thousand!

Well, tomorrow we will know how many T's we have to bring out. Not that it really matters. All the work so far really improved our life (and WRT's life, read *Oh, I feel like a princess and see some pictures she posted*).

Starting from the bow, there is a new cratch and cratch cover. The well deck is water tight now, and feels like a conservatory. The diesel tank in the well deck (that was no longer in use because there is a solid fuel stove on the boat now) has been converted into storage space for coal, kindling, fire lighters etc. It has a new top, which is wider in the middle. Just wide enough for me to sit on, since the well deck acts as my designated smoking area. The cat flap in one of the front doors, has been removed, and both doors now have the same panel at the bottom. The doors still need a touch-up with varnish, but well deck and doors are ready for the winter.

In the saloon there is now an additional book shelf, so the mess on the floor (books) is no longer there. To me it makes the saloon feel and look even more spacious.



New bookshelf

We've got a new mixer faucet in the galley, because the old one was leaking. For readers who (like me) do not know what a faucet is: it's another (Scottish?) word for tap.

The porthole in the cabin is now properly attached to the wall, so it's a lot easier to get the bung out in the morning without removing the wooden ring around the porthole as well. ("Bung?", you ask? Scottish for porthole stopper...)

At the stern, the doors now have proper door catches. And the engine and the gearbox have been serviced, for the first time in 1½ year.

On the way down from Scarisbrick Marina to Overwater Marina we found out that our batteries were flat, every morning. Or better, halfway through the night I would wake up because of the fridge trying to run continuously, due to flat batteries. So we had our batteries tested. The starter battery turned out to be OK. The state of health of the four leisure batteries was 35, 43, 71 and 100%, i.e. effectively dead. With our four new leisure batteries we should be able to watch TV for hours, heat our meals in the microwave, do the laundry in the washing machine (joking...).

And, as we promised ourselves we would do, we did our course Get to know your boat by Mark from Cheshire Cat. Finally our electrics make sense. No, of course we won't use the washing machine or the microwave directly off the inverter (and thus off the batteries). That's what we have our Sterling for (we knew that already, from the couple that commissioned WRT). But now we also understand the changes made to the system when the owner-for-a-year had the inverter/charger installed. Why the switch for landline-batteries doesn't work as it should do, and why the Battery Management System doesn't work as I thought it would (and should).

Yes, it will be well spent T's (both Thousands and Time).



The Shroppie Fly

We spent a gorgeous Sunday afternoon in Audlem, sitting outside the Shroppie Fly with a drink, walk through the village and have a look at the nice church, which dates from the late 13th century with additions in the 19th century.



St James' Church, Audlem

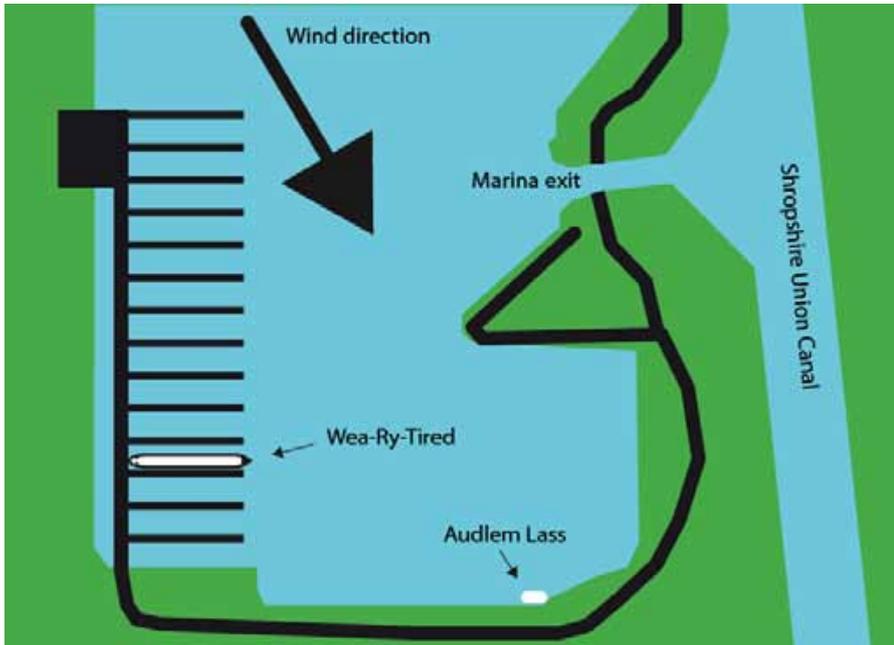
We had an excellent meal at the cafe in the marina during Bistro Night (Rhubarb Crumble, yummy), for the first time in our life did our shoppings online (You shop, we drop), and used the Audlem Lass ferry to get additional stuff from the Co-op in Audlem. We even had three visits from family/friends.

The only thing we need now, is a day with very strong wind, so we can (once again) make a fool of ourselves, trying to leave Overwater Marina. That will be next Tuesday, according to the weather forecast...

## HURRICANE GONZALO – 21 OCTOBER 2014

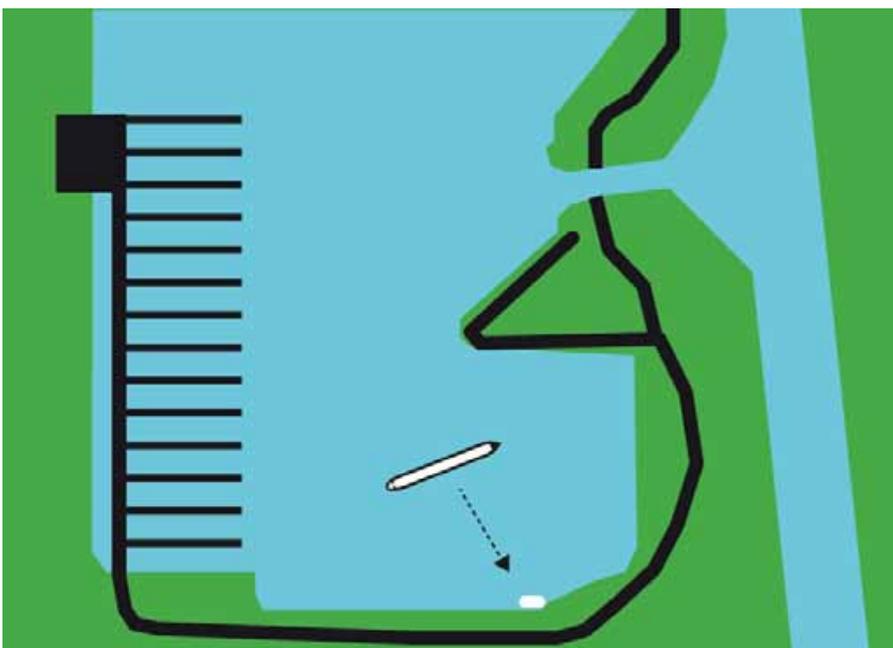
It's a beautiful day  
The sun is shining  
I feel good  
And nothing's gonna stop me now

Well, sort of. We're fuelled up, topped up with water, emptied the cassette, paid for all the work, ready to rock and roll. If it wasn't for the gale force wind. Remembering too well what happened to me with hireboat Sienna, last year in Middlewich, I'm a bit afraid to get out of the jetty.



Starting point

If WRT does the same as Sienna did then, as soon as we get out of the jetty, we will go sideways, and run straight into Audlem Lass, the small ferry. Audlem Lass is a small polyester boat, and I think she doesn't have a chance against our 18 (or so) tons of steel.



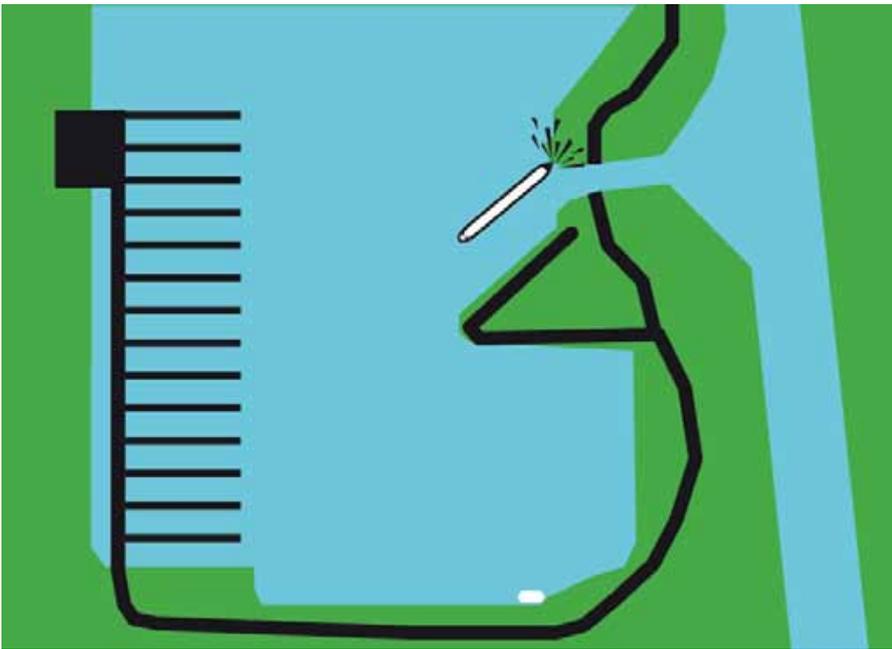
Would we crash into Audlem Lass?

Getting out of the jetty, and trying to get the bow into the wind, is Plan A. We can't think of a Plan B, other than stay for another day. Waiting till the wind goes down, is not an option; it will only increase over the next 10 hours.

But Lawrance wants to go, and Dave from Overwater Marina reckons we will make it (and he is willing to be part of the crew (for the time it will take us to get out of the marina)).

So, at 10:30 hrs, Lawrance is at the tiller, with Dave next to him, and I'm sitting in the saloon, eyes closed, hands on my ears, and praying.

To my surprise (and relieve) Lawrance has absolutely no problems to get out of the jetty, and to turn the bow towards the exit. I take my hands off my ears... just in time to grab hold of the bookcase, which is about to fall when Lawrance bangs into the side of the exit. Having only two hands, unfortunately all the other stuff that's on various shelves, lands on the floor. The stove tools even totally fall apart. And no, banging into the other side of the exit doesn't put all the stuff back on the shelves.



What actually happens

But we're on our way. Dave leaves us at Bridge 80, and I take over on the tiller. Yes, it is a bit windy. But, other than Sienna, WRT reacts different to side wind. She just throws her head into the wind (while the stern drifts off). I can deal with that.

After a short break in Nantwich, we resume cruising, while the wind increases. We now also get frequent showers. Lawrance is at the tiller for a short period, and his right turn at Barbridge Junction is absolutely perfect.

Then it is my turn again, and Lawrance disappears inside. Once we're passed the moored boats, the canal is on an open plain, and I get the full force of the now very strong side wind. WRT turns her bow to port side, the stern goes to starboard side, and here I am, in the pouring rain, going diagonally over the canal. The tiller pointing roughly in the same direction as the bow!

My boater's hat, perfect to keep my glasses dry, when rain falls down, is completely useless when the rain 'falls' horizontally. Luckily I can still see more or less perfect without glasses.

Once in a while Lawrance has to take over the tiller, so that I can sit down on the engine cover, to warm up again. It's so cold now, that we even get a hail storm, and Lawrance stands on a white 'carpet'.



Hail on carpet and jeans

At 17:30 hrs we are at Church Minshull. In the most horrible weather you can think of we manage to moor up, close the back, and lite the fire. And no, we're not going to The Badger Inn for supper. We make a meal out of store cupboard ingredients, and call it a day.

## TIME AGAIN – 21 NOVEMBER 2014

In general I'm quite happy, living in the UK. I'm now used to driving on the wrong side of the road, sitting at the wrong side of the car. I found a replacement for *Andijvie* (*Cichorium endivia*) to make *Andijviestamppot*, a Dutch dish I absolutely love. And everybody I met so far, is extremely friendly. Just to name a couple of things...



I found a replacement for *Cichorium endivia*



to make *Andijviestamppot*.

But there is one thing that puzzles me more and more. I know the UK is on the same planet as Holland. And, being in Scarisbrick at the moment, we are at (roughly) the same geographic coordinates (53.59N – 2.92W) as Doorwerth (51.98N – 5.79E). That's less than 2.5% further west and less than 1% further north. OK, I crossed the Prime Meridian, but only just.

I do live on a lower altitude now (17.658 m/57.933 ft), compared to Doorwerth (39.347 m/129.090 ft), but that should only have a slight impact on the temperature, which (on average) should be 0.1388°C higher, here in Scarisbrick.

No, what really bothers me is *Time*, as in *Amount of Hours*. Somehow I don't think the UK has an 24-hour day. It feels like there is time missing. It could be something similar to English and Continental pounds (454 grams versus 500 grams = 46 gram missing (9.2%)). Which, by the way, is good, because by moving to the UK I lost (59 kg = 118 pond = 118 lb = 53.572 kg → 59 – 53.572 =) 5.428 kg.

But emotionally there is a difference between loosing weight and loosing time...

Usually I get up sometime between 6 and 7 a.m. I have breakfast, a mug of coffee, and a smoke. Then it's time to start the first of the things I planned for the day. But to my surprise, in no time it's time to start supper. And yes, I know it is the *Dark Days before Christmas*, but somehow they seem to be darker here than in Doorwerth.

I decide to go on the internet, and to my amazement I find out that my feeling is right. There actually IS less time in a day in Scarisbrick than in Doorwerth.

Sunrise and Sunset times reveal that today, the 21st of November 2014, there is a staggering 13 minutes more daylight in Doorwerth (8 hrs and 31 minutes) than there is in Scarisbrick (8 hrs and 18 minutes). That's a quarter of an hour.

And the sun sets a lot earlier in Scarisbrick than in Doorwerth (16:06 hrs versus 16:38 hrs). That's another 32 minutes.

So by moving to the UK I'm loosing  $18 \text{ minutes} + 32 \text{ minutes} = 45 \text{ minutes}$  every day. Would that be  $45 \text{ minutes} * 365 \text{ days} = 273.75 \text{ hrs per year} = 11.4 \text{ days per year}$ ?

I knew it. There was bound to be something crawling out of the woodwork...!

## BLOW OUT – 25 NOVEMBER 2014

We have a tiny solid fuel stove, an AX. Or to be precise, an AX 1M-S2. By saying tiny, I mean really tiny. About a quarter (or less) of the size of my downstairs woodstove in Doorwerth. More like a stove for a dolls house. It's so tiny that we had to buy a new stove toolset, because my Dutch one was twice as tall as the entire stove on WRT.



Our stove

This tiny solid fuel stove is basically our main source of heat. I know, we also have (gas) central heating. But coal is a lot cheaper, and it is more traditional. So the central heating is for those days when it is only a bit chilly in the morning. At the moment it is cold enough to have the stove on all the time. If one manages to get the bloody thing running, and keep it running...!

Compared to the woodstove in Doorwerth, with a chimney about 6 metres high, the stack effect of our 2.2 m chimney is next to nothing. So especially on relatively mild, damp days, with a low atmospheric pressure, the stove is very hard to light.

Once it is up and running, it depends on the type of coal whether it keeps burning or not. We use smokeless coal, which still emits a lot of smoke when first lit. So far we tried six types of coal. And I know what you are thinking: coal is coal. No, this is man-made coal. Most types have the same oval shape, and are roughly of the same size, but they all burn different. Some are hard to light, others just burn down to some kind of concrete dust. Or they burn down to the size of a pebble, which is exactly the same size as the holes in the bottom grid. Therefore blocking the airflow in the stove. and causing the fire to die out.

It was after one of these sudden deaths when it happened. Lawrance is busy hoovering out the stove, the ash pan, underneath the stove and around it. I'm somewhere in the back of the boat. Suddenly I hear a loud BANG, and a big black cloud fills the boat. After a couple of seconds it sets off the smoke alarm in the saloon. I hurry to the saloon, one to switch off the smoke alarm, and two to see what is going on. But I have to run back straight away: the cloud now reaches the bedroom and sets off the second smoke alarm. Then, walking back towards Lawrance, I realise: I'm in for a serious cleaning job...

So what did happen? The bag of the Hoover, full of ash, coal dust and remains of coal, did burst. And the Hoover, with its outlet right in front of my new bookcase, spreaded the ash first over all my books, and then evenly across the entire boat (confirming that there is adequate ventilation on WRT).

There is now a layer of black dust on every horizontal surface (window sills, shelves, floors). It's even in the bathroom. And, of course, inside the Hoover as well. Cleaning out the Hoover seems the first and easiest part of the job. But no, there is so much dust inside engine and filter that, as soon as we switch the Hoover back on (after cleaning and re-bagging), another cloud appears, again sets off the smoke alarms, and covers everything with a second layer of dust.

Long story short, while visiting Lawrance's older brother and his wife, we use their Hoover to clean our Hoover. And the next day I do an unexpected complete spring cleaning of WRT. Floor, walls, shelves and books, all regain their original colour, and WRT looks brandnew again.

Luckily we also found a type of coal that is easy to light and burns completely to ash. The stove has been going all the time, since the blow out. It's cozy warm inside, and we don't need jumpers, fleeces or woolen socks, with temperatures between 25 and 35°C. In fact, it's a long time ago I've been so cozy warm.

But it was (once again) a steep learning curve...

## WEATHER BOMB – 12 DECEMBER 2014

It's Tuesday, late afternoon. Lawrance has just put new coal in the stove, and as always the smell of the coal wipes through the boat. The coal is supposed to be smokeless, but when it first heats up, it certainly does smoke. It leaves the chimney in big, dark-grey clouds. Well, it is supposed to leave the chimney. But less than a minute after Lawrance closes the stove door I smell something, and almost at the same time our smoke alarm starts. Not surprisingly, this time the smoke doesn't come out of the chimney outside, but puffs out of the vents, straight into the boat. We rush to the stove, switching off the smoke alarm, and closing both vents.

We're puzzled. The stove behaved perfect recently, and WE didn't change anything. Something that has changed, though, is the weather. We're currently experiencing a so called *weather bomb* (or Explosive Cyclogenesis, as it is know officially). This is a situation where the air pressure of a depression at 60° latitude suddenly decreases at least by 24 mb (hPa) or more in 24 hours. This storm, called Alexandra, is breaking all the records, with its minimum pressure plunging 44 millibars in just 21 hours, falling to 942 millibars at the early hours this morning. There is an Amber Warning for wind in Scotland and the Nord-East of England. The wind hits WRT directly on the starboard side, so we keep bouncing against the jetty. Walking is difficult, and we rock so much, that a little bell, hanging from the ceiling, actually starts tolling. But we had strong winds before, without the smoke coming into the boat... So I wonder if it's not the wind, but a problem with the air pressure that causes it.

I know that the hot air in the stove/chimney is less dense than the air outside, has a lower pressure, and is supposed to suck up air through the vents into the stove to balance out this situation. In that same process the smoke is pushed up into the chimney and out of the boat. The stove is still hot, so in theory this should work. So why is, in reality, the smoke going the other way now? I find out by going on the internet, that there are situations in which the easiest way for a stove to balance out the difference in pressure, is sucking air into the chimney. This, of course, will force the smoke of the coal out into the boat. But that happens only if there is not enough ventilation around the stove. And our stove still puffs with the nearest windows, and the front doors, open. Closing the top vent reduces the puffs, a little bit. But we still have to close the bottom vent as well, a couple of times.

For the oncoming night we decide to close both vents, and hope there is still a bit of glowing coal left, when we get up.



Wednesday morning there is indeed some glowing coal left, and after topping up with coal, our stove happily starts puffing smoke again. Setting of smoke alarms, once in a while, and (even worse) again spreading thin layers of dust on every horizontal surface. AGAIN! We're still puzzled, and annoyed. We need the stove, it's not only very windy, it is also getting very cold. At noon the jetty is still partly frozen over.



Still frozen over

Hail storms are really frequent, and WRT must have been covered in hail/sleet/snow. We don't check it out (or take pictures), it's too cold to go outside, but our neighbour's boat is white, so... The entire day we're busy, opening and closing stove vents, windows and switching off the smoke alarms. At night we decide to let the fire go out, and to switch on the heating system. It's programmed to start at 06:00 hrs.



It's six o'clock the next morning, and I hear the 'click' from the heating system. Good. No more smoke puffs, until the weather gets better.

But it's only after a short time when I notice something near the bathroom: a flashing heating system control panel. Which tells me: no gas. Not a problem. Before Lawrance leaves (the car needs some repairs) he changes over to the full bottle. I turn the heating system on again, switch on my computer and start reading my email. But soon I realise that it doesn't get any warmer. A look at the control panel tells me why: no gas. This doesn't make sense. Did we actually change over from one (empty) gas bottle to the other (full one) without buying a new gas bottle the same day? That's not us. Besides that, I can't remember when we last had an empty bottle. Luckily I have my log book. The last note I made about an empty bottle was in October. That bottle lasted 21 days. A quick calculation tells me: this one lasted 53 days. That's almost twice as long, so I assume we didn't buy a new one. I phone Lawrance. He doesn't remember things either.

Well, here is me. It's close to zero, bloody windy, and freezing cold. And I have no heating. I don't want smoke puffs, and I don't have gas. So it is fingerless gloves, extra pair of woollen socks, fleece. Until Lawrance gets back and we can buy new gas.

At around one o'clock he's back. And immediately realises what he forgot this morning. He changed over to the full bottle, closed the old, empty one.

**BUT DIDN'T OPEN THE NEW ONE.**

Once the bottle is open, it gets nice and warm inside WRT.

And what about the stove? Well, we find out that everybody in the marina had the same problem. It's just the very strong wind, and as soon as that wind drops, our stove is back to normal. The only thing that is left, is dust...!

## IT'S BEGINNING TO LOOK... – 16 DECEMBER 2014

Yes, but there is one thing missing. So me and Lawrance jump in the car and head for the outskirts of Southport. In the car are also a kilt (and waistcoat and jacket) and a memory stick. The kilt is going to the dry cleaners, on the memory stick is a picture for a personalised mouse mat, and I want to buy another (!) set of fairy lights (battery operated) for the cratch.

Well, that's the plan...

I know there is something wrong with the UK. Sometimes I come across things that give me a very strong feeling of déjà vu (taking me at least 20 years back), and I mentioned in an earlier blog the loss of 1 hour per day. But this beats everything: it's a week before Christmas and all Christmas merchandise is GONE.

Two months ago (when all trees still had leaves, and we were walking round in shorts) whatever shop you entered, you walked straight into a Christmas Grotto. With 20.000 different Christmas lights, half a million Christmas ornaments, and enough Christmas trees to replace the entire Amazon Rain Forest. And now, when normal people start to decorate their homes for Christmas, there is nothing Christmassy left.

Except for some wrapping paper.

So what does that tell me? Everybody must have put up all the Christmas decorations weeks ago. Because shopping for that one missing item, that would make your house suitable for a story in a magazine about posh homes, that's out of the question.

Are UK people that good at planning that they can buy everything they need at once?

And what about all these Christmas trees? By the time it's Christmas they are just wasted away to skeletons, with all the needles gone.

I wonder what happens on the 25th of December. If something happens, that is.

Will that be Christmas Day, like on the Continent? Or does the UK celebrate Christmas on a different day, and I just missed it?

Anyway, luckily for me, Poundstretcher still has heaps of lights, even battery operated ones, so I manage to get a string for the cratch.

And we definitely will celebrate Christmas on the 25th of December, the proper day; like I've done my entire life.



Merry Christmas to you all (whenever you celebrate it).

## DREAMIN' OF A... – 18 DECEMBER 2014 – BYWRT

Did you see the silly Christmas card they made? With me, having a Christmas tree on the gas locker and one on the roof, as well as two sleighs? With 'funny' ornaments in the windows, and these horrible lights on top of everything? Making me feel like the Titanic, with all these icebergs around me? Me, moored somewhere in a snow covered forrest?

I think it's time to show you the real situation, outside and inside.

Let's start with the front. Around the tunnel light is a beautiful, handcrafted wreath. This, in combination with the fairy lights around the cratch, makes my front really festive.



Festive front

On my sides you can see fairy lights in the windows. These lights are part of a long chain of Christmas lights inside me, running from front door to galley, back to the stove, and back to the galley, but now under the gunwales.



Side lights

On the old bookshelf is a so called dowel tree. Clever, because, when not in use, it hardly takes up any space. And I must admit, there is just not enough room for a normal Christmas tree, real or artificial.

Between the two windows at portside is a red/green rope. This is for hanging all the received Christmas cards.



Christmas cards

And last, but not least, there are also fairy lights in the bedroom. Not the multi coloured ones, but warm whites.



Cozy bedroom

Oh, I almost forgot, there is a Christmas quilt on the dinette table, and even the hand towel and the dish towel in the kitchen are Christmassy...



Dowel Tree and Christmas Quilt

So everything is ready for a white Christmas. Not that that is going to happen. Although my stove is on day and night, the temperature outside is around 11°C, AT NIGHT.

And yes, I've seen some ice in the marina last week, but that was nothing like the icebergs on the Christmas card. The vintage Dutch ice skates are still somewhere in one of the kitchen cupboards.



Ready for Christmas

Merry Christmas to all of you, and a Happy New Year as well.

## BELL ARE RINGING... – 21 DECEMBER 2014

I believe that, when you move to another country, you should adapt to the local traditions. Speak the language, dress the same as the locals and get involved in a local hobby. Not that one can do much different. I can speak Dutch to people, but hardly anybody will understand me if I do. And going to Holland to buy clothes might be a bit expensive. I can still cook some traditional Dutch meals, like stampot boerenkool met rookworst (Curly Cale Hash with Smoked Sausage). The code on the smoked sausage has something with NL on it, which tells me: it's made in Holland. But the curly cale at least is from England.



*Curly Cale Hash with smoked sausage*

A couple of weeks ago I decided it was time to start a local hobby. So I went to St Helens and joined Mucky Mountains Morris. I have been to their practice night three times so far. And today I make my debute as a member of Mucky Mountains Morris. In a little village called Mobberley, during the Winter Solstice Dance at a pub called Bird in Hand. I'm accompanied by Lawrance, and Eddie and Carol, so needless to say that I am a bit nervous.

I don't have the proper kit (yet), but I borrow a hat and use my Swedish dancing shoes. I manage to sit out the first dance, but at the second dance it's BINGO!



*Avoiding the first dance*

Frantically I try to remember steps, figures and chorus, wondering why the hell I started a hobby that involves performing in public...



Steps? Figures? Chorus?

But of course I don't have to worry too much. I've been a morris dancer and morris musician for about 12 years.

The only thing is: that's also almost 12 years ago. I was still young, then. Was NOT out of breath, after 1 dance. And didn't have to think about steps or figures, I could dance in my sleep. Now I'm a lot older (yes, I know, 12 years, to be precise), and co-ordinating hands and feet doesn't come as easy anymore. I've danced most of the dances before, but they do feel kind of new to me, somehow.

Which is fkin (excuse my Dutch) frustrating.

But despite all this, I do enjoy myself very much.



Lot's of fun

I even dance the Prescott Clock, a dance that is completely new to me, and (during this dance) manage to break one of my sticks in half.



Just halved one of my sticks

Yes, I think I'm adjusting very well.

#### **Update 22 December 2014**

Did I say I adjust very well? That went out of the window today. Why? Read this!

A lot of people in the UK complain about these bl\*\*\*y EU migrants, that move to the UK just to (mis)use the NHS. Well I can tell you, us bl\*\*\*y EU migrants can't even AVOID the NHS!

Since I'm in the UK I had all the periodically checks a woman of my age gets. I had my mammogram taken a couple of weeks ago. Nobody even asked me when I had the last one in Holland. And today I had my cervical cancer check. Again, nobody asked when I had my previous one.

So I'm at the medical practice. The woman who is taking the sample tells me to (partly) undres. There is an examination bed, with a piece of paper, to lay on. And she also gives me a big sheet of oversized kitchen paper. Well, I've had these checks many a time in Holland, but to be honest, I don't have a clue what to do with the kitchen paper.

So, being an stupid foreigner, I decide to ask: "What is this kitchen paper for?"  
To my utter surprise the answer is: "To cover yourself up."

This absolutely doesn't make sense to me. It's not cold in the room, and if it were, kitchen paper would not give much warmth. So what does she want me to do with it? I ask the same question again, and lo and behold, I get the same answer. While I'm wondering if I should just blow my nose with it, and see what happens next, she finally manages to get the message across to me by showing me what to do (bl\*\*\*y, stupid immigrants).

At that very moment I realise that I will NEVER adjust totally. I'm absolutely flabbergasted. The kitchen paper is to cover up just that part of my body that has to be examined! And not because she won't see it, but so that I DON'T SEE IT.

By the time I'm back at the boat, I'm still shaking my head in disbelief...



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