

Rivers

2017

by

Magda M.W. Wensing

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 2017.

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

Enjoy reading.

CONTENTS

From the editor.....	3
So this was Christmas – 31 January 2017	7
So this was Easter...? – 13 April 2017	12
Girl’s weekend out – 01 May 2017	17
No crew – 02 May 2017	23
First time on a river – 03 June 2017.....	24
Back on the canals– 06 June 2017	30
Ship wreck – 16 June 2017	33
Bunbury Shuffle – 19 June 2017	40
Too weird to make up – 23 June 2017	42
Venice again? 09 July 2017	45
4000.0 – 17 July 2017	52
I’m nae sure – 23 July 2017	58
Girly talk again – 26 July 2017	66
It doesn’t ring a bell – 30 July 2017	69
Shakespeare’s Grave – 01 August 2017	73
Can’t write a script for this – 03 August 2017	75
It all happens in Stratford – 04 August 2017.....	79
Rivers – 06 August 2017.....	83
Five times reduced tick-over – 09 August 2017	87
Raindrops keep falling on my head – 10 August 2017.....	89
Complete The opposite – 11 August 2017	91
Shallow (part 1) – 01 September 2017.....	95
Another canal ticked off – 26 September 2017.....	98
Shallow (part 2) – 07 October 2017	101
Middleridge – 20 October 2017.....	105

And then there was silence... – 02 November 2017.....	107
Out of the blue – 12 November 2017	109
Out of the Blue (part two) – 28 November 2017.....	112
Last cruise – 03 December 2017.....	113
Last post? – 08 December 2017	115
Not the last cruise – 17 December 2017	117
Not the last post – 22 December 2012	119
Let it snow, let it snow, let it snow – 25 December 2017.....	122

SO THIS WAS CHRISTMAS – 31 JANUARY 2017

And Sinterklaas, and New Year, and Burns Night.

And what have I done?

Well, a lot! Except from cruising, that is. I crocheted dog bones, napkin rings and birthday cakes.



Birthday cake

Had golf lessons and played golf. Went to yoga classes twice a week. Went to the swimming pool (and jacuzzi and steam room) twice a week. Discovered a few very nice books in the book exchange in the marina (each about 600 pages). Made bread once a week, and yoghurt as well. Did our weekly shopping, and prepared meals four times a week (on average).



Home Made Bread

Notice the nice bread board in the background? Christmas present from Ann and Mick.

Other than that, Sinterklaas passed unnoticed; Lancashire is quite a long journey on a horse, for a guy his age. New Year's Eve was spent in the dark side of the marina, on a wide beam.

Burns Night was celebrated on WRT. Ann made the mashed tatties and neeps, and the haggis was prepared in our microwave. Because the microwave is stored under the kitchen worktop, in the far corner, me and Ann had to kneel on the floor, in front of the cupboard, to get the haggises in and out of it.

Christmas started with the annual boatersclub Christmas Supper at the New Scarisbrick Arms.



Annual Christmas Supper 2016

Then we had a pre-pre Christmas meal on WRT. Turkey with all the trimming.



Turkey

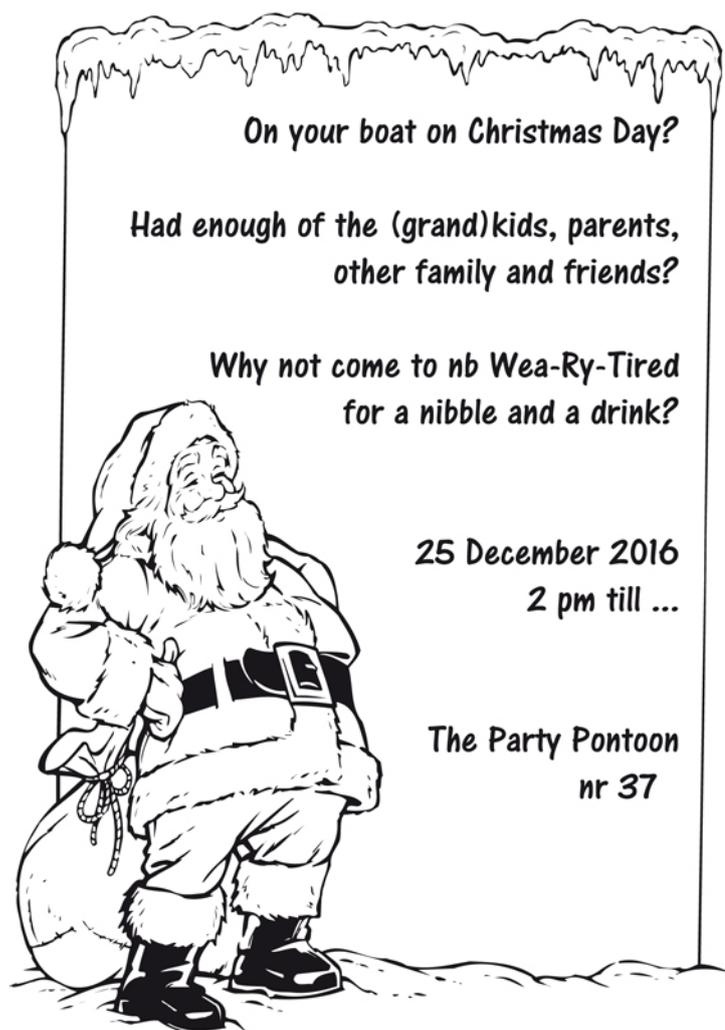
But with Ann being a vegetarian, it wasn't turkey as we know it, thanks to a sculpting chef.



Sculpting Chef

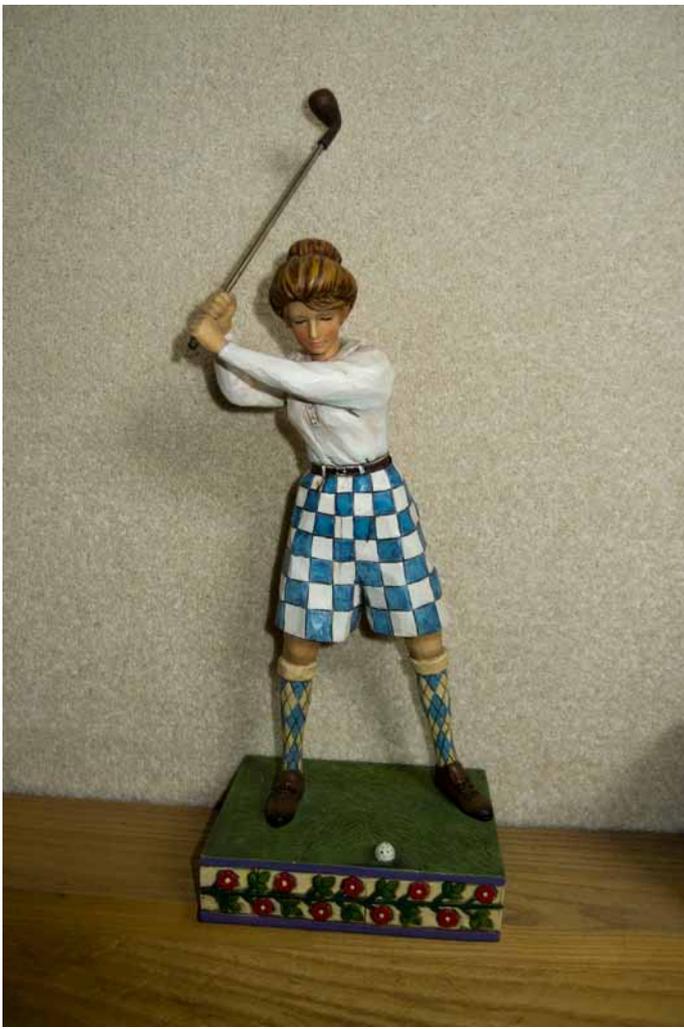
The Faux Grass starter was just that (faux) and the gravy was vegetarian as well.

We had a pre Christmas meal on Rorah, a meal at the golf club, and a get-together on WRT. With lots of healthy snacks and not-so-healthy drinks.



Open house 2016

And Santa Claus gave me golf lessons. Plus, as a result of that, a statue to celebrate the fact that, after two lessons, I managed to do Hurlston Hall Golf Course in 26 shots less than the previous round. Somehow I don't think the statue resembles me, though...



Golf Statue

And I've got the blues. The Delfts Blues, I mean. Due to us meeting a Dutch family on their narrowboat Dubbel Dutch in 2016 I suddenly found myself craving for something Delftware on WRT. So I started doing a panel of nine delftware tiles. This is one of them. But because it is not finished yet, that's all I will show you at the moment.



The Unfinished Blues

Well, do I need to say more? If a day had 36 or even 48 hours I would still try to fill all of them. The only problem would be: lack of energy. Yoga classes are mean. Yoga plus swimming? That's me knackered. Playing golf? Hurlston Hall Golf Course is a long course, and a pouring 'drizzly' rain or a gale force wind plus sub-zero temperatures turn a round of golf into a devastating experience. Doing cross stitch? It's hard to see for a woman my age, even with reading glasses. It takes so much attention that sometimes I just forget to breathe!

So it comes as no surprise that, around ten o'clock at night, I just manage to prepare the fire for the night, and after that I'm off to bed. Another day gone, in the blink of an eye...

SO THIS WAS EASTER...? – 13 APRIL 2017

No, it's not that bad. Easter is still far away (three days, to be precise). But as I mentioned before, one needs something to write about, other than: played golf, went to yoga, made bread, repeat, repeat, repeat.

But last week we actually did something else: we went to Liverpool.
By car? Just 44 minutes. Walking? Only five hours. By boat? Two days!

One of the reasons to go to Liverpool was that, after almost forty years my hand mixer finally died. So we had to go back to the fluffy Tesco wholemeal bread. I bought a new mixer, but found out (when reading the manual) that I could only use the thing for three minutes, and after that it had to rest for half an hour. So my only hope was John Lewis, and the nearest John Lewis is in Liverpool.

I manage to get a convoy of four boats to go into Liverpool on the 31st of March.
In the end it is only three of us: Bill (*Tin Lizzie*), Andy and Christine (*Wea-Ry-Tired 4*) and us (*Wea-Ry-Tired 1*). Mick (*Rorah*) decides to try to break his ribs. So him and Ann make the journey a day later. As is Kurt (*Archer's Den*). Two days later Ian and Pam (*Peppermint Patty*) arrive as well.

Our trip is kind of uneventful. We start at half past three on the Thursday (after I spend two hours in the hospital with Mick). On Friday it is the usual. Doing 1500 revs and nearly standing still: rubbish around the prop. WRT 4 decides to wait for her little older sister and manages to get stuff around the prop as well. But we're at Stanley Locks at the right time.



Stanley Locks

WRT absolutely gleams with joy: sharing the locks with her sister! And forcing people on the towpath to look again, and again, and again.



Double? Drunk?

Everything goes smooth, even in Albert Dock.



Into Albert Dock

Then s**t happens. It's a bit windy. We end up alongside another boat, and have to be towed onto our pontoon. WRT 4, definitely not as experienced as WRT 1, really loses it. She tries to get blown away with the wind, and manages to break free. And where does her middle rope go? Exactly, around the prop. Completely out of control Andy ends up right in front of us. No, that's not the proper way to moor.



Sorry... S**t Happens

Half an hour later, and with a much shorter middle rope, WRT 4 finally moors at her designated pontoon.

The following days it's very nice weather, and the others have no problems at all with mooring up.



No Spare Ribs



Peppermint Patty

When, after a few days, everybody is in Salthouse Dock, Kurt exclaims: “It’s like being home!” But at home there are no mixers, there is no theatre that does Grease, and we definitely don’t have this view at night.



Two for One

Or an Italian restaurant like Il Forno.



Il Forno

Thursday night we're back in the marina. I just manage to reverse onto our jetty. Mick doesn't make it, and has to go in head first. Yes, it's the wind again. But with Kurt and Ian still in Liverpool I have (temporary) a very nice view out of the conservatory.



Temporary View

Other than that, where back at the usual: yoga, golf (although my game with the ladies from Hurlston Hall Golf Club is cancelled, due to the bad weather, as is Lawrance's golf lesson), making bread.

And we have something to look forward to: WE BOOKED A WEEK ON A NARROWBOAT!

We, that's Ann & Mick and us . And yes, we both have our own boats. But there is a canal in the UK that has no connection with the main canal system: the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal, a small network of canals in South Wales. And because our boats don't have wheels...

The 30st of September we start. Will be fun. "Have you been on a narrowboat before?", is the first question one gets when hiring a narrowboat. Well, we haven't been off a narrowboat over the last three years! Yes. I'm really looking forward to it.

GIRL'S WEEKEND OUT – 01 MAY 2017

It's May Bank Holiday weekend. Lawrance is off on a boy's weekend out, i.e. his annual army reunion in Blackpool. Ann & Mick on Rorah are out as well (but not as we know it).



Out (completely)

So me and WRT decide to have a girl's weekend out. Well, in fact it is WRT's idea. She has been bugging me all week. "Can we go out? We could visit my little big sister! Please?" "Maybe", I keep telling her, "but, as you should know by now, it all depends on the weather."

Lawrance leaves on the Thursday, and that day definitely is a no-go. Gusts of wind up to 20 mph. I know that for sure, because we bought an anemometer (wind speed meter). Friday morning, probably around the same time as Lawrance goes to his bed, I wake up in a mill pond. So I tell WRT: "OK girl, we'll give it a try." WRT nearly jumps for joy.

Before I set off, though, I need to think. What will I need at hand while cruising? I can not just phone the crew to fetch me this, that or the other. And I'm not sure what will happen if I leave WRT to find her own way and jump inside to get things myself. But as soon as I think I've got everything covered I set off (and will be sniffing until I moor up, because the one thing I don't think of is hankies).

Safely out of the marina I suddenly turn into a nervous wreck. There's me, on my own, what the f**k am I doing? There are boats moored, there is oncoming traffic; I nearly panic. Then I ask myself: How often have you been on the tiller of WRT? (86 cruising days, I just checked the log books). How far away from home base and friends are you going? (6 miles one way). How often have you temporarily moored up on your own while Lawrance is getting a lock or bridge ready? (so many times, I don't know).

So get a grip!

Of course all goes well. But I am certainly nervous. A bit like when I first got my driving license in the mail, and my father handed me both driving license and car keys, saying: "Go visit your aunt and uncle in Oldenzaal." I know, if need be, I can walk home (although the home is then somewhere on the Leeds & Liverpool Canal). And I'm well within reach of friends. So after a short while my nerves calm down a bit. Especially when WRT tells me in a moody tone of voice: "Remember what I told you on the 14th of May 2014?"

And no, I'm not doing this long, six mile journey in one day. First I go down to Holland.
I know, that should read: I go to Downholland Hall Swing Bridge. But being down in Holland gives the impression that me and WRT crossed the North Sea and are in Holland for the girl's weekend...



Down in Holland?

Mooring up is a piece of cake, lunch delicious, and, best of all, the sun comes out. Supper is in the well-know Italian restaurant Il **Port(o)** di Olanda. On the menu? Pizza Magdalena, something I haven't made for, say, 15 years!

The taste of the pizza is OK. Not a surprise, I made it every week for about ten years plus. The shape, though, is a different matter. My pizza dish never made it across the North Sea, so I have to use what I have. The rest of the evening is uneventful.



Pizza Magdalena

Saturday morning starts with setting a new speed record.

Out of bed – into engine room – make note of battery status – switch on inverter – go midships – switch on heating system – reprogram it – go to dining area – check position of WRT – go back to bed. All this in approximately 5 seconds. Must be nearly the speed of light. Which is the aim, because time tends to go slower when you're doing near light speed. So I could have done even more, during these 5 seconds. Like polish brass, or clean the fridge.

What I should have done, though, was going to the toilet. The plan was to stay in bed for another half an hour until the boat is cosy warm, but my body decides otherwise. So after 15 minutes I can but go out of bed.

Yes. I know, I now have to explain two things: why reprogram the central heating, and what happened to the coal fire? Reference the central heating: it's programmed to run only between 6 and 8 in the morning. So when I want/need it on before 6 o'clock I have to reprogram it. And the coal fire? Well, at the moment WRT is a coal-dust-free boat. Last Wednesday we had all our carpets cleaned, i.e. the ones on the floor AND the carpets on the wall.



When I'm Cleaning Carpets

Plus we cleaned all the shelves, all the books, all the furniture, the entire floor. In fact, everything is so shiny, when inside, one has to wear sunglasses! So until the end of the summer the fire will have time off.

I have the feeling that WRT wants to visit her sister just to show off her shiny insides.

So, after I've done my duties (clean the bathroom and the fridge) and after I had my lunch I set off for the second part of the journey. It's only 2½ miles, but it includes a swing bridge...

I know I can moor on the side where the control panel is. But at some of these bridges there is only room for a 40 footer, and I can't remember how much space there is here. The wind will put me right against the bank, so mooring should be easy, but will I manage to get off to go through the bridge? In a reasonable time, in case there are 19,468 cars waiting? It turns out there is enough room.

Before the bridge, that is. Behind the bridge also is enough room, but some of that is taken up by a moored CRT barge...

In the end it's a piece of cake. Moor up. Open the bridge (no cars, whatsoever). Take WRT through the bridge. Moor behind CRT barge. Close the bridge. Set off. Simple.



CRT Barge and WRT at Swing Bridge

So I presume my next challenge will be going OK as well: turn around in the winding hole and reverse down (for non-boaters: it's very difficult to steer a narrowboat when reversing) to a mooring in front of WRT 4, just between two yoghurt pots. Even with it being windy, and people watching me.

I presumed right. Without hitting anything I turn, reverse and moor. Only the middle rope ends in the water when I do a girly throw.

Job done. And I must say, I'm a bit proud of myself. And of WRT, of course.

Who, although there is a boat between her and her sister, immediately engages herself in silly girly boat talk. And will keep doing that until late at night.



Close to little big sister

OK, we, the adults, talk as well, but after a delicious risotto on WRT 4 I go home for my normal early night. Tomorrow is not going to be easy. I have to one swing bridge, cruise 6 miles, and have to get back into the marina. The weather forecast predicts 20 mph winds, so I might be out longer than planned.

Sunday morning again sees the light speed run, only slightly different. I don't have to reprogram the central heating, and I don't go back to bed. I do check the position of WRT, even with being in a secure area. Because yesterday night someone threatened to cut the ropes. And he would do that (would you not, Andy?).

Today it's a bit windy, to say the least. Setting off is not a problem, cruising as such neither. But this one and only swing bridge turns out to be a bridge too far.

Thanks to this CRT barge I don't manage to moor at the side of the control panel. Worse, even, I just get blown onto the bank on the towpath side, the wrong side to do the swing bridge. And when I try to pull WRT a bit forwards to get the middle rope near a bollard, I realize: I'm grounded as well.

Great!



Wrong Side and Grounded

I moor up with three mooring lines, manage to save the TV-aerial from blowing off the roof, and get the anemometer out. Gusts up to 35 mph...

Nothing else I can do, I have lunch. Meanwhile the barometer drops..., and drops. And the wind gets stronger..., and stronger. I tie a rope onto the TV-aerial. A bit later I rescue the life belt. Yes, definitely time for cross stitch.

Then, three hours later, nb NIPS, turns up. A local, and also a single hander. He has the same problems as I had, but on the other side of the bridge. In the end I help him and he helps me. And me and WRT are on the move again. I decide we won't go any further than Downholland Farm. There are bollards, and I don't fancy (won't be able) to moor up with mooring pins.

Right decision. Even with the bollards mooring is difficult. The (now) very strong wind right from the back blows WRT forwards, while she has to go back, in order to reach the bollards.

At 15:00 hrs we've done enough for the day. Tomorrow I want a mill pond, 25°C and clear blue skies. I think me and WRT deserve that...!



Mill Pond

Monday morning it's indeed mill pond. It's still a bit too early for the 25°C and the clear blue skies, so shorts and sun cream stay where they are: in the cupboards.

After the usual morning rituals we set off at 8 o'clock. And about an hour later we're back in the marina. I do need somebody to help me to moor at our jetty, so I park WRT temporary at the diesel pump. And decide to fuel up as well, while we're there.



Almost Home

By the time we're refilled, enough people have gathered to give me a hand. Effortless I reverse back to our own jetty and with the help of Ian and Guy I put WRT back into her usual space. Except for some extra diesel in the tank, a few more engine hours and a few more scratches it's like nothing has been going on, over the last four days.

Epilogue

To be fair, as soon as they know the situation I'm in, both Ann & Mick, and Andy & Christine offer help immediately. But I decline that. Politely.

And is there any nervousness after the first day? No, I just bloody enjoy the challenges!

Oh, and just to put things into perspective: **from the marina to Lydiate is 13 minutes by car...**

NO CREW – 02 MAY 2017

My trip to Lydiate set off a whole train of thoughts.

When on the tiller I always get comments like: *Oh, my wife wouldn't think of steering the boat.* And: *One doesn't see a lot of women steering narrowboats.*

So I know I'm a relatively rare species.

But what does the wife do when something happens to the other half? And they are in the middle of nowhere?



Galley Slave cum Deck Hand cum Chief Engineer

Some men say: *Oh, my wife knows how to steer the boat.*

Yes, but I realize now that steering the boat is not the issue here. If the man is in bed, or, even worse, is not there at all, the woman is a single hander. Which certainly adds a couple of new dimensions to narrowboating!

The fact that you have to **take your own decisions**. And deal with the consequences... Like: do I desperately try to moor in front of the CRT barge or do I take advantage of the wind, let WRT drift to the other side (where I can moor safely), and take it from there?

The fact that you **only have two hands** (only one when the other is on the tiller or holding a rope), when you would need two hands on the middle rope, and four more hands to hammer mooring pins in.

The fact that you are 57 kg (at least I am) and you **need to hold 18 tons** of WRT in a gale force wind.

And all this is without mentioning doing locks and (swing)bridges on your own, identifying possible engine problems, keeping an eye on your batteries and cleaning the propeller every few hours.

I think every wife should take out the boat on her own, for a weekend or so. Because if all problems add up: something wrong with husband + strong winds + locks/bridges + the first time doing this on your own... **YOU BETTER HAVE SOME EXPERIENCE!**

FIRST TIME ON A RIVER – 03 JUNE 2017

Early Tuesday morning on the 30th of May we present ourselves at the booking office for the Anderton Boat Lift. Just to be told that the lift is fully booked for the day. Only one caisson is used, because of a fault in one of the gates. So we're at the visitor's moorings, going down tomorrow. So I thought: Would they do a Top of the World Tour today?

"No, but the volunteer, who does the tours, is in today", is the answer I get back. And, as I find out, he is willing to do a one (wo)man tour. This private tour lasts two hours in stead of the normal one hour. And they even let me operate the gates...! Sorry for the silly woman in the next two pictures.



On top of the World



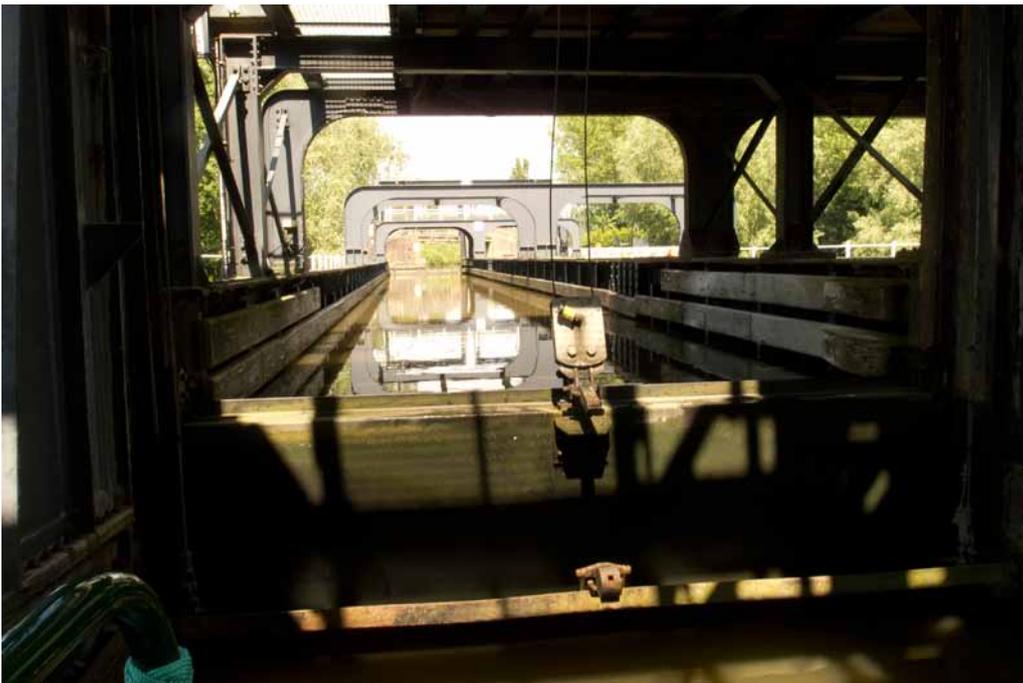
Apprentice Boat Lift Operator

Absolute amazing what they achieved in those days.

At one o'clock on Wednesday the 31st of May we move the boats onto the holding mooring for the lift. After getting instructions about the do's and don'ts they let us on the aqueduct, and then onto the lift.



Anderton Boat Lift Waiting Line



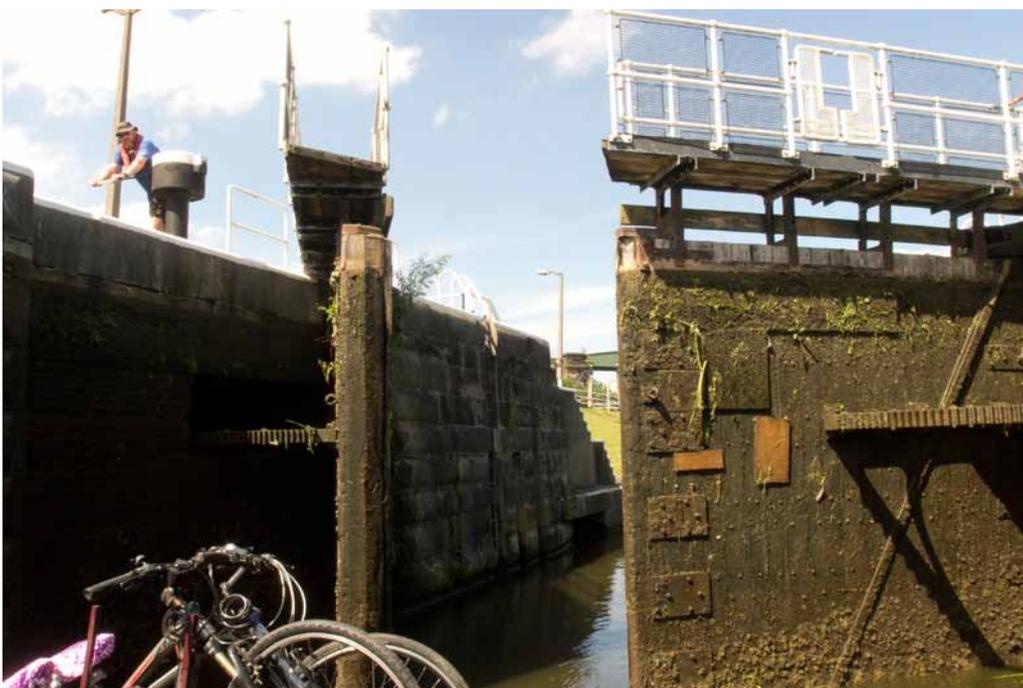
Looking back towards the canal

Forty-five minutes later I find myself in a completely different world.



First impression of the River Weaver

Locks are huge and have a lock keeper, who you have to phone, before showing up. You don't throw ropes, the lock keeper lowers a rope, onto which you attach your rope. And you switch off the engine in a lock.



With lock keeper

And when we're cruising we don't seem to make any progress. But that's just an illusion.

At four o'clock we moor up at the Vale Royal Visitors Mooring, ready to open the purposely bought bubbly, to celebrate our first day on our first river. Me and Ann prepare supper (I make a pizza and tzatziki, Ann provides the starter) and we have a delightful evening.



Bubbly for the celebration

The next day we explore the navigable part of the river Weaver all the way upstream.



Salt Mine



Alberta Canada?

We pass a salt mine, industrial debris that reminds me of Uluru (Ayer's Rock) in Australia or dinosaur country in Canada, and something I jokingly call a winding hole, which turns out actually to be a winding hole (don't want to encounter a boat that has to use it, here on the river. It can almost accommodate a DFDS Ferry!)



Winding hole for DFDS Ferry

Of course we also go all the way downstream. Through even bigger (but more or less gentle) locks (where one of the lock keepers even decides to buy one of my tea cup pin cushions).



Gigantic locks

In between the ups and downs we end up at the visitor's mooring near Anderton Boat Lift, for a well-deserved and very delicious BBQ with the neighbours.



Anderton Boat Lift BBQ

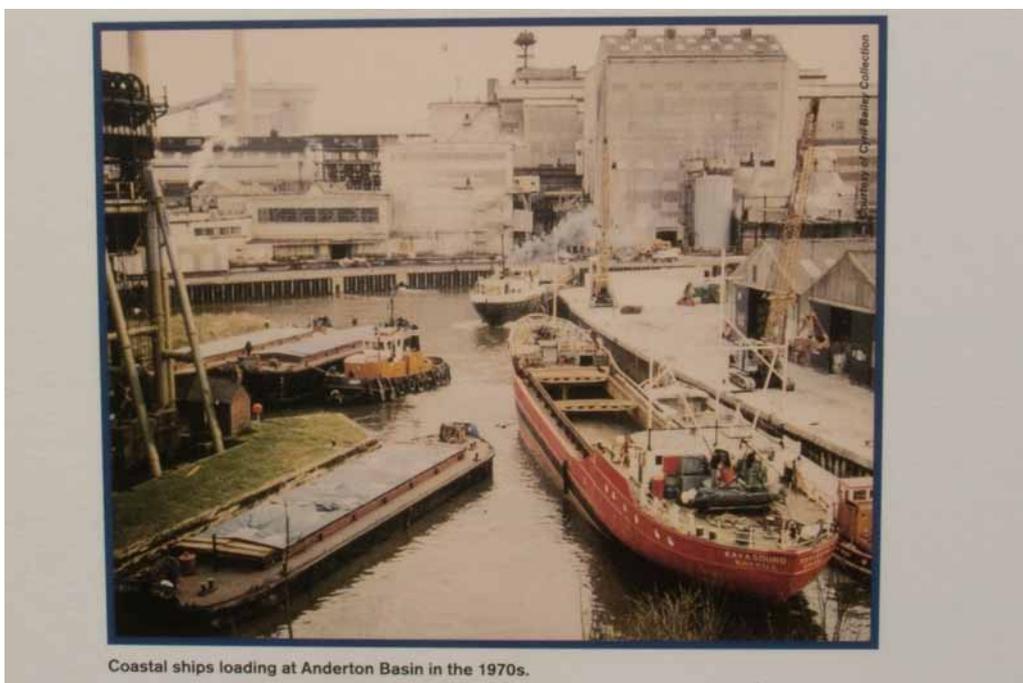
BACK ON THE CANALS— 06 JUNE 2017

After all these delightful days on the river Weaver it's time to get back onto the canals. Our passage on Anderton Boat Lift is at 12:10 hrs on Sunday, so at 11:40 hrs we move to the holding moorings from the lift. And wait, and wait...



Waiting for the lift

At 12:20 hrs Peter tells us to get ready, and 10 minutes later we're in the lift. There certainly is a difference between the basin nowadays and in the seventies, as these pictures show.



Coastal ships loading at Anderton Basin in the 1970s.

Situation in the 70s



Situation now



Ready to get out

Fourteen minutes later we're ready to get out. Ann and Mick will stop at Anderton Services (and dumping our rubbish as well), we just keep going.

It sure is a complete different cruising environment. The canal is small, overgrown, shallow, busy with boats (oncoming and sunken), people on the tow path, floating tree trunks.



Bit low in the water

It takes us just over four hours to get through Middlewich Big Lock and moor up. By then Ann and Mick are right behind us.

Monday morning me and Ann do the necessary shopping at Lidl before setting off on what will be our worst cruising day since ages. I'm the un-lucky, so to speak, so at 10:30 hrs I start walking towards the first lock. I prepare the lock, expecting Lawrance to turn up straight away. No, no Lawrance. Instead of that the heavens open, and in seconds I'm drenched. Fifteen minutes later still no Lawrance, so I decide to close the lock doors again, and start walking back to our mooring place. Just as I start doing that, I see WRT's beautiful nose slowly cruising around the corner. No, he did not break down. Although we discussed the night before that from now on all the locks will be single locks for a long time, Lawrance thinks the locks are double locks, so he waits till Ann and Mick start as well.

With the help of a volunteer lock keeper we get through the locks pretty quick, but at the third lock the heavens open again. Well, that doesn't change a thing for me, I'm already drenched...

Once we're past the last lock of the day (on the Middlewich Branch) I finally manage to change into some dry clothes, get a warm drink and get back to normal. Around two o'clock we arrive at Church Minshull. Way before everybody else, so we can moor close to the bridge, with lots of sunshine (if there was any, but you know what I mean: good for the solars).

Ann booked a table at The Badger, so at least I don't have to do the cooking. After that it's a relatively early night. Tomorrow Ann and Mick have to go, we don't. And looking at the weather forecast, we probably won't.

And that's exactly what happens. For the first time since we have the boat, we stay where we are because of the weather. It's cold; so I switch the central heating on. Winds will go up to over 40 mph, with heavy rain. So why move if you don't have to? And, other than that, it gives me a chance to catch up with the weblog. But in the end the weblog is not updated...

SHIPWRECK – 16 JUNE 2017

On our holiday in 2013 we visited Chester... But we cheated, by stopping at Egg Bridge and taking the buss into town. That did save us a lot of locks. This time we make up for that. We go to Chester, and even as far as Ellesmere Port, to visit the Waterways Museum.



Chester Tower Wharf

We moor at Tower Wharf, go to Tesco to do shopping, and head for the race course.



Day at the races – before

A day at the races. Well, we're not really dressed for that, so we stay outside the race course. Other people are dressed to the T, on skyscraper heels, and completely covered in spray tan. Their hands never without a drink. Half ways through the races it starts to rain. We're OK, the others mentioned before are not. Soaked, drunk, dripping spray tan they make their way home... on flipflops!



Day at the races – after

The next day it is bloody windy. I'm on the tiller and I'm doing fine... until Lawrance opens the lock that lets us go into the basin at the museum, to become part of the exhibition for a couple of nights.

As soon as Lawrance opens the lock doors I know I'm in deep trouble. To my right the lock wall extends for a while. I do have to turn left. Which I will never be able to do, due to the gale force wind, and the lock wall to my right. Still not a problem. I can 'spring' the boat and reverse to the planned mooring.

But what do I see right in front of me? A funnel, sticking out of the water.



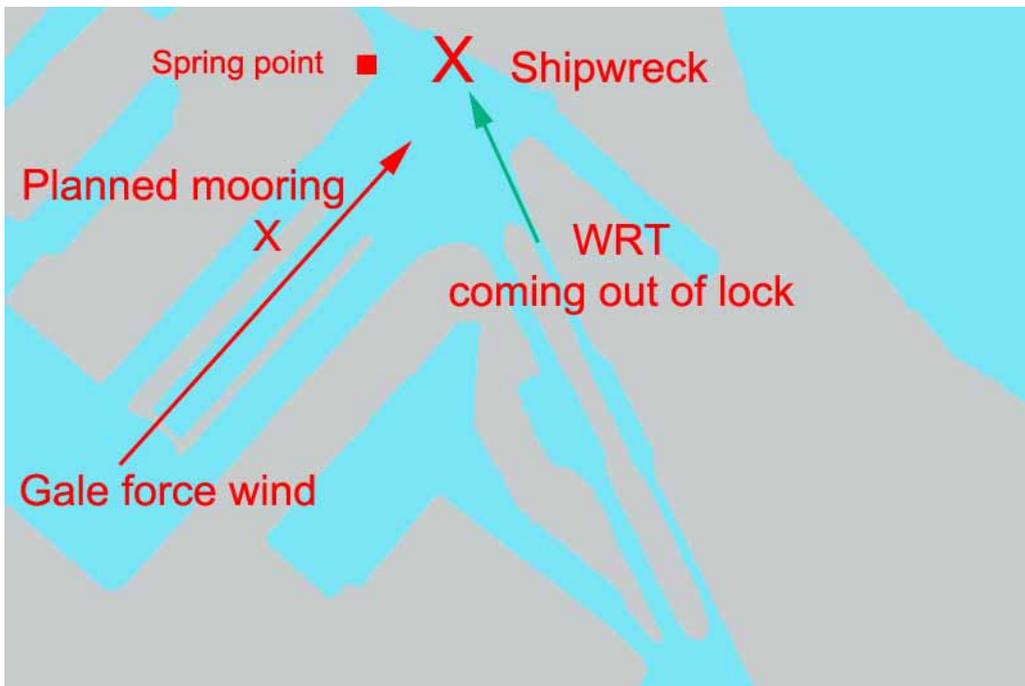
Funnel

What is usually attached to a funnel that sticks out of the water? A shipwreck.



Ship wreck

And due to the wind and the wall to my right, WRT's beautiful nose will hit whatever part of that ship that's under the water way before I can do any steering...!



No chance, whatsoever

I manage (just) to stay a bit away from the shipwreck. Lawrance grabs the front line. He wants me to try to turn the bow to the left. I don't want that, because that automatically puts the stern (and thus the propeller) right on top of the shipwreck.

In the end I manage to 'spring' WRT's stern away from the shipwreck, and reverse to the planned mooring. After that WRT is a boat in a museum (not half sunken, like most of the boats).



Part of the museum

The museum as such is not worth visiting again. The only things I like are the horse drawn tar boat Gifford, a (nearly empty) boatman's cabin on an old workboat (to get an idea about the size of the living quarters) and the crocheted replica of the side of the cabin on the Friendship. Especially the chimney is really cute!



Friendship crocheted



The real Friendship



Cute detail

Other than that, the museum feels neglected. It's nothing compared to the Black Country Living Museum. Unfortunately...

The day we leave the museum, I learn why women are better steerers:

Women use the engine; men use brute force and ignorance.

I can but agree...!

We spend another night in Chester, after avoiding a fallen tree and a diagonally free-floating coal boat. And after doing the Chester shuffle (under the guidance of a volunteer lock keeper).

Two boats coming out of the lock, one boat to go into the lock? Yes, one can do this, without taking one of the boats out of the water!



Chester Shuffle

We moor up opposite Abakhan. Just a little bit away from a winding hole. The next morning a hire boat will knock me off the toilet...!

Hire boaters, can't even properly steer a boat.

We leave WRT in Tattenhall Marina, while we rent a car to go down to Southampton, for a wedding reception in a marina.



Boats, but not as we know them

A 60 ft boat? Not for less than a million...! Would I change the environment? Never! We leave WRT in Tattenhall Marina, while we rent a car to go down to Southampton, for a wedding reception.

BUNBURY SHUFFLE – 19 JUNE 2017

It's going to be one of the hottest cruising days ever. It's nice and warm when I get up, but when Lawrance finally is ready to take our rental car back to Enterprise in Chester it's already 50°C in the well deck. By the time he's back, finishes his lunch and we set off (13:00 hrs) it's even hotter, but the thermometer only goes till 50°C...

We have about an hour and a half before we get to the first lock, so for now I leave the side doors open, to let some cool air in. But just before the lock I close side doors and cratch cover. Some locks have a tendency to pee, and we don't want an indoor swimming pool.

Lawrance is at the tiller, I'm the un-locky. It's hot. I take my time to open the lock. When Lawrance exits the lock I find out: I can't close the gate. Too heavy, too hot. So Lawrance has to close it, and decides to do the remaining locks, while I do the tiller. After we do the second lock I notice a hire boat just behind us, so we decide to wait for them at the next lock. Extra crew, so less work for Lawrance in the heath.

Everything goes fine, until we get to the Bunbury Staircase locks. Lawrance signals me and John (on the hire boat) to moor up. He then tells us that there is a boat just leaving the top lock, and there is one boat to go down. While he get's back to the lock, I think: one going down, two going up... time for the Bunbury Shuffle. So I go to the lock as well, and see two elderly ladies at the paddles (well, they are probably younger than I am, but you know what I mean, the grey hair, the kind of clothes, the I'm-too-old-for-this look on their faces). I tell them to do nothing at the moment, that we are going to do a shuffle. In the mean time I shout to Lawrance (who's at the top lock): we're going to do the **Bunbury Shuffle**.

Obviously it needs a clever illegal immigrant to tell eight UK residents how to use their canals and locks...!

I start explaining to the ladies what is going to happen.

"To save time and a lot of water, our two boats will be in the bottom lock (and going up) while your boat is in the top lock, going down."

One of the ladies answers: "No, I think you can not do that. We have to come down first."

"No", I say, "Tell me, what are you planning to do now?"

Her answer: "We are going to empty the water of the top lock into the empty bottom lock." (Hire boaters, just repeating literally what's on the CRT instruction board.)

"So is there a problem with our two boats being in that bottom lock when you do that?"

The answer again: "Yes, I think you can not do that. We have to come down first."

I must admit, I'm a bit nervous, just a tiny bit. OK, we've done the Chester Shuffle, and I have seen the Bunbury Shuffle before. In May 2013, when Swansong with friend Ian was one of the boats. But the embarrassment in case I'm wrong here...



Bunbury Shuffle 2013

Luckily Lawrance joins us then, so to prevent the ladies to start emptying the top lock I tell Lawrance to open the bottom gates, while I get WRT and the other hire boat.

John get's into the lock, I get into the lock, and explain to John what we are going to do.

Once we are all level, we open the lock gates, and I take WRT into the top lock. John moves sideways to the space I just left. Then the Black Prince boat in the top lock moves into the bottom lock, to John's place. I then move sideways to where the top lock boat was, and John moves into the top lock to the space I just left. We close the lock gates, and proceed as normal. Doing the shuffle this way none of us has to wiggle from left to right (or vice versa). It's an much easier version of the original Bunbury Shuffle.

Of course it all works well. We save a lot of water, and WE save a lot of time. The Black Prince boat loses a bit of time, because they have to wait for us to get in the bottom lock. But saving water goes before saving time...!

We end the day at Barbridge Junction. Have a meal at the Old Barbridge Inn, and sit on the tow path until late (and colder). It was an hot but interesting day.

TOO WEIRD TO MAKE UP – 23 JUNE 2017

There are a heap of locks between Swanley Bridge Marina and Norbury Junction. Thirty-one, to be precise. The boating season has started so there quite a few boaters heading down north. When we meet them when we are in the locks we're constantly faced with a very concerned person. They all say something like: "How did you do that? We've basically just passed you at Norbury Junction, and here you are, on your way back to Norbury Junction. And you must have overtaken us somewhere as well...!?"



Double? Drunk?

It takes a while to explain to them that: "No, that was a different boat you saw at Norbury Junction." And: "Yes, we know them, they are good friends of us." Followed by: "No, they didn't copy our name, our boat was their first Wea-Ry-Tired."

It takes us ages to get to Norbury Junction. It's quite full, but we manage to get a mooring space about five boats in front of WRT-4. After the usual hugs and kisses me and Lawrance do our after-cruising checks, close the back and start walking towards the rubbish and the chandlery. Between WRT-1 and WRT-4 a couple passes us. Clearly boaters; you can see that straight away. While Lawrance puts the rubbish in the bin I have a glance at the moored boats. I see that the woman of the couple we just passed has walked back, and is now talking to Christine at WRT-4.

Back from the chandlery (with only a Tillergraph and a Towpath Talk) an exited Christine tells us: "A woman walked all the way from your boat back to ours to ask me if I knew there was a boat in front of us with the same name!" After the usual explanations Christine finds out that the woman is Dutch, so she tells her that I'm Dutch as well. The woman then asks Christine to send me over to her boat, which is called Double Dutch. I look at her in disbelief. I'm pretty sure the woman I saw wasn't Annemarie from Dubbel Dutch. So I put the magazines in the well deck and start walking towards a boat called Double Dutch.

And for the first time in ages I can speak Dutch again. It's a Dutch couple, Coby and Henk, lived in the UK for over 30 years. They tell me that one day they were waiting to go into a lock and out of that lock came a boat with the same name, with a Dutch family on it, living in Rotterdam. So I say: "Yes, that will have been Annemarie and Martin, with their children. They have a boat with a lot of Dutch accents, like the tulip field on the outside."



Dubbel Dutch

Mentioning the tulip field painted on the outside of Dubbel Dutch doesn't give me the reaction I expect. But the couple says: "Well, it was busy, and you can't just block a whole lock and start yapping...!"

Half an hour later, back on WRT-1, I have a port and read the Tillergraph. And guess, who's picture is in the Tillergraph, under featured boat bilders? Dubbel Dutch. With two guys with hats and Martin, clearly standing in the hatch. So I immediately walk back to Double Dutch to show them the picture. And lo and behold, it's NOT the boat they met at the lock. So how many Dubbel or Double Dutch are there?



Dubbel Dutch in The Tillergraph

If all this was part of a book, people would say: "Rubbish...!"

P.S. I think I never revealed my finished Dutch cross stitch. Probably due to the fact that we had a problem with the wifi in the marina for a while. So here it is:



Triple Dutch?

VENICE AGAIN? 09 JULY 2017

No, we didn't cruise all the way to the Mediterranean. We're in Stourport. In the basin, moored up for a couple of days. And, like last year, it reminds me of Venice.

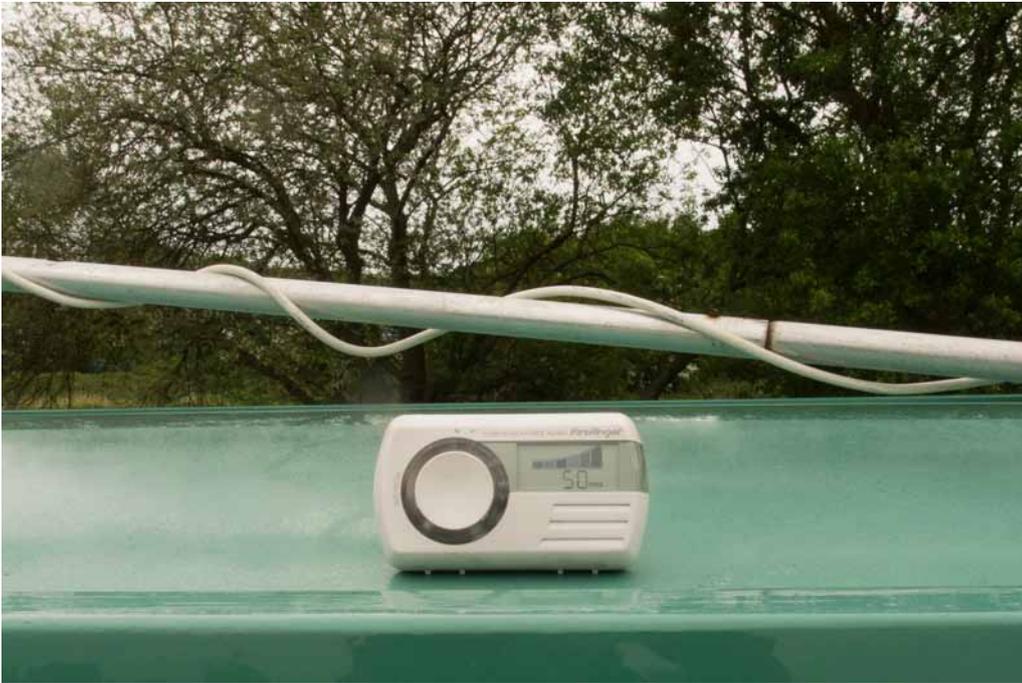
It is awful long ago I wrote something for the blog. Eh, no, let me rephrase that. I wrote some stories in concept, but never got the chance to actually put them on the blog. Reason? Well, no phone signal (so no internet), cruising mostly every day (so no time to do it), meeting up with friends (no time, again). So today is the day to write about everything that happened between the 2nd of May and today, the 9th of July. A lot of things, though, are not interesting enough to turn into a separate post. So I will just mention them here. All the important things you've read already, by the time you read this.

As a 'test drive' for our big annual cruise we do the Rufford Brach of the Leeds & Liverpool Canal, between the 16th of May and the 19th of May, meeting up with Ann and Mick, who already have left Scarisbrick Marina. With six locks, all with very strange paddle gear, and all need a handcuff key. Volunteers help with lock 1 and 2, but the rest is absolutely difficult. Lock 4 leaks so much... one side is Lancashire, the other side reminds me of Niagara Falls.



Rufford Brach

We have a slight problem with our CO-alarm. It tells us to get outside immediately, because we are exposed to 50 ppm of CO for too long. The problem: we ARE outside, as is the alarm. We're in rural Lancashire so where does the CO come from?



CO outside, in rural Lancashire?

So we decide to buy a new one. If that tells us that we still have a lot of CO in the boat then we have a problem. But no, the old one must be faulty.



New and old

Then, on the 22nd of May we leave Scarisbrick Marina for our annual cruise. Crooke is our first stop, and the next day we meet up with Ann and Mick, just before the stoppage at Vickar's Hall Bridge. At 16:45 hrs we know for sure: the stoppage is gone. The first two boats coming from Worsely are passing us. We wait till the next day. This gives me a chance to see unusual things, early next morning. Like a swimming deer (that can't get out of the water), and a giant fish that jumps out of the water every minute or so.



Swimming deer

At 09:30 hrs the next morning we are (almost) south of the stoppage. Finally.



Stoppage gone

We stop at Lymm, to play golf (next to another canal, the Manchester Ship Canal) and have a meal with the people on the boat in front of us (Ann and Mick, who else?).



Golf at Lymm



Meal at Lymm

We do spend a night between lock 13 and 12 in Audlem. On our first proper 60 ft mooring ever (the rings are exactly at the right distance). Here I take the last picture with my camera. For some reason I cannot charge the battery anymore. I do buy a new battery, but that doesn't solve the problem.



Audlem

The next day, in the middle of a txt conversation with Christine the English SIM card in my phone stops working.

Once we meet up with Andy and Christine even more goes downhill. We decide to stay for a few more days because the generator on WRT-4 is broken and WRT-4 is an all-electric boat. We can provide an oven or a hub to do some cooking. While there Lawrance's phone packs in (not that there is much of a signal at Norbury Junction...). He does manage to get a phone call from a Dutch number, which we think is Elly and Ronald. My Dutch SIM card works OK so I phone them back with that (roaming is cheap nowadays). We meet them at Wheaton Aston and have a meal in the Hartley Arms.

While Andy and Christine turn left on the Staffs & Worcester we turn right. Stop at Compton for laundry and a game of golf. A mink plays on and around our boat, and a fellow boater tells me about a phenomena I've heard before but never knew what it was: change ringing*.

Kidderminster is the first 'bigish' town, and has both a Vodafone and an O2 shop. The morning we're going to Kidderminster I wake up with the idea: it might not be the SIM card, it might be the phone. One way to find out: swap the SIM cards. To my big surprise both SIM cards then work. I swap them back to their original place (giving the contacts a wipe), and both SIM cards still work, two days later. Lawrance is less fortunate. He needs to buy a new phone...

Once my phone is up and running again, I text Pat (the ones who called us crème brûlée last year): "Where are you? We are in Kidderminster at Tesco".

Answer I get back: "We're at The Bird at Hand".

Exactly the place where we plan to be tonight. So we meet up with Pat and Stephen (and sister (in-law) Christine).

Writing all this (and especially that about the wiping of the SIM card) makes me do the same with my phone battery: I take out the (old) battery, wipe the contacts and presto, the camera charges. The old battery is ready for use pretty fast, so to prove this I take a picture of the basin.



Stourport Basin 2017

Shit, shit, shit. Our mooring at the church in Kidderminster would have made a perfect front for next years calender (if the picture had been taken with a proper camera).



Kidderminster Cathedral

I've got no pictures of Norbury Junction, the BBQ, WRT-4...

But at least I'm able to update the weblog. No we didn't disappear from civilization, civilizations had left us. Now we're back. Once we've played golf at Ombersley Golf Club, gone to the laundrette, and bought our life jackets we're ready for another river: the Severn, Britain's longest river. It runs for 220 miles from the Welsh mountains, through the beautiful Shropshire and Worcestershire countryside all the way down to the flatlands of the Severn estuary.

We'll keep you informed...!

***Change Ringing** (Wikipedia): the art of ringing a set of tuned bells in a controlled manner to produce variations in their striking sequences. This may be by method ringing in which the ringers commit to memory the rules for generating each change, or by call changes, where the ringers are instructed how to generate each new change by calls from a conductor. This creates a form of bell music which is continually changing, but which cannot be discerned as a conventional melody.

See and hear: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bix3S52VHsE>

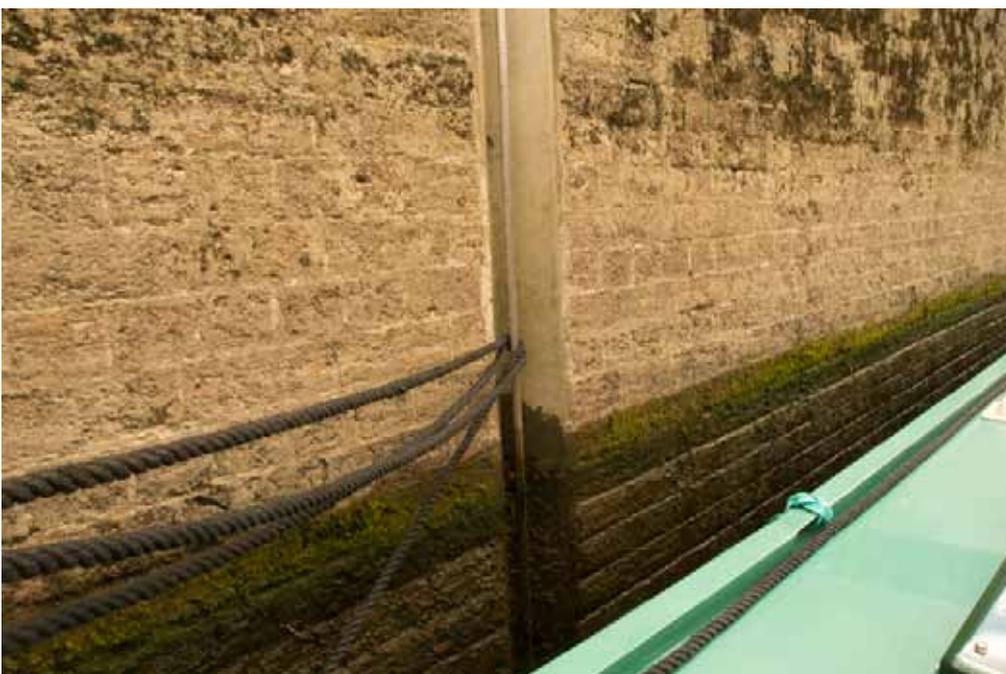
4000.0 – 17 JULY 2017

That's on the 'clock' just when I turn WRT out of the last of the Stourport Locks onto the river Severn. As we bought her with 3150 hours, we've done 850 hours of cruising so far. Most of them were easy. The last half an hour certainly wasn't. It's windy and on the landing pontoon for the first lock is a boat, getting some urgent repairs done. Lawrance manages to get off, but I can but drift onto that other boat. The staircase lock itself is not the problem, but, although Lawrance had a look out for oncoming traffic, and concluded that there was none, there is a boat coming up in the other staircase lock. It's awkward enough to get from the first staircase into the second, with a boat like WRT, but with oncoming traffic it's horrible. Especially with the already mentioned strong wind. But I manage, and off we are, on the river Severn. Downstreams, towards Worcester.



Stourport Staircase Lock 1

The first lock, basically just around the corner, is a new experience for us. No bollards, to wrap you rope around, but a iron wire hawser. You put your rope around it, and hold both ends.



Wire Hawser

The lock keeper explains it very clearly. It's easy enough (if boat length and hawsers kind of match...). What comes as a surprise for both Lawrance and me: we're going DOWN. Of course, we're going downstream, so of course we're going down in the locks. It's just that the lock walls are so high above us, if it was a canal, we would go up.

The second lock is a bit of a nightmare. The hawsers certainly don't match WRT's length, and to make matters worse, while I'm still trying to get anywhere near a wire, the lock keeper starts the procedure and we're going down.

At the third lock I do a typical Dutch thing: I ignore the red traffic light. Basically because the lock keeper is waving me in... She tells me what to do in this lock, where the wire hawsers are at the same distance as in the second lock: just walk on the gunwales and use the one in front of you.



Mooring Worcester

Other than that, it's an easy run to Worcester, doing 3 mph on tick-over. What puzzles me, though, is if I look to my left, we're travelling at a fair speed. If I look to the right, it looks like we're standing still...



Parking or mooring?

We moor in Worcester at the pay-and-display, next to the race course.

Two days we stay. We visit the cathedral, (and hear a rehearsal of one of the choirs of the festival, next week)...



Worcester Cathedral

...the Commandery (a museum)...



The Commandery – Great Hall

and (most important) get the problem with my camera fixed (one new battery and a battery charger).



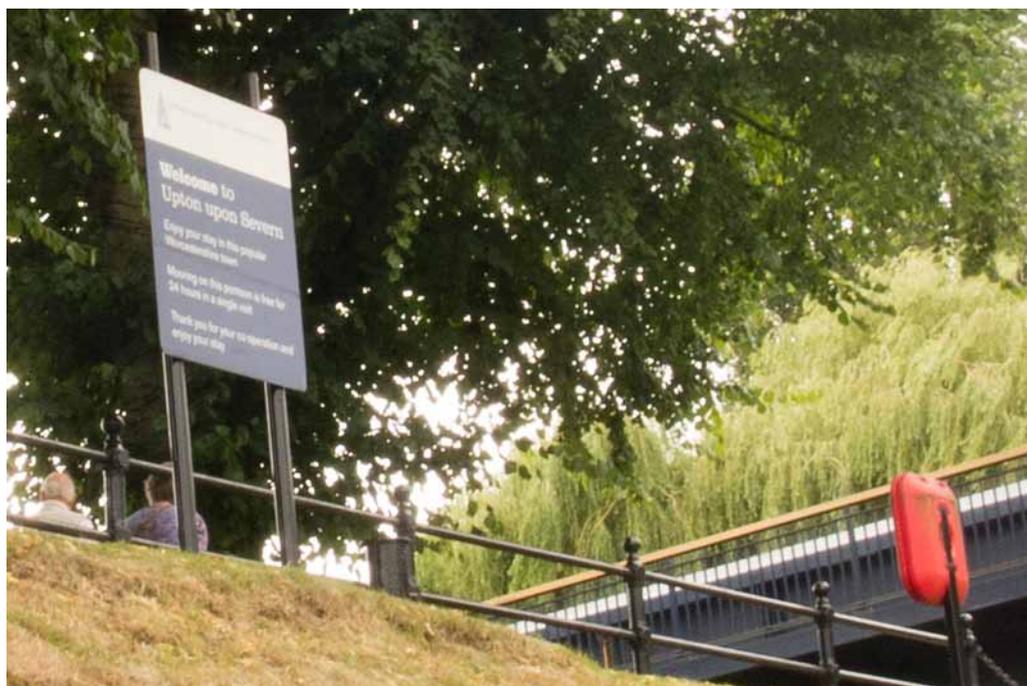
Leaving Worcester

We leave Worcester amidst Dragon Boats and lots of swans. And encounter the first of the somewhat bigger traffic on the Severn: a passenger ferry.



Passenger Ferry

Upton-on-Severn is our next stop. A little village, very relevant to my morris dance career.



Upton-on-Severn

Upton-on-Severn has two morris dances: the Upton-on-Severn Hanky Dance and the Upton-on-Severn Stick Dance. I danced and played both of them umpteen times. So before we leave I just have to get my melodeon out and play both tunes... Before that, I manage to take a picture of what I might encounter later on. But luckily for me, by the time we set off, the barges have their lunch break.



Barges on the Severn

After a long cruising day of two hours, we moor on a different river, the Avon.



Avon Lock

Bye, bye Severn. I'm not too sure whether I like you or not. You're a bit boring. You're just a vast amount of water, lined with trees. There is nothing to see...

I'M NAE SURE – 23 JULY 2017



Tewkesbury Visitor Moorings

Two nights we spend in the nice village called Tewkesbury. It has a cathedral-like church...



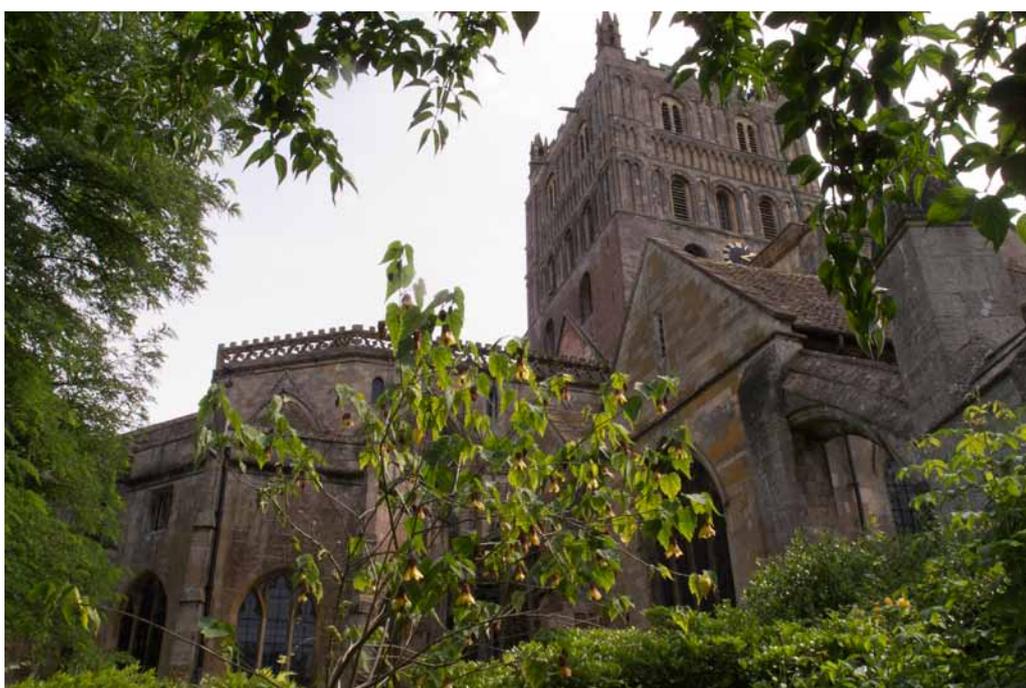
Tewkesbury Abbey Selfie

...two wonderful museums...



Old Baptist Chapel

...three bookshops, and a good Italian restaurant.



In the Secret Garden

Was the Severn a bit boring, with its high banks, the Avon is completely different. No high banks, but views over fields; cat-tails and yellow water lilies. And fields, and cat-tails, and water lilies, and fields, and...



Fields, cat-tails and lilies

And idiots.

Lawrance is on the tiller, I'm the un-lockie. First Lock on the Avon. According to our River Avon guide there is a swing bridge, just before the lock. But the swing bridge is open. So Lawrance tries to moor at the lock landing. That takes a while. Behind us are a yoghurt pot and another narrowboat.

The lock is not set for us, and there is oncoming traffic. One of the (five) elderly guys on the yoghurt pot comes out, windlass in his hand, checking his watch every ten seconds. When the oncoming boat is out of the lock, this yoghurt pot guy is determined to go in the lock with us, even if it means that he will be diagonal next and beside us, and therefore might be damaged by us, if the lock is rough. He opens one lock paddle, I have to open the other. But, although I'm getting better, I still can't hold 18 ton of steel with my left hand (to keep WRT away from the yoghurt pot) and open a lock paddle with my right hand. So it takes a while (I decide holding WRT is more important than doing the paddle. We've all the time in the world). Needless to say that standing right next to me is one of the other guys of the yoghurt pot. Yapping away, but not offering to hold the rope. He has no windlass, so doing the locks is out of the question anyway. While looking towards the yoghurt pot I see a heap of wine glasses, some empty, some still partly filled. Mind you, this is 11:30 hrs, on a Wednesday!

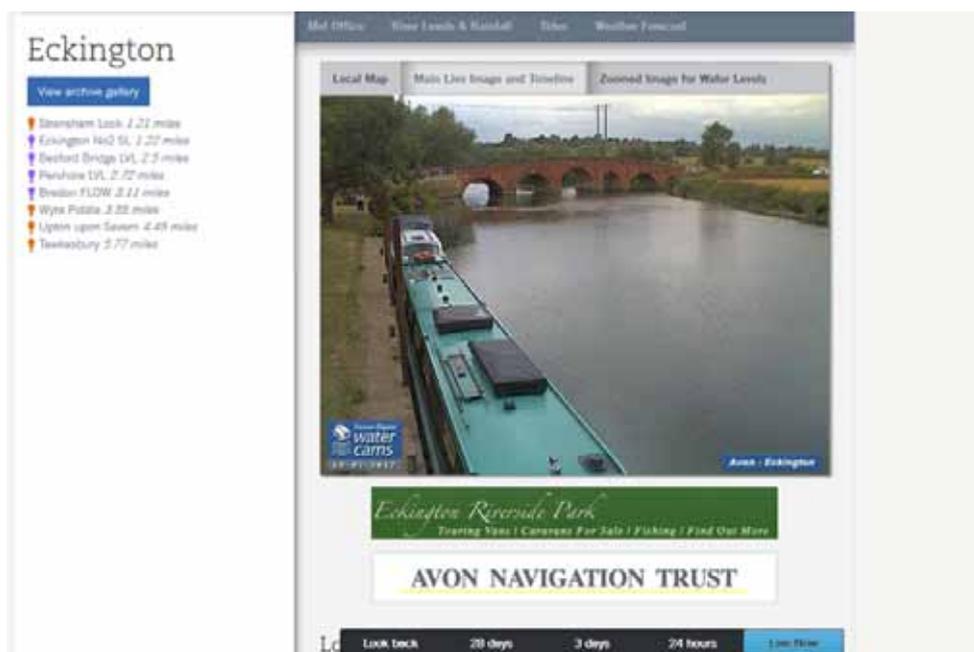
When we leave the lock, the yoghurt pot comes screaming past, on a bit of a meandering course. In a hurry, that's obvious. Until... we see him turn around, heading towards the lock again. The other narrowboat that was behind us, and what should have been in the lock with us, later confirms: the yoghurt pot went straight back into the lock when they came out.

Drunken idiots.



Eckington Bridge Mooring

We moor at Eckington Bridge. And have to behave ourselves. We're right in front of the camera's that keep an eye on the river levels.



Eckington Bridge

The next day we have to leave, we're on a 24 hr mooring. We kind of plan to stop at the moorings at Comberton Quay, and play golf on the golf course just next to it, but the mooring is one narrowboat long (plus a bit) and there already is one narrowboat and a yoghurt pot. So we proceed to Pershore.

Two difficult locks we have to negotiate. Well, difficult, it's the logistics I don't understand (yet). One has to secure the boat with a front line and a back line. Middle ropes are not allowed, for some strange reason. The only problem is: there is nothing to attach a front or back rope onto, with a boat the length of WRT. With a yoghurt pot, yes.

And one is allowed to leave the exit gates open. Well, one doesn't have much choice: for example, the landing stage at Nafford Lock to pick up your crew is long enough, but has a 90° bend. Unfortunately WRT doesn't bend in the middle...



PershoreVisitors Moorings

Luckily the visitor moorings in Pershore are narrowboat size (room for about twelve boats), and more or less empty. Asda is nearby, as is a well-stocked second hand shop (I buy four pretty port glasses) and a indoor retail market, where I buy... ENDIVE. So guess what supper is? Yes, stamppot andijvie met spekdobbelsteentjes. The weather is nice, people are out, canoeing, dragonboating, young guys are fishing right in front of us. They only use a fishing line and a float, and still catch one fish every minute.

At two o'clock at night I wake up and think: I'm back in Scarisbrick Marina. It's very windy, and WRT is dancing. I get out of bed to check if we're still attached to the bank, and not floating towards the weir. We're on flood save moorings, so I go back to sleep.

The next morning between nine and ten we're rising pretty fast. So we decide to use our chains around to mooring poles. I think chains might 'creep' up (and down) easier than rope.



On Chains

Lawrance thinks it's someone using the lock, but with all the weirs I don't think filling/emptying a lock has any noticeable effect on the water level of a river. Half an hour later we're back to starting level. Scary, especially with the heavy rain that's in the forecast, which keeps us from playing golf today. I still have mixed feelings about the rivers...

Mixed feelings, because while cruising it's absolutely boring. Water, and trees, and water, and trees, and... And you never know exactly where you are; the river just meanders, and meanders. But if you find a mooring that's long enough for WRT, then things change.



Meander

After we leave Pershore in beautiful sunshine we make our way to Craycombe Turn. Two (very heavy) locks to negotiate (but we are able to share, hence the other boat in the picture), and, just before we stop, fifteen minutes of pouring down rain. But it is worth every lock and rain: we're moored at the most idyllic place so far. OK, cattails, yellow waterlilies and (willow) trees again, but what a place. Absolutely gorgeous!

Who has a view like this, from his kitchen window?



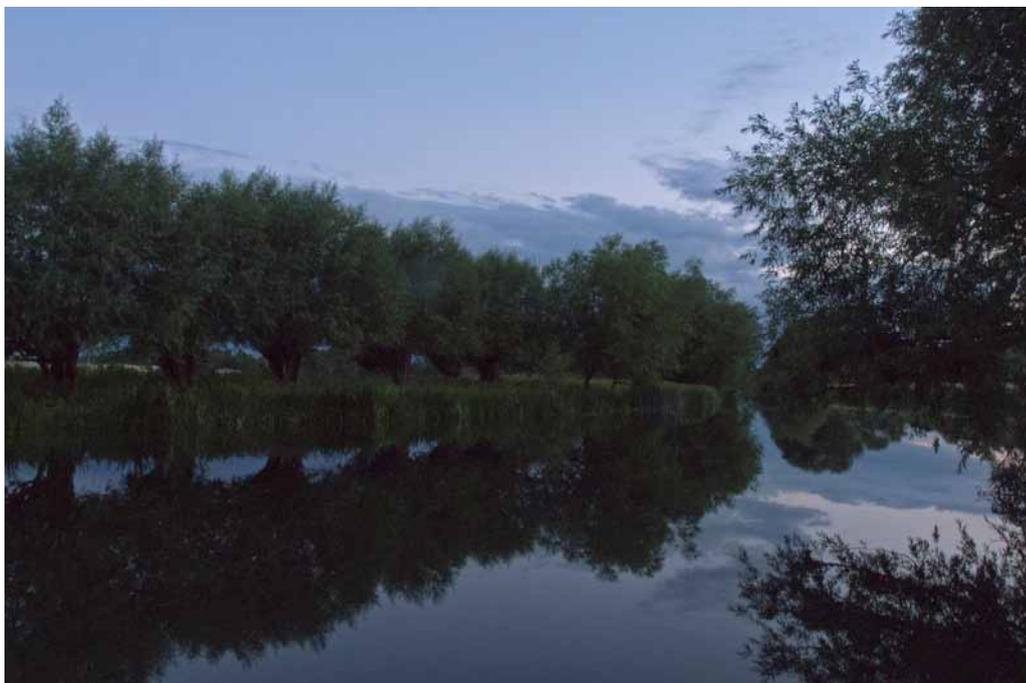
Galley WindowView

Just a pity that it drizzly rains, the rest of the day. And that the golf course next to it is unreachable. We stay here the next day as well, so I can make bread.



Bread and Liquorice Allsorts

Here's the liquorice allsorts workshop (outside) cum bakery (inside). Can you not smell the bread in the oven? And the liquorice Allsorts I make today must be the most tasty ones I ever made, with a view like this... Tomorrow we'll go to Evesham. A chance of scenery. So I leave you with a picture, taken just before I'm going to bed.



Night Sky

GIRLY TALK AGAIN – 26 JULY 2017

I manage to convince them that today I really want to leave early.



Hampton Ferry and Ferry Man

One: I have to negotiate a ferry cable (use the horn three times, and the ferry man lowers the cable), and two: I'll meet up with Swansong. And what a timing: we arrive at the moorings at exactly the same moment!



Evesham Visitors Moorings

We haven't seen each other for almost a year, so we have a lot to talk about. And the few times we are not yapping there is enough to see. About a hundred swans, geese and ducks, the rowing club is just across from us, and there is also a lot of boat movement.



Girl's Talk

Evesham is a nice place. There is enough to do for the boat crews, while me and Swansong indulge in girly boat's talk. Magda visits the Almonry, (a nice museum), a church (St. Lawrence), and, of course, Evesham Bell Tower.



Evesham Bell Tower

I get visitors from Australia and Germany to have a look at my inside. And the crews visit two local pubs, the Royal Oak and the Red Lion, for drinks and meals.

Evesham is also a bit weird. Where we are moored, one cannot be seen with (or carry) alcohol. Which, of course is not a problem for me and Swansong, but Magda and Lawrance certainly break the law by sitting outside and having a drink.

They show us a picture of a entrance to a bank for disabled people. We all wonder what happens if one presses the button. Four heavy weights, running out, and lifting the wheelchair over the steps?



Bank Entrance

And the two yellow lines alongside the roads in Evesham are not there to say: no parking. No, they are for drunks, to enable them to go (kind of) straight, going home from the pub.

Unfortunately, two days later Swansong is on her way again. I'll miss her...

IT DOESN'T RING A BELL – 30 JULY 2017

But it certainly was present!
It being me, of course.

Remember I mentioned Change Ringing (see Venice again?)? It turns out that the ringers at Evesham Bell Tower have their practise on a Wednesday. So there is only one thing I can do: send the contact person an email to see if I can visit their practice.



Evesham Bell Tower

And yes, I can!
So around 19:15 hrs on the Wednesday I climb the steps to the bell ringing platform of Evesham Bell Tower. Nine people pull the bells this evening.



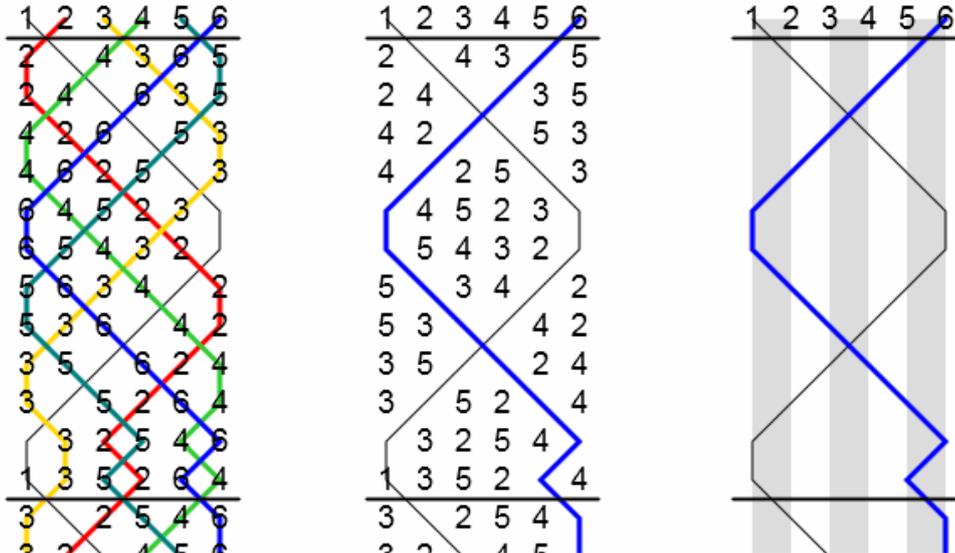
Evesham Bell Ringers

They even show me the bells themselves. Upside down, ready to start ringing.
 Well, in fact, they did ring one of the bells when I was up there, but at that moment I had my fingers in my ears!



Bells, upside down

They ring a couple of patterns. And now I can hear that the order of the bells changes. But following the pattern...? No, not yet.



Bell ringing pattern

But I find out that Ormskirk has bell ringers as well, so I definitely will pay them a visit, once we're back at home base.

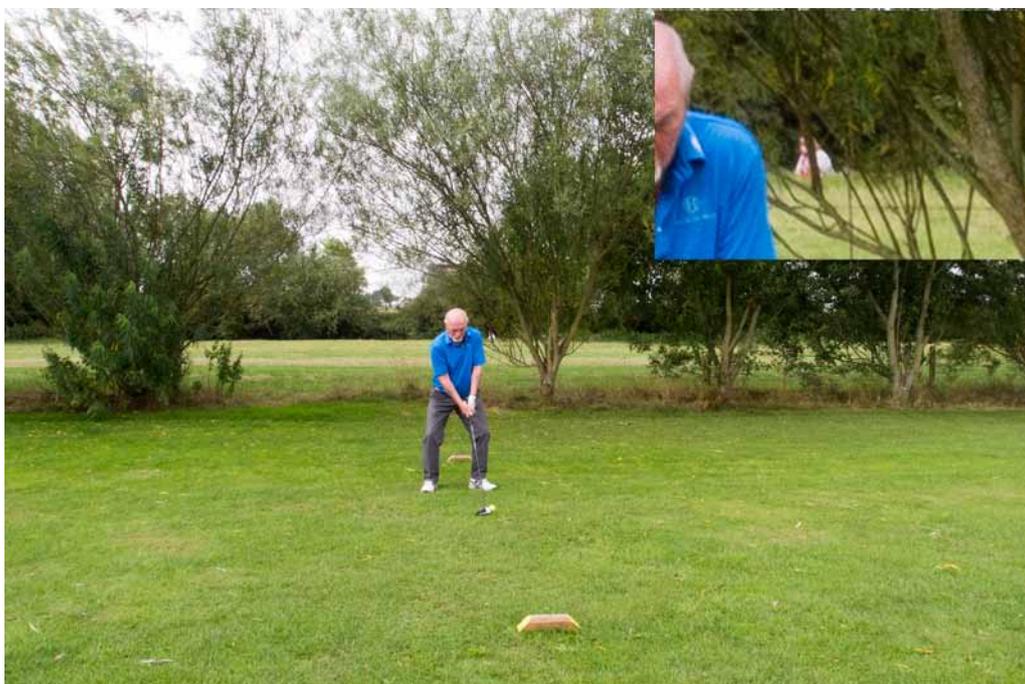
The next day we HAVE to leave the 48 hour moorings. We get as far as Offerham Lock, a two hour journey.



Offerham Lock

And what is in walking distance? Harvington Golf Centre. So the next day the owner of said golf centre meets us half way with a golf buggy, and we start playing golf at 09:00 hrs. Early, as to be back before the rain starts.

The golf course is right next to the river. To prove that, I copied part of the picture. See the lady, or half the lady, just behind Lawrance? She's on a boat on the river.



Golf Course next to the river Avon

We are unlucky with the weather. It's very, very windy from the beginning, and after hole 13 we jump in the buggy and go back to the club house. Rain. After half an hour (and a free coffee) we're off to hole 14, but by the time we finish it starts raining again.

I'm double unlucky: I loose (the first time during this cruising season). But that's entirely due to the gale force winds. Should have brought my winter cap, which has an ear cover...

We spend the weekend in Bidford-upon-Avon, a nice little town. We find a place to have the anchor, I make bread. We need new magnets on some of our cupboard doors, but unfortunately Bidford Hardware Store is closed for a short holiday break.



Bidford-upon-Avon

Now we're waiting for the rain and thunder...

.

SHAKESPEARE'S GRAVE – 01 AUGUST 2017

Guess where we are? Excellent! Yes, we are in Stratford-upon-Avon. Moored right opposite the Royal Shakespeare Theatre.

Coming into Stratford on the river is a complete different experience, compared to coming in on the Stratford Canal. Lush parks, posh houses, lots of swans. And then the view of the theatre. On the canal it is awkward moored narrowboats, an awful low bridge, and then a basin full of moored narrowboats, Ice Cream Barges, trip boats, floating restaurants, and half the Japanese population.



Luddington Lock

We came all the way from Luddington Lock. That's almost three miles! Luckily it was nice weather. And because it's holiday season, WRT is on lots of pictures again, with all the gongoozlers at the locks.



Waiting at Stratford Trinity Lock

We want to stay here a couple of days, then go into the basin. So, after we've done the dishes, we go for an evening stroll. We can go straight ahead, over Tramway Bridge and have a look at the basin, but it is Tuesday. And on Tuesday the Holy Trinity Church Bell Ringers have their practise. So I suggest to walk to the footbridge to the south, go past the church and head for the basin that way. In case they do have their practise, so I can hear the bells. The basin itself is too far away from the church. It's a bit further to walk, but now we are able to see a heap of trees, just back from the hair dressers. It looks absolutely weird!



Trees with hair cut

At 7:30 pm the bells indeed start ringing. We're just approaching the church.



Holy Trinity Church

If you listen carefully, you can hear the bells in the picture...

I spot an open door. Being Dutch, and adventurous, I enter the church. There are two people, bell ringers, and before Lawrence realizes it, we're climbing the steps to the ringing platform.

And watch the Stratford-upon-Avon practise. Absolute friendly people, so needless to say that we never get to the basin, but end up in a pub with them.

And what about Shakespeare's Grave? Well, that is in the afore mentioned church. And instead of paying £3 pp, we see the grave in the dark, lightened up by a mobile phone.

Impressive? Nae, not really.

CAN'T WRITE A SCRIPT FOR THIS – 03 AUGUST 2017

Remember I mentioned that we are moored just opposite the Theatre? Well, that's not exactly true. We're about three boat lengths further away, right in front of Avon Bowling Club.



In front of the bowling club

Earlier this week a lot of seriously looking men, all dressed in something white-ish, and pulling an airline stewardess-like suitcase on wheels, arrived at the bowling club. A little later we see them, now and again, walking on the bowling green.

Lawrance, nosy as always, walks up to the gate to watch them play. Then one of the guys, Martin, approaches him and says: "Tomorrow at 2 pm we have Community Bowling. You bring flat soft-soled shoes, we provide balls, instructions, and tea and biscuits."

Of course we can't ignore an invitation like this, so early-ish the next day Lawrance is off to the laundrette, while I do next month's planning, write part of the blog, and make a shopping list. Then, with half the (now clean) laundry still on the bed, we present ourselves to a guy named Peter.

Lawrance has played bowls before. I haven't. I played Jeu de Boules and, of course, the similar ancient Dutch game of Klootschieten, which is only known, nowadays, in the north-west of Germany and in the region of Holland where I was born and grew up. So the first question is: left-handed or right-handed? Right-handed, as I soon find out.



Playing Bowls

We get the basics about the green, the ball, the jack (small ball), the mat and how to throw, sorry, bowl the ball. And after some practising competition starts. Me and Lawrance are on rink 1, playing with Peter, who, as we find out, is the Club Captain.

It's certainly not his day. I beat him, and Lawrance, in the first end (beginner's luck?), and I'm a very good second (with two or three balls) in the next ends. Then it's time for tea and biscuits. After that Lawrance beats Peter (and me) as well.



A very good second

Can I get any more English? Yesterday I'm om a bell ringing platform at the church (visible from the bowling green), and now I'm playing bowls!

Anyway, we have a great afternoon. And go back to WRT with an invitation for later tonight. It's the annual visit of the mayor (and the council staff) for a friendly game. While we're finishing off our meal everybody starts to arrive (including the catering).



Arrival

A dark blue Jaguar with the coat of arms of Stratford brings the mayor. Or mayoress, as it turns out to be, complete with chain. And, to our big surprise, even the leader of the the bell ringers, Charles, turn up. We just can't believe our eyes!

When Lawrance is almost finished doing the dishes, someone knocks on the boat. Martin. That's how we end up at the Bowling Club again. No, we don't play, but talk to a lot of people, bowlers, the mayor Victoria, and Charles the bell ringer, who turns out to be the mayor's secretary.



Do you see that green narrowboat?

Most used sentence? "If you turn around, do you see that green narrowboat?"

And I start doing tours of our boat, for those who like to see how the other half lives. Even the mayor gets a tour of the boat.



Celebrity tour of WRT

There are drinks, sandwiches, a raffle (we win a box of Cadbury Chocolates) and we become honorary members of the bowling club.

At around 10 pm everybody has gone home, and we're back on WRT. Looking at each other, thinking: did all this really happen?

IT ALL HAPPENS IN STRATFORD – 04 AUGUST 2017

It's Friday morning, when the next chain of events starts to unfold. A fire brigade truck enters the recreation grounds and parks close to the river.



Fire brigade

Out come four guys. They put on life jackets, and take one hose out of the truck. The hose gets straightened up, and both ends are blocked off. One of the guys gets a gas cylinder and fills the hose with a gas. Then the now inflated hose is put in the water, one side first, so blocking the passage for any boat.

Then I hear someone say: “A fire at Birmingham Road.”

The hose comes out of the water, gets deflated, life jackets put away, and with blue lights and siren the truck is soon gone.



Fire brigade going

Just after that nb Brindley moors in front of us, to top up with water. We have been at the same spots for the last week or so. You can see just their bow on this picture from Luddington Lock.



Luddington Lock

When we mention us going bowling yesterday, the guy says: “Oh, if I had known that. It’s something I always wanted to try.”

Just at that moment Peter opens the gate of the Bowling Club. So I ask him if there would be a chance for Community Bowling today.

Well, no, not really, but in the end there will be a private lesson at 1 pm.

In theory we need to go today. We have a full cassette, and absolutely nothing to eat. But we work around that. An easy meal, with ingredients from the small Sainsburys in town, and we think we’ll manage with the cassette.



Bowling again

So at 1 pm there are four boaters, on the bowling green. The weather is nice, the scenery is beautiful (the church, all the weeping willows) how good can life be? Even Tina, who certainly wasn't going to play, is playing (she didn't get a choice) and enjoying it!



She only came to watch him play

And what did I say? Yes, it all happens in Stratford-upon-Avon, in the UK. Although at a certain moment, earlier this day, I had to shake the cobwebs out of brains and eyes:



Venice-upon-Avon

Oh, and I also get a phone call from Pat. Her and Stephen are moored at Glascote Locks. Pat sees a boat passing them and thinks: *Oh, I like that boat. Wonder what the name is...* Well, as you probably guessed already, that name is Wea-Ry-Tired. I can basically see the look on her face when her brain says: *ho, wait a minute. What's going on here?*

End result? A call from Pat, and a text from Christine.

Wea-Ry-Tired is a horrible name anyway (sorry WRT, I don't mean it that way). Almost 99.999% of the people who pass WRT say the name out loud. So while sitting inside you hear *Weary Tired*, a minute later *We're retired*, another minute later *We Re Tired*, another minute later... etc, etc.

It almost comes to the point that, if anybody will mention the name out loud again, I will commit murder. YES, WE KNOW THE NAME OF OUR BOAT!

Anyway. Another great day. But everything comes to an end, and tomorrow WE WILL MOVE ON!

RIVERS – 06 AUGUST 2017

A first verdict

OK, that's us on the canals again. The anchor will stay where it is, life jackets are put away, binoculars are no longer needed. So what do I think of rivers, now I've been on three of them?

Well, with the weather we had so far, they are not half as frightening as I thought they would be. Yes, there always is that nagging thought in the back of your head: what if we have an engine problem? (Engine failure means no steering, so do we have to throw the anchor, or should we let WRT find her own way towards the bank, and we tie up on a tree?)

But other than that, being on a river is a pleasant way of cruising. Everything is very well sign posted, although binoculars come in handy to be able to read signs as early as possible. Locks are manned, or have easy to wind paddles. Except for one lock, they are usually smooth filling up. Only the lock doors (on the Avon) are a bit heavy.



Binoculars come in handy

The weirs on the maps, the 'waterfalls' one doesn't want to negotiate, are well fenced off, and don't suck you towards them (as I thought they would). And the by-wash at a lot of locks is more severe than water coming of a weir.



A weir

Things I didn't like? It's yoghurt pot country, so most of the visitors moorings are yoghurt pot size. Like one cannot park an truck and trailer in a car park, we can't moor at a jetty the length of our well deck, having the rest of WRT sticking out into the river.



Moorings space for two narrowboats

By the way, the yoghurt pots look a lot more expensive (and well kept) than their sisters on the canals...

And all the moorings are far and few. They are at idyllic spots, with lots of weeping willow trees, but our solars then are not of a great help to keep the batteries charged up.



Space for one narrowboat and a yoghurt pot

A river is (most of the time) pretty wide, so it is easy cruising. It's basically green around and under the boat, because the water is very clean and clear, so you can see all the greenery in the river as well.



Greens around and below water

But other than that, there is not a lot to see. The Severn is absolutely boring. The Lower Avon is a bit better, but still a matter of water, trees, fields, lilies, water, trees, fields, lilies, ... The Upper Avon has a bit more to look at. Posh houses, for example. Yes, I definitely like the Upper Avon!



Arriving at Stratford-upon-Avon

And because one only sees water, trees, fields and lilies, it's very hard to know where one is. Water is water, trees are trees, and not every tiny bend in the river is on the map. So sometimes the channel to the lock comes at a surprise. Although, once you see the sign for the lock, you also realize that for the last few minutes you've been looking at the water flowing off the weir, but that didn't ring bells...

Oh, and another thing on the rivers. I can't explain why, but whenever I looked to starboard we seemed to nearly stand still. If I looked to port side we were going pretty fast. And this happens both going upstream and downstream. It might be the bigger distance to the banks on both sides of the river. I haven't noticed it (yet) on the Stratford Canal, but I haven't been on the tiller so far. But canals certainly have a claustrophobic feel...

End conclusion

Was it a good idea to get anchor and life jackets?

It surely was!!

FIVE TIMES REDUCED TICK-OVER – 09 AUGUST 2017

I know, we all had a first day of steering a narrowboat. Some do fine from day one, some first have to run into another hire boat (after 500 yards cruising) and then do fine for the rest of their life, for some it takes a couple of years to go straight. But if this would have been me, three years ago, Saltersford Tunnel and Barnton Tunnel would no longer exist!

Anyway, last time we were here on the Stratford Canal I was able to update my reverse mooring skills, cruising behind the hotel boat (motor and butty).

This year I finely find out the difference between tick-over, tick-over-plus, reduced tick-over, and the ten different tick-overs WRT has on offer.

In front of us is a Portuguese family, that got their boat from Anglo-Welsh at Wootton Wawen. We've seen them getting all their stuff on the boat while we were moored up there for the night.

He is ab-so-lu-te-ly MASSIVE. When he gets off the boat, the boat rises about 4 inches out of the water. I presume the boat has a walk-through bathroom, because he would never fit through the corridor on WRT. On WRT he would have had to go on the outside, on the towpath. NO...! Not on the gunwales, WRT would capsize straight away!

His wife is not too small either. Twice my size? I think the draft of their boat will increase at least with half a foot, when both of them are on board.

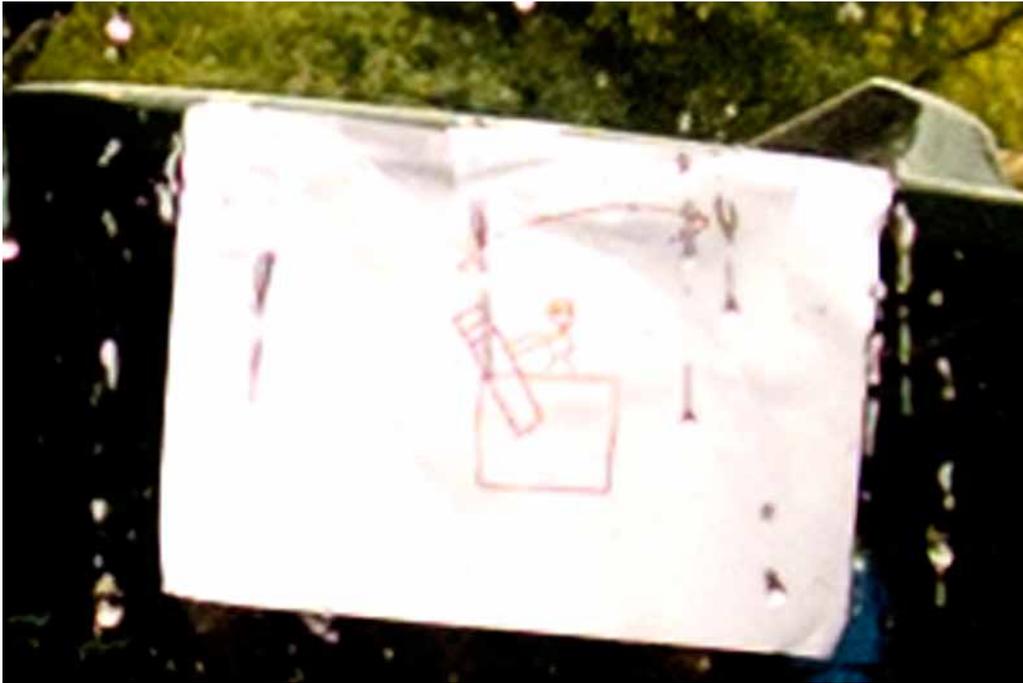
Also on the boat is their little son, and grandma. Haven't seen much of grandma, except her face. She looks kind of normal, but doesn't venture outside the cabin.

I'm not sure about this Portuguese family, though. On the back of the boat are two diagrams. I tried to make a picture of the diagrams, but could only do that from inside WRT, for obvious reasons.



Portuguese On a Hire Boat

The diagrams are about how to steer a boat with a tiller. Tiller left – boat goes to the right. As one can see on the (enlarged) diagram. The diagram on the left is similar, but about: tiller right – boat goes to the left.



Steering Instructions

Except from this bumping into a boat (which had nothing to do with the steering, I just panicked and let the boat find her own way) I can only think of one situation where I got my left and right wrong, and that happened the first week we had WRT. I never had to think about it again.

Anyway. A diagram on both sides of the boat... and they still go all over the place. Well, all over the canal, I mean. And the Stratford Canal at the moment is a bit shallow, to say the least. I try to stay in the middle, I try NOT to moor up waiting to get into a lock, I try not to cut corners. I'm not heavy, WRT is not deep drafted... and I still scrape her bottom once in a while.

So going all over the canal is the last thing you want to do. Because you get grounded all over the canal. Especially if two of the crew are standing on the cruiser stern deck (trying to interpret the diagrams?) They zigzag, bow disappearing into the trees, stern firmly aground.

I'm right behind them. I'm capable (and want) to go in a straight line, so I have to go slow. Dead slow. Twice reduced tick-over. Five times reduced tick-over. Yes, WRT still moves, and I still can steer. (*Did you ever find out that WRT could do this, Andy and Christine?*)

In the mean time Lawrance does most of the lock work for them, tries to give instructions, and, of course, then sets that same lock for us and works it for us.

When I get out of the lock, Lawrance closes the lock door, I go onto reduced (or twice reduced, or nine times reduced) tick-over and Lawrance walks (slowly) to the next lock. Where he arrives, just at the same time as the Portuguese.

Needless to say that it takes us hours to go from Wootton Wawen to Lowsonford.

I have just enough time to make two loafs of bread, before we're off to the Fleur de Lys for supper.

Oh, and the Portuguese family is moored here as well. I wonder, are we going to stay here for an extra night?

RAINDROPS KEEP FALLING ON MY HEAD – 10 AUGUST 2017

It's a beautiful day. It's raining when I get up. It's still raining when Lawrance gets up. So, with Lawrance on the tiller and me doing the locks, he's in his fishermen's gear, and I'll try out his waterproof golf gear.

I know, how come he has all the right gear and I haven't? Well, I don't have the money for it...

Joking! I do have the money for it, but both fishermen's waterproofs and golf waterproof are absolute expensive, so I want to buy something I REALLY REALLY like. All the fishermen's gear I've seen so far is dark blue or dark green or camouflage colours. I want something more feminine. If golf gear works, I'll have a look for some nice golf gear.

Anyway, when we set off it's still raining. The Portuguese family has gone earlier; no doubt we will catch up with them.

It's not cold, because there is no wind. So it's a perfect day for a walk along the towpath. And that's what I do. Meanwhile open the odd lock...

There is an oncoming boat in the second lock, with another boat waiting. The crew of the waiting boat is at the lock, actually doing the lock. And who's on the boat in the lock? Exactly, our Portuguese!

They jumped right in front of this second boat, just to... have someone else do the lock. How they managed to turn around, no-one knows, because there is no winding hole. But then again, they've been diagonally on the canal so many times, it would have been a matter of: OK, use the bargepole on the other side of the boat and head in the opposite direction.

And that's what they do. They're going back to the hire base to take the boat back. It's not the holiday they thought it would be.

To us it's an easy and nice day. Last year I couldn't do one of these locks, they were way too heavy. Now I do all of them; only at one lock Lawrance has to help me close the lock. So either they've done some maintenance on the locks, or I've got a lot stronger.

I walk two miles, do nine locks, eat lots of blackberries, speak to a heap of people and have a great day.

We moor up at Kingswood Junction. Lawrance has a catnap (he had a hard day on the tiller) while I, still full of energy, have a walk towards The Navigation, through the village and around the basin. It finally stops raining.

A good meal in The Navigation ends a perfect day for me.

P.S. No pictures were taken, of course. Not in this weather, and not when I'm doing all the work. So instead of a new a picture, a picture of last year, taken at exact the same spot we left today...



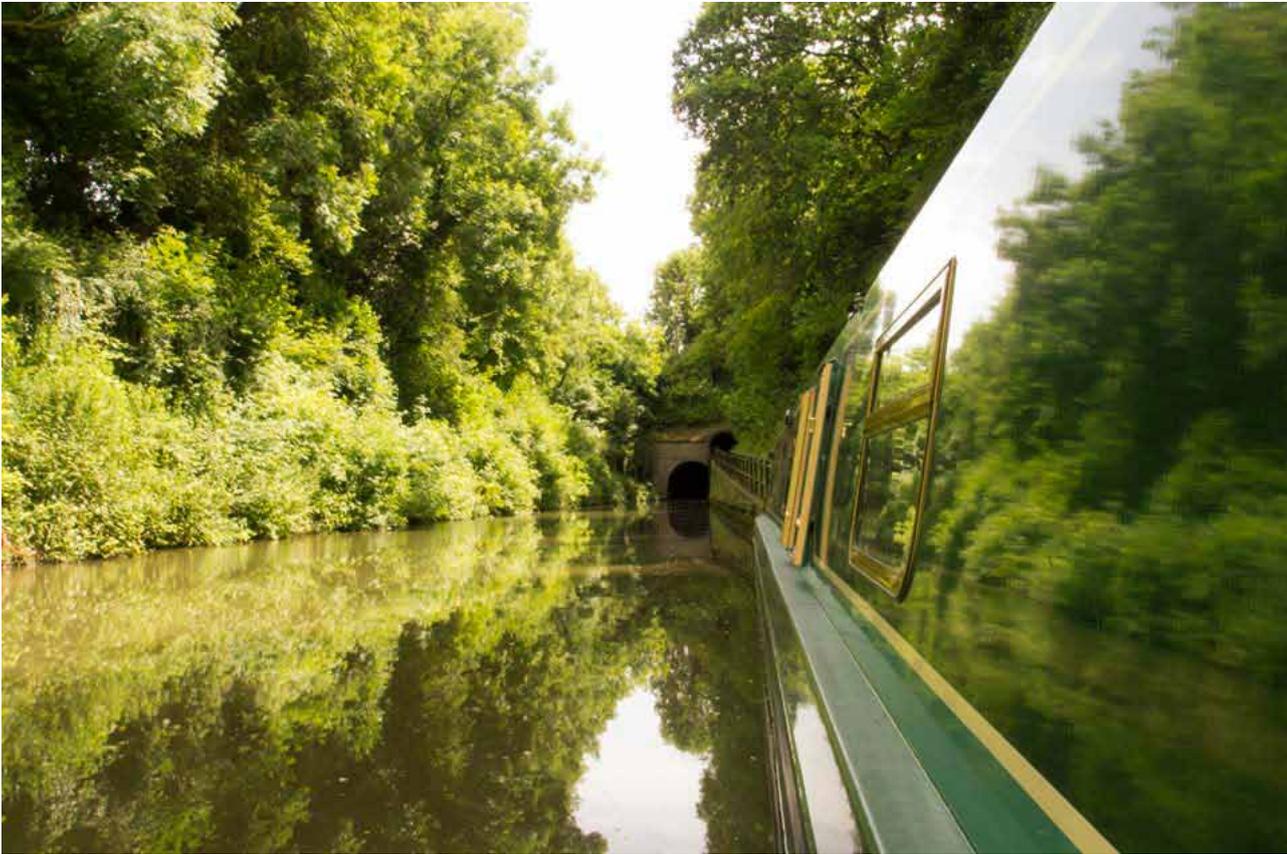
Alternative cratch cover

Oh, and the title of the blog is also not correct. I'm wearing my boater's hat, so there are no raindrops falling on my head!

COMPLETE THE OPPOSITE – 11 AUGUST 2017

Last year we arrived at Warwick on the 29th of June. Soaking wet, absolute exhausted and ready to commit murder. This year it's warm (getting up to hot), we're a just bit weary and sorry to say goodbye to our lock partner.

Everything is different anyway. What we did in three days last year, we did in one day this year. Last year we had to stop at Shrewley for me to take one of my best pictures ever.



Glossy boat

Then we had to stop before the locks to see what weird system the Hatton Flight had. This year the plans are to stop at the same spot as last year, which would be slightly good for the solar. But when we get there (*before eleven o'clock, someone must have fallen out of bed*), Lawrance decides to take the two-way radio and to walk to the locks. He radios me that we can moor further on, towards the locks.

I only remember gloomy, dark permanent moorings, but one can but obey. As I get to the spot it is indeed a permanent mooring, it's dark and gloomy and we don't really fit; we're too long. So I tell Lawrance we'll wait for an hour, to see if another boat shows up, to share the locks with.

Just at that very moment, a boat comes around the corner. Bit smaller than WRT. When I see the boat name I nearly decide to stay where we are: Mad Hatter. Instead of a crazy woman I now share the lock with a crazy guy?

No, not all, as I find out. Single boater, knows what he's doing, gives me time to get into the lock without taking too much paint off (I can't, most of the paint is off already...!). Together the three of us do the Hatton flight in five hours. OK, Lawrance and Les open and close paddles and gates, I only steer WRT and close the gate closest to me.



Completely different Hatton Flight

I know, we should have breasted up, like we did with Ian on the Wigan Flight. But would you leave your boat in the hands of a unknown, and foreign woman? I wouldn't!

In the mean time the weather has definitely improved. During the flight we take as much clothes of as possible, and after we moor up, it's time for seats out, port and nibbles. Mind you, I had breakfast at 6 o'clock and had nothing after that but two cigarettes (to keep the hunger pang at bay).

So now we're in Salterford Canal Centre. Moored up right at the end, so I had to do the Lydiate trick: turn in the winding hole, and reverse, and reverse, and reverse...



The end, there is no more

It will be quiet on the blog now, for a couple of days. Not because we don't have wifi, or a computer that's not charged. No, it's because there will be nothing to write about. Only: went to the hairdresser, spent a day at the beautician (I know, with no visible result), played golf, went shopping. Not really interesting, is it?

ALL THESE BL***Y FOREIGNERS – 18 AUGUST 2017

And that's what we do. I manage to get an appointment with the beautician, and with my favorite hair dresser.

We play golf at The Warwickshire Golf and Country Club. And won't play that course again. Why? Well, imagine having a huge basket with all the possible hazards one can encounter on a golf course, at least fifty of each. Shake the basket well, and then empty the basket over the golf course-to-be. Voila, an American style course, that looks absolutely pretty, but is absolutely no fun to play. The only places without hazards are the greens. No, never again.



Warwickshire Golf & Country Club

After the necessary shopping we leave Saltersford Canal Centre, on our way to Braunston. The weather is fine, we moor up with view of the local church (yes, they have their practise night tonight) and I sell two normal teacup pincushions plus a teacup with saucer!

The next day it's me on the tiller. The weather is amazing. No water from above, and not a lot of water underneath WRT.



Low tide

We get to Long Itchington, the only place we stopped at last year that I couldn't remember. Even now I hardly have a view in my mind of the place!

Then a long and early day takes us to Braunston. To meet up with Dubbel Dutch, and Christine, a friend of Lawrance, with her pal Christel. Both Dubbel Dutch and the two C's are at The Boat House (not that they know each other at this stage), and Martin manages to persuade the boat behind Dubbel Dutch to wait until we have turned around and occupy that space.



Two for One

We do the stern gland, turn the battery switch onto 2 and switch the inverter off. Then it's pub time. Here we are: Annemarie, Martin, Izaak, Kristine and me (Dutch), Christel (German), and only two natives. Having a very good afternoon and evening.

Oh, I forgot to mention, the boat across from us also belongs to a Dutch couple... Has the continent taken over the most famous canal place?

SHALLOW (PART 1) – 01 SEPTEMBER 2017

As per usual the weather knows exactly when I'm on the tiller. After a bit of sun I get rain, then rain and hurricane force winds, and then rain, hurricane force winds and thunder. Time to moor up and sit it out... And repair the leaking prism in the bedroom again...

Ansty is our next stop. Because: we have to play golf.

But before we moor up I nearly jump off the boat. Why? Well, just before you get to Ansty, the railway line runs next to the canal. I'm on the tiller, and, as one does, once in a while I look behind me. You never know if anybody going doing breakneck speed and wants to overtake. In a split second I see a freight train. It looks weird. In that split second I see a locomotive, then a fairly big gap and then the containers on the rest of the train. My mind is saying: is that locomotive actually attached to the rest? It is of course, but I didn't have time to see the two empty flat wagons. So I turn my head again, clearly looking at the train now. The train driver must have seen that as well. And as a greeting TOOTS HIS HORN THREE TIMES! Needless to say that I didn't expect that. I can but jump. (In the air, luckily.)

Days are strange anyway. The first night at Ansty I hear a boat (with a light outboard engine) passing us, at 4:30 in the night. It's still dark.

And after we played golf I got stung by a wasp, for the first time in my life. OK, I got stung once by a killer wasp, when I lived in the US, but that is a totally different matter.

Then we venture out on a new canal, the Ashby Canal. No locks, no water, but a heap of boats. But except for the lack of water it feels like being on a river again.



Bramcote

The plans are to go all the way to the end, moor up, take the steam train to Bosworth Battlefield, and visit Snarestone. But we're unlucky. Next weekend is Shackerstone Festival, and most of the moorings are reserved for visiting boats. So we wind at Shackerstone and spend an afternoon and night at Sutton Cheyney Wharf (August Bank Holiday, so our boat name is mentioned umpteen times).



Sutton Cheyney Wharf

The boat in front of us kind of looks familiar, but the owners don't react to some Dutch words.



Fake Dutch

Next day we proceed to Hickley to meet up with Pat and Stephen.



Gone back in time

They arrive after two days. In the mean time we already had two meals in The Lime Kiln, the pub at the bridge. It doesn't happen that often that I get to a restaurant and have a choice of (at least) seven meals! So we have another meal there the third day.

Unfortunately, in order not to overstay, we have to leave the next day. We'll be back sometime next year, do the entire Ashby Canal...

ANOTHER CANAL TICKED OFF – 26 SEPTEMBER 2017

Last year we went up north on the Staffs&Worcs and stopped at Stafford Boat Club. And turned around to go down south. This year we turn left at Great Haywood Junction and moor up at Stafford Boat Club again. At least now we've done the complete Staffordshire & Worcestershire Canal.

But before we get there it's golf time again. Atherstone Golf Club. Enjoyable as last year.

When we get back at WRT we find a piece of paper in the well deck: "Just passed you, plan to stop at the Kings Head." Jim and Maralyn. So at 4 pm the engine is started and we move 1 ½ mile. Lawrance is on the tiller, so who is doing the locks? After doing a 18-hole golf course?

Our next stop is Hopwas (pronounced Hoppas), like last year. And I notice that things have changed. This time we know exactly how long we can moor here. The confusing signs have gone.



Two Days



Two days? Or 48 hours?

We stop at Fradley Junction as well. A famous boater's stop, so we had to stop here at least once. But the meal we have in The Swan is so good, we might stop there again. If not for a meal, then at least for a real ale. They have a real ale called Old Original, which is the best real ale I've had so far.

Before we leave Fradley Junction Lawrance repairs our leaking end cap. Unfortunately he also leaves the bleed valve open, so when we stop at Worseley the entire engine bay is again covered in coolant. The next day, after I finish off the remaining part of the Staffs& Worcs, moor up at Stafford Boat Club, and check the engine, the leakage seems to be fixed.



Will it stay dry?

The next day it only leaks outside...



Leakage from above

The rest of the journey to Overwater Marina is uneventful. We have to light the fire, because it gets a bit too cold at night. Fuel up at Wheaton Aston. The by-wash at the last Lock at Tyrley pushes WRT onto the rocks with force (nothing I could do). As a punishment I'm the unlucky one to do the 18 locks to get to Audlem.

But therefor I'm also the one who's on the tiller going into Overwater Marina. Because of the strong wind I decide to reverse from the fuel pump to our allocated jetty. We're back where it all began.



Where it all started

But what a difference between me sitting inside, eyes closed, hands over my ears and praying to every god I know of, or just nonchalant reversing WRT in a gale force wind.

And yes, I had to tell WRT a couple of times that WE ARE NOT LEAVING HER THERE TO GET SOLD!

SHALLOW (PART 2) – 07 OCTOBER 2017

But leaving WRT at Overwater Marina is exactly what we do. I don't tell her that after a few hours driving we put our stuff in another narrowboat. She would just have been upset for a week.



Red Billed Finch

But there is absolutely no reason for her to be afraid. Our home for a week is of a completely different class. It's a hire boat, 49 ft. With a reverse lay-out, and a shower-over-bath. Every morning (and night) the engine bilge is full of water, and the water tank needs topping up every day. (Would there be some sort of relation here?)

The boat has a cruiser stern. A lowered cruiser stern, to be precise. In fact, one stands about ten inches lower than on WRT. Or on Rorah (the complete crew of Rorah is on this Red Billed Finch as well). Because of the low bridges the roof is more curved than on WRT and Rorah.



What do you mean? Low?

End result? Negotiating a bridge is like steering a narrowboat for the very first time.

Did I say steering? I'll rephrase that. It's 50 percent steering, 20 percent praying, and 30 percent cursing. One moment she's doing fine (50%), the next moment she just goes straight (20%). And keeps going straight (30%). And then suddenly stops. The one on the tiller is confused, asking him or herself: 'How the f**k did this happen?'

Meanwhile the rest of the crew grabs the nearest barge pole, and manoeuvres the Finch back in the right direction.

After an hour on the tiller it feels like one has done an eight hour shift, without a break.

Cruising means one crew member on the well deck, inventing new hand signals by the dozen, to point out to the one on the tiller what is heading towards him at the next bend. A second crew member on the stern deck, keeping an eye on the starboard side of the boat, at bridges. Both these crew members have a barge pole right in front of them.

I know, stop emitting question marks. Why are we not on WRT or Rorah? Well, because we're on a canal that runs from A to B. And back from B to A. It's 33 miles from A to B. And 33 miles back, of course.



Does it end here?

It doesn't have a connection with the rest of the system. But it has all the features 'normal' canals have: a tunnel, locks, lift bridges. Well, most of the features. It doesn't have depth...

We're on the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal in South Wales. To tick off another canal on the map. And no, we will not do the entire canal. Progress is slow. It's shallow, crooked, full of leaves, full of hire boaters (yes, I know).



Crooked

Most hire boaters don't realize that leaves around the prop is slowing them down very much. And none knows the remedy (engine in reverse for a short moment).

The canal is fed by the river Usk, and going upstream is just that. At one time Mick passes moored boats on full throttle, and we're nearly standing still. And just during this week CART is closing a pound for a day for inspection and repairs. But for our statistics we consider the canal done completely.



It's a bit narrow

I know, although it doesn't look like that, the canal actually is wider than the narrow canals elsewhere. So we encounter 'widebeams', well, half widebeams. Hireboats with bow thrusters, and sometimes even a jacuzzi on the well deck. All the boats of this hire boat company emit a lot of blue smoke. Another hire boat company only has electric boats, so some of the most beautiful mooring spots are blocked for us because of the charging point, placed just there.

The scenery though is stunning. The little villages cozy, with village shops that are: the village shop cum liquor store cum post office cum cafe cum bike rental place cum...

We spend a full day in Brecon, where me and Ann visit the cathedral, the indoor market, all the second hand shops.



Theatre Basin

There are enough pubs alongside the canal to enable us not to do any cooking. And except for steering, the biggest task every day is turning the dinette into a double bed.

Yes, certainly a very interesting week.

MIDDLERIDGE – 20 OCTOBER 2017

We're on the last stage of our summer cruise. Should be easy, one would think. It's the eighth time we do this stretch. And yes, we're doing fine.

Until... I get to my favorite spot: Middlewich Junction. Of course it is very, very windy. But I'm sure I manage. Out of the lock, turning left as soon as I'm away of the bridge, but... WRT still decides to make a wide swing. Not a problem. A bit more throttle and... I see another narrowboat heading towards me. If I give it full throttle I will certainly hit him, because he can't see me at the moment. So I decide to slow down a little.

WRONG

The wind blows me straight onto the new mooring, someone built there. But, after the oncoming boat is out of the way and moored up across from me, WRT is going nowhere.



Middleridge

I'm stuck. Barge pole out: nothing.
Rock the boat: nothing.
Meanwhile it starts to rain.

HEAVILY!

A deluge! And Lawrance is on the other side, without any rain gear, and with no way to get to me.

I try whatever I can think of. With no result.

The 'oncoming narrowboat' is willing to let off his back rope and ferry Lawrance across the canal onto WRT.



Middlewich Ferry

Finally, after an hour of absolute pouring rain WRT moves. Lessons learned on the Mon&Brec about using the barge pole do come in handy.

Needles to say that at the same moment the rain stops...

Two days later I face another day of hurricane force winds. The early start I wanted gets delayed because our header tank cap is missing, and nowhere to be found. It's still dark, long after dawn, and the sun turns red, so Lawrance keeps telling me it's not the sun, it's Mars.

Just before Ophelia hits Sale, we're moored up safely.

After getting grounded before Poolstock Lock 1 there is only one bad day left. We're trying to make the marina, because there is another storm coming. We leave Wigan early-ish, the weather is still fine. By the time we get to Dean lock, it starts to get dark, so I put on my water proofs, leave my glasses off and wear my boater's hat.

After five locks and three swing bridges I feel water running into my bra. I already know that my jumper, polo shirt and arms are soaked. My boater's hat turns out not to be water proof, so my hair is soaked, and I can hardly see, with all the water in my eyes.

We get as far as the Farmers Arms. Have a meal there, dry out, and go to sleep.

Finally, on the 20th of October we're back home.

AND THEN THERE WAS SILENCE... – 02 NOVEMBER 2017

All the way up till today.

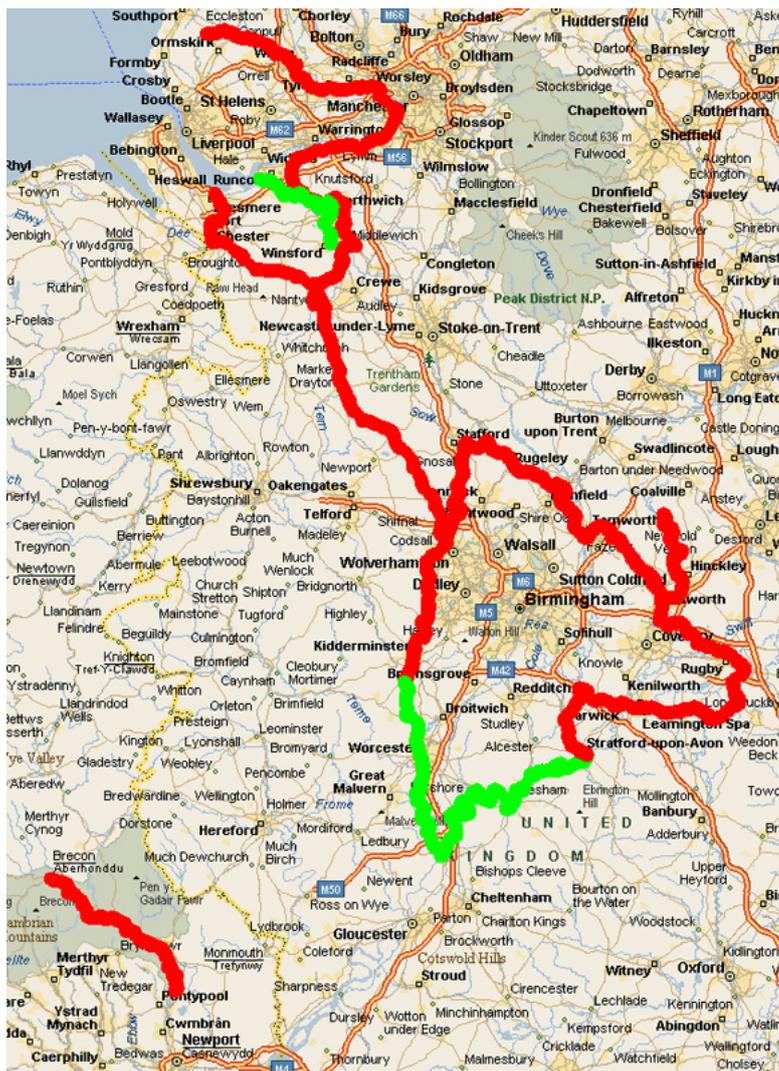
I know, it doesn't look like I didn't write, but I certainly didn't.

All the posts between the 11th of August (*Complete the opposite*) and this one are written today. The reason for this? Too busy, no internet, computer not charged, not a lot of pictures, etc etc.

At the moment me and WRT are on our own. Lawrence is off to Scotland. Time for me to do my Self Assessment for HMRC (two days ago), do the accounts (yesterday) and catch up with our adventures (today).

What I did do while we were still cruising, though, was the statistics.

First this year's map. The parts in green are our travels on a river.



Summer Cruise 2017

And now the numbers.

Days out	152
Cruising days	92
Cruising every	1.65 day
Cruising time	333.5 hours
Cruising hours per day	3.63
Total miles	655
Miles per day	7.12
Miles per days out	4.31
Locks	312
Locks per day	3.39
Bridges	18
Bridges per day	0.2
Shortest day	00:45 Bird in Hand to Stourport Basin
Longest cruising day	8:45 hrs Llanfoist to Talybont-on-Usk

So we were away almost for the same amount of days (159 in 2016 (without the time spent in the caravan while WRT got her make-over)), of which we cruised more days (2016: 85). We cruised for just a bit less hours (2016: 351) but covered more miles (2016: 585). We've done less locks (2016: 509) and bridges (2016: 29), but, except for the locks at the Stratford Canal I managed to do all the locks I had to do.

This year the shortest day was longer (2016: 00:30 Banbury to Banbury), and the longest day shorter (2016: 10:45 hrs Wigan to Slipway).

I know, once an accountant, always an accountant. So now I have to look at all the numbers and find explanations for the differences...

OUT OF THE BLUE – 12 NOVEMBER 2017

By writing all the previous posts at the same time I forgot to mention a lot of things. One of it: the amount of objects in the Dutch shrine has miraculously increased, over the summer.



Dutch Shrine

First of all, thanks to Annemarie of Dubbel Dutch. She gave me two Delft blue windmills while we were in Braunston. And two months later she sent me my supply of tobacco (enough for half a year), tissues, and speculaaskoekjes (Dutch pronunciation: [spe:ky'la:s], a type of spiced shortcrust biscuits, traditionally baked for consumption on or just before St Nicholas' day in Holland (5 December)) in a Delft blue tin.



Hatsjie

While on the Mon&Brec me and Ann went gallivanting all over the town of Brecon. Visiting the obvious: charity shops and indoor markets. The indoor market had a bric-à-brac shop, where I found a nice Dutch cookie tin. It was so greasy, it stuck to my hand. And it was on offer...! (The Dutch stroopwafels (Dutch pronunciation: [ˈstroːpʋaːfəl]; literally syrup waffle) next to it I bought yesterday at Tesco.)



Dutch Cookie Tin

A shopping trip in Market Drayton not only provided us with all the ingredients for meals for a week, but the local antiques shop had klompen (wooden shoes... well, in this case, porcelain) on offer. Two small ones, and a bigger one, an ashtray klomp.



I know...

And while Lawrance was away to Scotland for a week, I had all the time to start an experiment. While waiting for the bread to rise, I made my own zuurkool. That is sauerkraut, in English. But, unless the local Tesco store has a section of Polish food, this ordinary, once-a-week vegetable in Holland is nowhere to be found in the UK. It's still fermenting, at the moment, so I don't know yet if the experiment will be successful. But I should have kept the Delftware fermentation pot my parents used to make sauerkraut in. I'm sure I would have found the space to put it somewhere in the boat!



Making Sauerkraut

Oh, and I even got a birthday card that matched (thanks, Nina)...



Happy Birthday

OUT OF THE BLUE (PART TWO) – 28 NOVEMBER 2017

Delftware is still haunting me. And because I'm worth it, I decide to have a second Pandora bracelet. This time with proper Dutch beads. It has everything, from a windmill, wooden shoes (well, sort of) via a kissing Dutch couple to a bag of fries.



Real Dutch

And not only because I'm worth it, I've also been working hard. I included all the posts on this blog into pdf's. So if you want to read, for example, all the posts from 2015, just go to the tab PDF'S and download the pdf *The First Full Year*.

And because I'm worth it, I had, for the first time in my entire life, my nails done. Professionally. Might not do that again, though. Nice, long, polished nails severely limit you doing things. Like daily checks of the engine, or even crocheting.

Lawrance worked hard as well. He serviced/winterized the engine. And because he's worth it, he bought himself a steam iron.

Other than that, it's time for beautiful sunsets again.



Beautiful sunset

And, of course, gym, yoga, gym, yoga,...

LAST CRUISE – 03 DECEMBER 2017

It's that time of the year. In Holland people will celebrate Sinterklaas. Or, more precise, celebrate the name day of Saint Nicholas on 6 December, by giving gifts on St. Nicholas' Eve (5 December).

There are a lot of sweets involved, like *speculaas* (spiced cookies), *kruidnoten* (mini spiced cookies, also called ginger nuts), *pepernoten* (small aniseed flavored honey cookies), *taai-taai* (aniseed and honey flavored figurines) and chocolate letters.

And a lot of songs. One starts with: *Zie de maan schijnt door de bomen...* (Look, a bright December moon is visible through the trees).



Zie de maan schijnt door de bomen

Sinterklaas must be in the UK as well. I can but start singing, when seeing this moon. And Aldi sells the proper *speculaas*. Would I also get presents next Tuesday..?

Ho, ho, ho, don't be silly. This is the UK, and it's all Christmas here. Which means: annual Christmas Dinners. So, in order to benefit from the 'good' weather, we cast off on Friday the first of December, and make our way to the New Scarisbrick Arms. It's a bit cold, but that's about it.

Not having to cruise on the Saturday enables me to make bread, and assemble most of the Christmas Cards.



Christmas Dinner

The Christmas Dinner is, as usual, absolute superb. I have a very interesting tomato-mozzarella salad, sea bass filet (that almost makes me licking the plate afterwards), and Christmas pudding. And, as per usual, we have an after dinner drink, and are about the last ones to leave the restaurant.



After Dinner Drink

No, I'm not drunk, but I forget half of my normal going-to-bed routine...

The cold weather, that was predicted for this weekend, never made it. It's not cold, but windy. Of course, it's me on the tiller, who has to try to get properly back at the jetty. With the wind from the wrong direction: usual the wind turns the bow of the boat into the right direction, now I have to turn into the wind. But I manage. Quit well, I must say.

And this will be our last day of cruising, this year. In total we've cruised 113 days. And were 'om the move' for 388 hours. We covered 776 miles, 334 locks and 54 bridges.

When I switch the engine off, Lawrance has been on the tiller for 170 hours, and I braved the elements for a staggering 203 hours.

Yes, I know, $170 + 203 \neq 388$. The missing hours was Mick on the hire boat, of course.

LAST POST? – 08 DECEMBER 2017

When, after this post, it is silent for a very long time, then you know it all went wrong.

Remember I started making my own sauerkraut (Out of the Blue)? Well, that first attempt wasn't really successful. Not having the right equipment, and not treating the white cabbage the right way, I ended up with a jar of very dry cut cabbage. So I decided to buy a fermentation crock.



This time I cut the cabbage as thin as possible, and mistreated it the right way.

One of the ingredients for home-made sauerkraut is *patience*. The crock has to be in a warm place for about four or five days, and after that, it wants to be in a cool place for two to eight weeks. And one is **not supposed** to lift the lid and have a look, because that might attract the wrong kind of bacteria. I placed the crock in the well deck, and every time I had a smoke it was tempting me.

Yesterday I finally gave in. It had been fermenting for three weeks. That is, apparently, the minimum time, so I should either have a crock full of unwanted bacteria, or full of sauerkraut in its early state.

Yes, I had sauerkraut!!!



First Homemade Sauerkraut

It tasted 'young', so to speak. Like a young wine. But it certainly was sauerkraut. So I took out 300 gram of it, and put the crock back in the well deck. The sauerkraut I took out, went in the fridge. And I tried to stay away from the fridge; I could have eaten it all...

No, don't worry, I behaved, so today we're having our favorite sauerkraut dish: a barley-sauerkraut gratin. But, although the amount of salt one uses should keep the unwanted bacteria away, in case they are present, I won't be able to see them.

So, if this is the last post on the blog, then you know: we died of botulism.

NOT THE LAST CRUISE – 17 DECEMBER 2017

Do you know what this is?



It's part of a IWA Waterways Map, with parts of the canals we've cruised so far. Cruised canals are in red.

Do you notice that small red dot, just under the name Trevor? No, that is not me, accidentally touching that spot with a red pencil. We cruised it. Today. It's the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct in the Llangollen Canal (see <https://www.pontcysyllte-aqueduct.co.uk/>).



Under the aqueduct

The aqueduct is 307 m (336 yd) long, 3.7 m (4 yd) wide and 1.60 m (5.25 ft) deep. It consists of a cast iron trough supported 38 m (126 ft) above the river on iron arched ribs carried on eighteen hollow masonry piers (pillars). Each of the 18 spans is 16 m (53 ft) wide. There is a small railing to the right of the towpath. On the other side? Just the abyss.

Build with blood in the mortar it was opened in 1805, and is considered to be one of the highlights of the English Canals.



On the Aqueduct

Now have a look at the Waterways Map again. The aqueduct is on the Llangollen Canal. But the rest of the Llangollen Canal on the map is still blue, ie not been cruised by us.

Strange...

And the roof of the narrowboat on the picture above doesn't look like WRT either.

Strange...

OK, I will explain. The narrowboat we're on is named Betty Baker, and belongs to friends Pat and Stephen (see <http://wea-ry-tired.co.uk/creme-brulee-au-fleur-de-lys/>). They will spend Christmas in Llangollen, and, this weekend, are moored just before the aqueduct.

By boat, this is 122 miles, with 38 locks. With us, cruising about 4 hours maximum per day, that would take fourteen days. By car? Just 61.5 miles, no locks. About 1.5 hours. So that's what we do. Drive to Trevor Basin, park the car, and walk over the aqueduct to the boat. This way we can go with them on the boat to get back to the car, tomorrow. That's the aqueduct done twice.

We actually do it four time, because the pub at Froncysyllte, at the southside of the aqueduct, doesn't do meals, so we have to go over the aqueduct to Trevor to get something to eat. And back over the aqueduct of course to the boat.

What I think of the aqueduct? Well, it reminds me a bit of the first time I drove over the Golden Gate Bridge in San Fransisco: Is this it?

Walking over the aqueduct three times probably takes away the wow-factor, and having done already the longest aqueduct in England (Edstone Aqueduct, see <http://wea-ry-tired.co.uk/birmingham-and-beyond/>) probably doesn't help either.

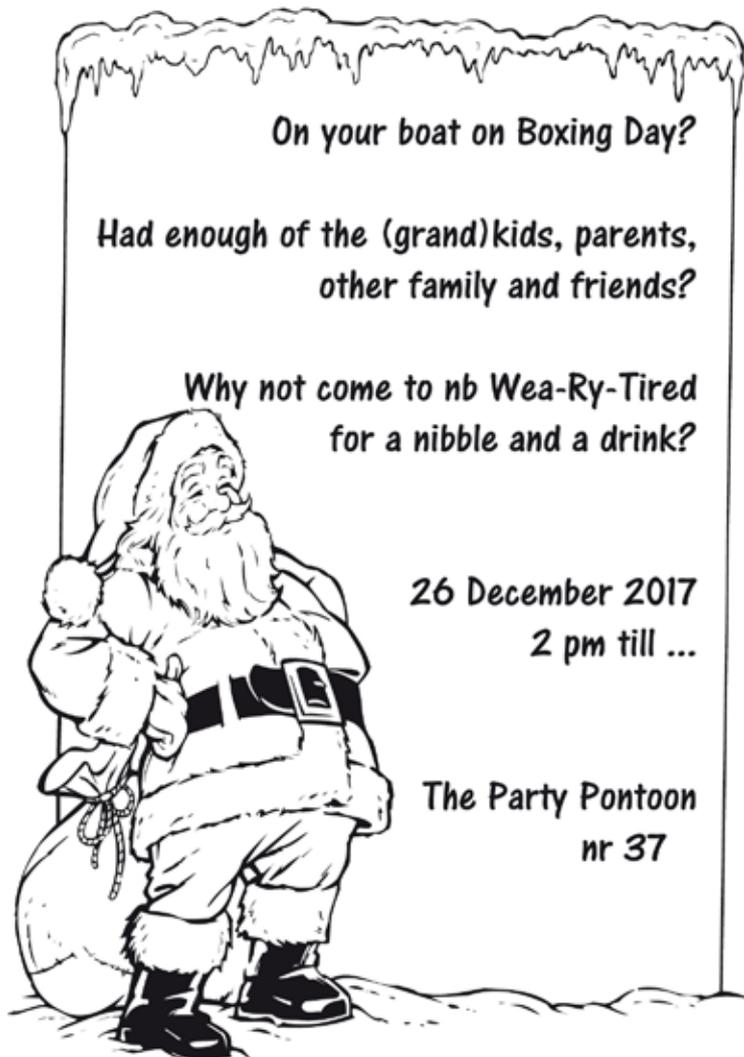
But we'll see. Next year we'll be on the aqueduct on WRT, no doubt with me on the tiller (and a force 12 wind from the right). That might just be completely different...

Statistics

I won't add the 15 minutes and the distance onto the total hours and miles. But, although we didn't actually drive the boat ourselves, and it also wasn't our boat, I still think it counts towards our cruising experience. Because otherwise we have to take off the time Mick was on the tiller on the Mon&Brec as well.

It was not the last post on the weblog either (see <http://wea-ry-tired.co.uk/last-post/>). And the home-made products are increasing.

Just imagine yourself in Tesco, on the Friday before Christmas. It's absolutely packed, with people trying to buy things they usually never buy. One of these people is me. We're having our annual Christmas get-together.



Being Dutch I always try to make some old-fashioned (60s-70s?) Dutch snacks. Like cheese cubes with a silver skin onion on top. This year I want to make cheese cubes with stem ginger on top as well. So here I am, trying to find stem ginger.

It's not near the home baking stuff. And also not near the silver skin onions. So I have to ask somebody. The Tesco lady knows exactly what I want, and takes me to the home baking section. And then to where the silver skin onions are. Without any success, of course. I follow here to find someone else who might know where to find. At that point another shopper asks: "Where do I find stem ginger?" Two people answer at the same time: "Just follow the queue!" She, and her daughter, do just that.

We find another Tesco lady. "Yes, I know where it is." And off we go, five people in a line, to the home baking section, and, yes, you guessed right, to the silver skin onions. Still no stem ginger. A guy from Tesco now joins the group. He has a smart phone, and, on that, he finds out: They are on the top shelf, near the cherries (I haven't seen cherries so far, but everything is possible...). Here we go again, now six people in a line.

The cherries are where the silver skin onions are, and where the stem ginger definitely is NOT. Then the fourth Tesco person, one with a head phone, manages to contact the manager. And then, finally, we learn where the

stem ginger is: GONE..!

So in the end I have to buy a piece of fresh ginger, and try to make my own stem ginger. Hopefully the internet has a recipe.

Later today

Stem ginger. I never paid any attention to it. I knew it was made of ginger, but how? You just bought it in the supermarket. It always came in a hexagonal container, either made of glass, or made of green, glazed pottery.



And after you used some of the ginger, your fingers would stick to everything, thanks to the sugary syrup.

Luckily the internet has a recipe for stem ginger. And no, I won't be able to make it. Because it's made from the choice pieces of the underground stem of the ginger plant, which are then preserved in syrup. Pieces without the fibers you find in a fresh piece of ginger root.

But of course I'm going to try it!

I cut the ginger root in small pieces, boil them three times for 15 minutes (renewing the cooking water every time). Then I try a (small piece) to see if it's edible.

It is..., but it nearly blows the top of my head off! What a taste!

The final step is boiling the ginger again, now in a sugar syrup. So new water (again), sugar added, and on the fire (to save gas). The end result is indeed a bit fibery, but tastes absolutely delicious.



And so I keep increasing my home made stuff. Bread, yoghurt, sauerkraut, and now stem ginger. As if I live somewhere, far away of civilization.

But I definitely must live in a strange country. Today I also try to buy baking paper. I find some in Aldi. As always I read the label before I buy anything. And what does the label tell me? It's flammable! I have to keep it away from naked flames. How can I do that in a gas oven? Do I miss something here?

Unfortunately the whole story with the stem ginger makes me forget to look at baking paper in Tesco. So some of the snacks on Boxing Day will just stick to the baking tray (not a problem, Lawrance has to do the dishes anyway...).

The other thing I find out today: Aldi's decorated kitchen roll is right handed.

I never buy decorated kitchen roll, except for Christmas. And this year is the first time I have to use the kitchen roll holder the wrong way around (for me, that is). Just look at the picture.



Right Handed Kitchen Roll

Of course I can turn the kitchen roll upside down, and use it left handed. But that means upside-down Christmas trees, and ditto gifts, polar bears, and snow men.

Isn't life full of surprises?

LET IT SNOW, LET IT SNOW, LET IT SNOW – 25 DECEMBER 2017

It's baltic here. There is at least a metre of snow, and the fire works overtime. It must be that time of the year. So WRT, Lawrance and me can only say:



No, be real, let's start again.

It's 11°C, with light clouds. The wind is 20 m/hr. We're only dreaming of a white Christmas. Because it feels more like Spring, and for snow one has to refer back to Photoshop.

But still, last night Santa Claus managed to get himself, with all the presents, through our not so wide chimney. He even found something that is supposed to resemble a Christmas tree. We didn't hear a thing...



Prezzies under the Tree

After we unpack everything we realise: now we look like alcoholics, that like golf...



Alcoholics who play golf?

Not only the birds think it's spring, and twitter like it is mating season already. Even we got the spring bug. No, we don't twitter (yet), but we gave WRT a spring cleaning yesterday. She has to impress, tomorrow, when everybody comes for a drink and a snack.

While cleaning the bathroom we found out that she has changed a bit, over time.



Colour Change

Don't worry, the mirror is back on the wall, and nobody will see it. And besides that, maybe nobody will visit us anyway. Not a problem, we will eat all the delicious snacks ourselves. And get roaring drunk.

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year from

