

Summer Cruise 2022 – Flora Dora

Fri 3 June – Sun 5 June: SPPC Platinum Jubilee Cruise.

Arrived on board on 1 June and stocked up for the initial trips before the real summer cruise. On Thursday 2 June we filled up with the 'new' HVO at the club before cruising down to Limehouse paired up with Dragonfly. A briefing meeting presented by Simon and David followed by the customary meal in CA House.

Friday 3 June.

An early rise ready for a 05:00 lock out onto a calm and deserted Thames, down through the barrier, no Woolwich ferries running over the Bank Holiday weekend, so a very quiet and easy run down to the Town Pier pontoon at Gravesend. An excellent meal at the Three Daws organised by Andy Clarke and a restful but slightly bouncy night's sleep to follow. Twin spring lines between each pair of boats worked successfully and despite the tide and wind little banging together during the night.

Saturday 4 June.

The crews surfaced on the Saturday morning to find the wind had increased, at that time running against the tide, and was causing white horses to be seen breaking up the river. After a slightly hair raising run across the river with swell side on the conditions improved once in the lee of Tilbury Docks. Thereafter an uneventful run back up to Limehouse.

Sunday 5 June.

Pam caught a morning train home to avoid a rail strike on the Monday and to be home for final rehearsal for Comrie Singers summer concert. Manjit and Lizzie joined as crew for the run up to Brentford and Hanwell.

Tues 14 June – Thurs 11 August: The 2022 Epic Cruise.

Terry returned to boat at Hanwell on the Monday to find boarding plank had been taken, no damage though nor anything else touched.

Tuesday 14 June.

Pam arrived at The Fox and after some refreshment we set off for the real start of our epic journey. Locked up the Hanwell flight and moored at Bulls Bridge after negotiating a water hose across to a boat on the east bank which could not move because of a coot nest in its fender! Stocked up at Tesco and had a quiet night on the moorings.

Wednesday 15 June.

Joined by Pip & Lorraine George at Hayes and Harlington. Paused below Cowley Lock for lunch. Shared Cowley Lock with another boat but they were only going to Uxbridge. Worked on up solo to Rickmansworth, moored opposite Tesco and walked Pip & Lorraine to the station for a rather late journey home.

Thursday 16 June.

No wind; clear sky; temp. 27°C

Quick shopping trip to Tesco opposite and set off 0900. Delayed by CRT maintenance staff clearing vegetation at Casio Bridge Lock and then for half an hour at Casio Park Locks where the intervening pound was near empty, a boat coming down and then we got stuck on the lower cill of the second lock. Paused in a shady spot before Lady Capel's Lock for lunch before a few more locks. The temperature was taking its toll and we moored up in our regular spot opposite Kings Langley station at 1700.

Friday 17 June.

Light SW breeze; clear sky; temp. 30°C

Early start [0730] to beat some of the expected heat. Worked single up to Winkwell Bridge where we stopped for a cold beer in the pub and lunch on board. Worked up to lock 57 just in time before they closed for night lockdown. Very shallow for the next two pounds which we shared with another boat for the first time this trip! More water above lock 59, worked up to top of Gas No 1 for a mooring only disturbed by the trains close to the east.

Saturday 18 June.

Gentle N breeze; overcast, showers; temp. 15°C

Totally different day! Worked up the last few locks to Cow Roast and the Tring summit, sharing with another boat for the last lock, having been caught up due to our delays with a coal boat and following a wide beam. Paused for lunch at top of Marsworth flight, then the descent with help from a pair of volunteer lockies. Pam worked the two Marsworth locks being helped by group of lads on a DoE course. Stopped for night between swing bridge and Seabrook Top lock. Showers regularly throughout day and night.

Sunday 19 June.

Gentle N breeze; overcast; temp. 20°C

Steady progress through locks helped by pairing up with 'Kings Landing' to Grove lock. Confronted by a mass canoe race on exiting lock which continued down to outskirts of Leighton Buzzard. Found a mooring just before The Globe Inn and went for Fathers' Day lunch. Dropped down Soulbury Three Locks and moored up before Stoke Hammond lock before a shower of rain at 1800.

Monday 20 June.

Gentle N breeze; mostly sunny; temp. 20°C

Pam disturbed in night and woke with pain in left leg; no obvious causes as had been fine after mooring up and walking to and from pub at lunch on Sunday. Pam was best when lying down so Terry worked down Stoke Hammond with help from boat coming up and through Fenny Stratford lock and bridge. Stopped at Gifford Park for shopping at the Tesco Express including Paracetamol which combined with Ibuprofen eased the pain in Pam's leg. Continued around Milton Keynes past the newly developed houses and marina at Bridge 82 where the Bedford Link will connect, across the iron trunk aqueduct over the Great Ouse valley and locked up through Cosgrove. Moored at a previously noted 'green' site up from bridge 63 in splendid isolation with no traffic and only distant train noise to cancel out the bird songs.

Tuesday 21 June.

Light variable wind; long spells of sunshine; temp. 25°C.

An easy start with no locks for a good distance before reaching the Stoke Bruerne flight where we paired up with another boat and had the advantage of volunteer lockies for all the flight into the village. Stopped for water and then headed through Blisworth Tunnel and on to a shady mooring before the aqueduct in Weedon Bec.

Wednesday 22 June.

Mostly sunny; temp. 25°C.

Lazy start as ahead of schedule; walked to Tesco for paper and other minor bits; after breakfast went to the Royal Ordnance Depot which used to have direct canal access from where the boatyard is now. Originally a skew sliding rail bridge allowed access to the site which was subject to Official Secrets Act until the 1960s. Set off late morning and met up with another boat to share the Buckby flight. Moored up near bridge 3 to be away from the M1 at Watford Gap.

Thursday 23 June.

Gentle breeze; sun early then showers; temp. 22°C.

0800 start up to Watford staircase where there was no queue and the bottom locks empty; spoke to lockie who was helping a hire boat through the staircase, rose up the first two locks and left gates for the boat coming down, easy rise through remainder and began the lock-free, and widebeam-free summit pound. Polished out some of rain spots on rear hatch paint before first rain shower of the day. Carried on non-stop across the summit level and reached Foxton at 1630; lockies were pleased to see us as they had only had three boats instead of the usual 20+. Turned right onto 'new' waters for us through the swing bridge which is not marked on our 1990s version of Nicholson and moored just below the Main Street in Foxton. Dinner in the newly refurbished 'Shoulder of Mutton' now Hoggitt where they do steaks cooked at the table on volcanic stones.

Friday 24 June.

Gentle S breeze; sunny intervals, dry; temp. 20°C.

Slow progress up to Market Harborough, shallow and very overgrown with reeds and overhanging Willow trees. Stopped in Union Wharf for rubbish and elsan, then a mooring just outside the basin for water. Brunch in the café, which took an hour for a coffee and an egg & bacon bap! Walked into town, which has some nice historic buildings in the centre, crossed the R Welland and shopped at Waitrose. Taxi back to the boat with heavy bags up the hill to the canal. Headed back to Foxton and towards Leicester. Moored at very quiet spot between reed beds down from Debdale Wharf.

Saturday 25 June.

Moderate S breeze; sunny intervals, rain showers; temp. 20°C.

Continued on towards Leicester, still with nothing to share locks with. Only a couple of boats going in the opposite direction though most locks against us so must have been something ahead going our way! Worryingly overgrown with reeds and very shallow in a number of places – the Leicester Line will soon be unnavigable for deep draft trad boats and difficult for wide beams. Paused at Kilby bridge for rubbish and elsan. More locks, mostly against us and moored up just after Knights Bridge for the night.

Sunday 26 June.

Fresh S breeze; sunny intervals; temp. 20°C.

0800 start with toast and coffee under way; worked round south Leicester and joined the River Soar. So little fresh water in river that filling Freeman Lock stopped the flow over the weir at the King Power stadium! Easy run into centre of Leicester with only two rowing boats and space on Castle Gardens moorings with only one other boat. Went for lunch at Bistrot Pierre, a chain that have restaurants all over apart from South and East, for a nice relaxing Sunday lunch. Impressed with Leicester City centre, many old historic buildings and mainly pedestrianised. After a short break continued northwards, with difficulty at the last city centre locks, and moored at 1800 at Birstall before the lock.

Monday 27 June.

Moderate SW breeze; rain showers; temp. 20°C.

A wet start to the run, Birstall Lock was difficult to open but shared with another boat though they were only going down to the Leicester Marina so on our own again after the one lock. Rain eased by Mountsorrel and finally dry and sunny by the final run into Loughborough. Moored above Nottingham Road bridge near to the station where we had stopped in 2019. Went into town but found little of interest apart from Market Place with the Town Hall. Walked back via Town Basin where we discovered one day mooring was allowed, so plan A is to move there on Sunday 3 June and Pam to get taxi from station as all services are also available in the Basin and we will be ready for the next stage.

Tuesday 28 June to Saturday 2 July.

Pam caught 'fast' train to St Pancras at 0955 on 28 June; I settled in for the week at Loughborough. Windy and boats going past loosening pins so moved down to mooring on bollards outside The Boat, where there were also three other boats for safety and shorter walk into town. Seems nice and quiet, but only a Tuesday night.

Walks into Loughborough to Liz's Laundrette, some shopping at Tesco and drinks at the Swan in the Rushes, a local winner of CAMRA Cider Pub of the Year. Big B&Q just up from the junction provided the long cabin hook for the starboard rear door. Collected clean laundry and said good-bye to the landlord of The Boat who had been helpful and allowed me to use their recycling bins. Karaoke and disco on Friday and Saturday, lucky Pam not on board!

Sunday 3 July.

Moved down to Loughborough Basin. Not the most friendly moorings for narrow boats as pontoons only about 30' long and some mooring cleats missing. Cleaned and mopped out engine room and gave loo a good clean.

Monday 4 July.

Gentle NW breeze; sunny; temp. 20°C.

Pam arrived back via train and taxi at 12:30. Part unpacked and then did BIG shop at Tesco to set us up until Nottingham. Moved across to service point which proved even less narrow boat friendly than the moorings. Tied mid rope to railings and reversed so access to stern was an option – no bollards, ladder positioned on inside of concave curve so no access for narrow boats! Phoned and got code for the elsan room, filled up with water and disposed of last of rubbish. Avoided the sofa that was floating in the basin and headed downstream again. Shared first lock then on our own. No space at The Plough in Normanton so tied up for the night to the 'emergency' dolphins above Zouch weir.

Tuesday 5 July.

Gentle NW breeze; sunny; temp. 20°C.

Set off in broken sunshine but the wind chill was such that I had my fleece and waterproof on and Pam had her hoodie to keep warm – but both dressed in shorts as it was July! A couple of locks, with only a single hander coming up at Kegworth Deep also on the move, got us to Radcliffe Lock; filled the lock but with the three usable paddles open the level never got within 75mm of full. First test of my handy-billy, which with Pam pushing as well enabled us to get the gates open enough to level the water. The good thing with the gear was being able to hold the gates once cracked open rather than the usual slamming shut and undoing all the previous work. Through the Cranfield Cut and onto the wide spaces of the Trent for a few miles before the Beeston Cut. Went for drink at the Boat and Horses and settled down on the visitor moorings in Beeston.

Wednesday 6 July.

Moderate W breeze; light cloud; temp 20°C.

Moved down the three miles to Nottingham Castle Marina to top up fuel to find that they had been taken over in April by Aqua Vista and their IT department had tried to upgrade and transfer systems at weekend but had failed leaving them with no computer systems and cash payments only. Went to Sainsbury ATM and got the cash for red diesel – no HVO here or anywhere near. Moved down to mooring outside Sainsbury. Walked into town and visited Castle and very good exhibitions of Queen's collection of Gainsborough sketches, lace, ceramics and general art.

Thursday 7 July.

Moderate W breeze; light cloud; temp 25°C.

Locked down onto the Trent and good run down to Gunthorpe; moored on inside of visitor pontoon. Phoned Cromwell lockie who suggested leaving at 10:00 on Sunday, one hour after HW; discussion on Trentlink FB confirmed my concern that this would be late and levels might be too low in the run down to Gainsborough.

Phoned Selby who booked us in and agreed with my timings for the Trent Falls and Ouse section. Checked weather and Sunday/Monday appears a calmer wind than either side. Discussions with others on mooring indicated Fiskerton might be difficult to find space on Friday!

Friday 8 July.

Moderate W breeze; sunny; temp. 25°C.

Dropped down Gunthorpe and Hazelford locks, sharing with two other narrow boats, one of which had been moored at Gunthorpe pontoon with us. Rounded the bend and saw a 57' space on the Fiskerton pontoon – turned out to be 52' so overlapping the upstream private pontoon a bit! Mary arrived and after Flora Dora cocktails on board we adjourned to the Bromley for lunch and two bottles of wine. Coffee back on board before Mary walked the three and half miles home. A large river cruiser managed to moor up alongside the narrow boat behind us but after drinks at the pub they left for Newark. Pam's right leg appeared to be swollen but not in any discomfort so review in the morning.

Saturday 9 July.

Gentle NW breeze; sunny; temp. 25°C.

Easy run down to Newark, moored on pontoon and walked into town. Found a cafe and antique shop almost the twin of the one in Berkhamstead for a coffee and bought a wooden spoon! Shopped at Waitrose and filled up with water before dropping down to Cromwell Lock – pontoon full of 'Tupperwares' on day trips so on wall for the night, Spoke to lock keeper who corrected some of my timings and agreed 10 am lock out on Sunday, Anchor rigged, engine and weed hatch checked, radio readied for the morning.

Sunday 10 July.

Gentle W breeze; sunny; temp. 30°C.

Rigged and call checked radio; the narrow boat that had been aground while waiting on the pontoon below the lock came up and asked us to move – we were moored on the water point but could not see that from below a 10' wall. Locked out of Cromwell at 09:30 with another narrow boat who had come onto the quay behind us the evening before; they were heading for Torksey so would drop off our tail there. Arrived at Gainsborough at 14:30 an hour before 'flood' as LW is called on the Trent. Reasonable mooring on the pontoon, though not helped by a pair of speed boats going full speed through the town.

Monday 11 July.

Gentle S breeze; sunny; temp. 30°C.

Tea at 06:30 to get all prepared for the change of tide – happened as calculated at 07:30 so turned everything on and were away by 08:00. Easy run down the Trent on the ebb tide following a lot of flotsam; occasionally seemed very shallow as stern wash looked more like mud than water. Arrived at Trent Falls at 12:45 dead on schedule; two cruisers at anchor which helped to locate anchorage and dropped mud weight which held well. A short break for lunch and then the boat started swinging indicating the start of the flood; left on schedule at 13:45 and punched the flood down to Apex Light. Tide up the Ouse was running hard and even on 1200 RPM we were doing over 7 MPH; the flood was running hard all the way with us and some very hairy moments with the back flows, eddies and whirlpools particularly near jetties. Two calls from the lock keeper at Selby to check our progress and then we called him from the Selby swing bridge for him to prepare the lock. Decided that going straight in while travelling at 7 MPH with little steering way was not the best option! Swung round and travelled backwards punching into the flood until we could see the lock, not easy as hidden in the middle of thick undergrowth. Ferry glided in but still managed to gently bump the downstream wall. Looking afterwards it was clear that there was a large area of 'dead' water outside the lock so we were no longer being carried upstream. Very helpful lock keeper raised us up and showed us where all the facilities were before we tied up in the basin. Collapsed with a stiff gin and tonic at 18:30.

Tuesday 12 July.

Gentle SW breeze; light cloud with some showers; temp. 25°C.

Pam walked into Selby and found the Abbey, a baker and a butcher before returning with a newspaper. After a leisurely breakfast we set off for a launderette that was a mile away on the south-west side of town; discovered that they were closed down having had a fire in April so walked back to the Abbey for a coffee and seat. Discovered some of the history of the Abbey including the near destruction by a fire in 1906 and left before an organ recital by a visiting organist from Salt Lake City. Found a 'mini-launderette' for our washing and a Spar for beer and bottle of water. Fairly refreshed but glad the next couple of days would be virtually lock-free and on canals and the canalised River Aire.

Wednesday 13 July

Moderate W breeze; sunny; temp. 25°C.

Filled up with water and headed down the weed filled Selby Canal; swing bridge at Selby then nothing else apart from one narrow boat coming in opposite direction, paused for lunch at the flood lock then out onto the River Aire, leaving the large collection of weed from our bow behind in the canal. Easy run through to Beal Lock where we had to wait for a boat coming down and CRT surveyors depth sounding at the upper pontoon. Slightly hairy moment in Bank Dole Lock before working out the flows from massive gate paddles on the upper gates. Bulholme Lock full of kids swimming and playing on gates but helped through by local resident, continued into Castleford where all mooring busy but stopped on flood lock landing as little chance of a flood and anyone needing landing!

Thursday 14 July.

Moderate NW breeze; sunny intervals; temp. 20°C.

Turned right onto Aire & Calder towards Leeds. Wind from NW meant we had to put fleeces on and actually felt cool for the first time in weeks. Arrived at Lemontroyde Lock as they were opening at 09:30. Joined up with a very friendly wide beam hybrid boat for remaining locks to Leeds who let us through, and even worked the last lock which would only take the one of us, into Leeds where we breasted up in Leeds Dock. Looked round the Royal Armouries museum before Val and Graham visited for a G&T before we went to The Canary Café for a meze supper. Discovered that lock 10 above Kirkstall was closed until 18th July so unable to give Val and Graham a trip out on canal.

Friday 15 July.

Moderate W breeze; light cloud; temp. 20°C.

Boats ahead of us left so we pulled forward to get our own space on the pontoon, a boat arrived later and took the remaining space ahead of us. Took the water taxi into the station, walked around and found an EE shop where the helpful manager explained that the odd readings on the internet were due to all the flats around us, as at St Pancras, where the residents were using mobile streaming rather than paying exorbitant fees to management for broadband in their flats. Found the M&S and bought a new fruit-bowl and wine glasses. Another quiet night in Leeds Dock apart from being rocked about by the strength of the wind.

Saturday 16 July.

Gentle W breeze; sunny intervals; temp. 25°C.

Walked up to the small Sainsbury opposite Granary Wharf and bought the last bits needed for lunch. Val and Graham arrived and after Flora Dora cocktails we lunched on Spanish Omelette and salad with an Eton Mess parfait to follow. Pam walked through to the Pets at Home for a bag of barley straw as wood shavings are in short supply.

Sunday 17 July.

Gentle S breeze; sunny intervals; temp. 30°C.

Day started overcast with even a couple of light showers around the time Pam went to Tesco for the croissants and paper. We walked into town, past the Minster and into Victoria Centre to find John Lewis.

Good cup of coffee but no storage jars to replace our cracked tea containers. Found the old Corn Exchange – now a shopping centre with small traders around the courtyard – a cross between Covent Garden and Royal Exchange. The sun was now fully out and flying ants around as we walked down towards Granary Wharf and stopped at The North Brewery bar for a beer and Bau in a well air-conditioned room. Caught the river taxi back to Leeds Dock and sheltered out of the sun for the afternoon.

Monday 18 July.

Gentle S breeze; sunny; temp. 35°C.

Two earlyish trips to Tesco for a paper and toilet rolls, then for six bottles of wine – should get us back to Nottingham! Managed to keep the sun out of the boat mostly and get some occasional breezes through. Temperature inside still got to 34° though. Phoned Keadby and Cromwell Locks and got even more confused with Trent tides. Adjourned to Pizza Express for the evening – with air conditioning – but even in the cooler evening the temperature on board was 30°. Tried to sleep!

Tuesday 19 July.

Moderate W breeze; sunny; temp. 35+°C.

Decided temperature was going to be too much on board so booked into the Holiday Inn for a night – also Pam's birthday. Went to hotel at 11:00 before things heated up too much and sat in bar with coffee, then beer, then sandwich before room was available. Went up and had brief siesta before returning to lounge for tea and games of cribbage. Learned that it was graduation week from university hence the hotel was busy. Reasonable meal in evening and early night in air-conditioned room.

Wednesday 20 July.

Gentle NW breeze; light cloud; temp. 25°C.

Birthday breakfast at hotel before setting off from Leeds Dock at 08:30. Met up with two other narrow boats as we worked down the locks to Castleford. Continued down the Aire then the Knottingley & Goole before turning into the New Junction, through two bridges then stuck at Sykehouse Lock where the interlink on the bridge barriers failed to release the bridge lock; phoned CRT who recorded the failure and said an engineer would be out to rectify in morning. Another boat moved up to behind us on the lock landing having found themselves aground further back as the level had dropped six inches. Oil barge is due from Rotherham at lunchtime Thursday, so CRT should action repair to bridge mechanism before then.

Thursday 21 July.

Gentle NE breeze; light cloud; temp. 20°C.

Lock keeper and another CRT man on site 08:00, explained the problem, which neither were aware of, and workman hit the offside gate barrier with a large hammer which then released the bridge lock. Were let through at 08:30 and on our way. Over the Don aqueduct and onto the Stainforth and Keadby where we met our first short lock which also had the shock of being back to manual operations! Phoned Keadby and Cromwell to re-arrange passage up the tidal stretch. One of the first boats through the re-gated Thorne Lock and through the numerous bridges. Arrived at Vazon Swing Bridge; two boats below the bridge ready for the rail bridge, we stopped above on the north side lock landing. Trains seem to run pretty late into the night so not sure how good sleep will be as noisy over the sliding bridge joints. Aerial and anchor rigged ready, radio to check in morning.

Friday 22 July.

Gentle E breeze; light cloud; temp. 20°C.

Two more narrow boats arrived ready to go through bridges and lock out; signalman revised bridge opening to 09:30 and three boats waiting to come up through bridges. Got through rail bridge – Network Rail then announced closure at c.10:30. Locked out at third group onto Trent with a pretty tug-style boat 'Carnaby' who expressed interest in the SPCC Thames cruises. We motored up to a very full Torksey pontoon. Tupperwares decided to go elsewhere as narrow-boats breasted up all along pontoon, some three deep. Met

up with 'Bob' and agreed to travel up with them starting 05:00 on Saturday to catch some of the flood to Cromwell.

Saturday 23 July.

Moderate SE breeze; light cloud; temp. 25°C.

Away as intended at 05:00 to find little flood to help us and progress was a sedate 4 to 4.5 MPH, we were caught up by the cruiser 'Due South' and also 'Time after Time' that had only one engine running. Radio conversations with Cromwell resulted in the cruisers hanging back; we locked in at 09:00 having discovered a surprisingly strong flow of fresh over Cromwell weir which explained the lack of flood to assist us earlier. The lock keeper put the two narrow boats in the inner lock and the cruisers in the outer and filled the whole lock to raise us up; since learnt that this is done on low water levels as the inner sill is higher and not passable by deeper draught cruisers. Motored on and moored on pontoon in Newark around 11:30 for shopping, packing away anchor and a rest – ended up staying the night.

Sunday 24 July.

Fresh SW breeze; light cloud; temp. 25°C.

Rain during night and first thing but cleared by the time we were away at 09:30. Slow progress up the Trent as against an increasing flow and fresh head wind – making 3.5 MPH was about our average. Helpful family worked us through Meadow Lane lock onto the Beeston Cut and we moored up just above Castle Lock. Walked through the nicer bits of Nottingham that we had missed in 2019 to Bistrot Pierre at the Victoria Centre, taxi home to a quiet night apart from the rain.

Monday 25 July.

Moderate W breeze; sunny intervals; temp. 20°C.

Moved up to Nottingham Marina and walked to a launderette, planning a quiet day to avoid the head wind on the Trent. Passed 'Bob' who were on their way westwards and invited them to SPCC when they were ever in London. Called in at Nottingham Castle Marina and filled up with 200+ litres used since we were last there on 6 July for the trip to Leeds and back. Chugged down the few miles to Beeston and moored on the rings under a massive weeping willow which hid the boat.

Tuesday 26 July.

Gentle NW breeze; sunny intervals; temp. 20°C.

Back out onto the Trent but a less breezy day, up through Cranfleet Cut and onto the Trent & Mersey where we paired up with another narrow boat through Shardlow and all the deep [10' to 12'] locks up to Stenson then motored on to Buckford where we stopped for the night rather than risk Willington mooring place being full. Our 'Buddy' moored up a little way behind nearer the bridge and pub in Buckford.

Wednesday 27 July.

Gentle S breeze; sunny intervals; temp. 20°C.

Enjoyed the run up through narrow locks to Burton upon Trent where we moored on Shobnall Field, presumably the location for the IWA Festival in August, and had a 20 minute walk into the town. Found a nice cafe and bookshop before M&S Food Hall for the few things we needed and called into the chandlery on the way back for a replacement mooring chain – no idea where I left the other one. Motored on up including a last section of the Trent at Alrewas before mooring for the night with black clouds approaching from the West. Pam not feeling 100% though no particular symptoms of anything.

Thursday 28 July.

Gentle E breeze; light cloud; temp. 20°C.

Up through Common Lock and on to the last locks for the day at Fradley where we found three volunteers, one on each the locks. Left turn onto Coventry Canal and filled up with water before breakfasting underway

on the lock-free section through Whittington, Hopwas, Tamworth and Alvecote before mooring at Polesorth ready for the Atherstone flight on Friday.

Friday 29 July.

Light S breeze; sunny intervals; temp. 25°C.

Set off up the Atherstone flight, boats ahead and behind – little coming down so locks to set each time. Arrived at lock 9 to find a boat in the lock, two more waiting and no water in pound 8-9; CRT informed, and phoned back [!] to say team were on their way. A couple of hours later and levels were usable again although low and locked up through the remainder of the flight with volunteer lockies on 1 & 3. Top pound about 9” – 12” low but passable through to below Nuneaton where we stopped for the night.

Saturday 30 July.

Gentle SW breeze; light cloud; temp. 25°C.

Early run down to Hawkesbury Junction, occasionally bumping on the bottom. Filled with water and dumped rubbish before 10:30 and under way again onto the North Oxford. Level on N Oxford slightly better than on Coventry, motored down to Rugby and stopped by the Tesco Extra for food and wine for the next stint. Moved on to Hillmorton which we thought was closed at 17:00 but re-reading email that will only apply from 12 August so locked up and found a quiet spot a little way above for the night.

Sunday 30 July.

Gentle NW breeze; light rain; temp. 25°C.

Level on the top of the N Oxford some 6” down but no problems motoring through to Braunston, across the GU link and onto the S Oxford. Busiest we had seen all holiday with steady stream of boats coming in opposite direction and often following and being followed by boats travelling our direction. Two slow ones ahead on the link both turned up the GU at Wigrams Turn. At Napton “Slow Loris” was just rising in the bottom lock and then one dropped down, we were caught up by “Kings Meadow”, a family of four who were to be helpful all the way up the flight. The three of us worked up to the top with “Slow Loris” benefiting from empty locks all the way. All of us stopped fairly soon after arriving on the summit pound.

Monday 1 August.

Gentle NW breeze; sunny intervals; temp. 25°C.

Easy run around the remainder of the summit with a couple of boats coming up but apparently many going down with us, according to the lockies who were on a couple of the Claydon flight. Two lockies at Cropredy trying to get the pound below back to level – it was about 6” down but passable. Passed a number of boats coming up and they said Banbury was busy but not full; arrived there and was full apart from the end mooring outside Premier Inn. Walked into town, glass of wine in The Wine Vaults then a great meal at Thai Orchid. Returned to boat and discovered the steps opposite were a meeting and smoking stop for Banbury youth! Finally got some peace and quiet at 23:30 and went to bed.

Tuesday 2 August.

Moderate SW breeze; light cloud; temp. 25°C.

Slow progress through locks after stopping for water at Banbury and being ‘overtaken’ by another boat; also caught up a newbie at the first lock. Things seemed to settle down after that though wind made for some interesting manoeuvres when waiting for boats coming out of locks. Made it down through Somerton Deep but the boat waiting below ended up across the canal and had great difficulty turning and getting alongside, after we had passed they were stuck on the lee shore again. Motored on to our previously marked spot not far above Dashwood Lock for a quiet night – no internet either so played cribbage.

Wednesday 3 August.

Moderate SW breeze; sunny intervals; temp. 25°C.

Reasonable progress down remainder of locks and lift bridges of the S Oxford. Discovered that one can get two narrow boats into the 'diamond' locks, something that had not occurred to us before as normally spread out by single lockings before. Levels low even in the R Cherwell where we helped a narrow boat off a shallow patch that they had been moored in overnight. Through Duke's Cut onto the Thames – after patching up Terry's arm after the side sluice gear on Duke's Lock threw the windlass at him. Dropped through King's Lock with help from a Tupperware as the lock was self-service, then with a lock keeper at Godstow. Level around Port Meadow was low and with no flow there was heavy weed growth, ended up on a tree with mud weight in the channel to the West of Fiddler's Island.

Thursday 4 August.

Gentle NW breeze; sunny intervals; temp. 25°C.

Down through Osney Bridge and found a space towards the south end of the East Street moorings. Walked to station and caught bus tour around Oxford, alighting at The Broad for a visit to Blackwell's Music shop, pub for drink and craft shop for stiffeners for the CA burgee. Discovered Aldens Butchers and Fishmarket, a seventh generation family firm that has been in Oxford since 1793 and is now based on the retail estate below Osney Lock. Dined at The Punter pub on the end of the terrace of East Street, formerly The Boatman pub, now a vegetarian/vegan pub/restaurant.

Friday 5 August.

Gentle NW breeze; sunny intervals; temp. 25°C.

Down through Osney lock with another narrow boat whose owners live in Tiptree, keep the boat at Napton and were en route for the K&A and Bristol. Big queue of boats for water at Abingdon so dumped rubbish and continued down, just catching Benson before the lock keeper finished for the night. Had had a mixture of boats sharing with us but never a queue and the lock keepers were saying it was extremely quiet; many hire 'Le Boats' at Benson not out and only half a dozen or so boats passed us going upstream. Tied to a couple of trees above Wallingford for the night.

Saturday 6 August.

Gentle N breeze; sunny; temp. 25°C.

Long run to Cleeve and Goring Locks – cooked breakfast underway – shared locks with a couple of nice 'Little Ships' cruisers and narrow boats varying as we got down to Reading. Pulled in to Better Boating to find Andy and Julie on the mooring having just filled up with diesel. We took over when they moved off and filled with diesel and water. Had to queue at a couple of locks but still quiet for the first Saturday in August. Arrived at Marsh Lock, after negotiating some congestion at Shiplake Regatta, to find a queue of three narrow boats, two cruisers and a number of day boats at a Self Service lock. Turned round and tied up for the night on a former barge post to get an early lock on Sunday. Slightly worried as swinging out across river so turned mast round and left steaming light on, plenty of width though even with us at 90 degrees to bank, even when New Orleans came past in the dark at 23:30.

Sunday 7 August.

Gentle N breeze; sunny; temp. 25°C.

Locked down Marsh Lock with another narrow boat and Andy and Julie who had set off early and caught us up. Got to Hambledon Lock to find the lock waiting full and two narrow-boats, a dutch barge and a couple of cruisers sitting in the river; the lock had failed and would not operate, gathered that it had been like it for an hour. Another hour later and the Salters steamer Hampton Court turned up, the skipper pulled onto the posts by the lock and used his over-ride key and got the lock working at which time a lock keeper turned up. They swapped keys and the pedestal lit up with every possible error, but continued to work, apparently two people had tried using the two pedestals at the same time earlier and the computer had said 'no'. Finally got through and continued down, but now with an accompanying gaggle of narrow-boats, cruisers and day boats.

Stopped for brief shop at Marlow where Court was on the pier – the skipper had also worked on Reading steamer which he had taken his Skipper's ticket on. Arrived at Bray lock at 18:00 when it was then self-service and a queue of 10 boats. Backed up to below a fallen tree and moored with two mud weights – the second found on the quay at Hurley.

Monday 8 August.

Light NE breeze; sunny; temp. 30°C.

Early start to make up for the short run on Sunday. Easy, steady run with self-service to start then lock keepers all the way to Molesey and Kingston where we found the last space. Set up anchor and VHF aerial and checked the tides and timings for Tuesday. Zoom call with Geoff and Sandra then a normal evening.

Tuesday 9 August.

Gentle NE breeze; sunny; temp. 30°C.

Ran down to Teddington and checked timing with lock keeper who recommended 12:20 departure, his tides were some 20 minutes earlier than calculation of London Bridge HW +1hr 15 min from tide tables. Actually left at 12:00 on a rising tide, which we punched until Isleworth following tow others that locked out with us. Finally picked up ebb on last reach down to Brentford reaching 5 MPH before turning in and leaving the Thames. Volunteer on the gauging lock warned us that the second lock was a bit sticky but got through having joined up with Poppy who had led us down the Thames. Moored up below the last turn to Hanwell, walked up for a cold beer in the cool of the Fox before returning and changing for a meal in the Fox – curry night on Tuesday.

Wednesday 10 August.

Gentle E breeze; sunny; temp. 30°C.

Early start to beat the worst of the heat; first Hanwell lock at 07:00 and completed to Bull's Bridge by 10:00. Lock 92 or 93 was nearly impossible to open, taking the boat at full power and Pam pushing with all the paddles up to open top gate. Bottom gates were leaking so badly that the one lock full of water had dropped the pound above by 18" having been full when we arrived and some water entering from the by-wash. Brief shop and water stop then on way down Paddington Arm with a further stop for lunch during the hottest part of the day then onwards to St Pancras, arriving at 20:30 in time for a meal and then meet up with Colin, Di, Sasha and others at Club Night.

Thursday 11 August.

Light E breeze; sunny; temp. 35°C.

Swapped boats over with Dragonfly, Pam packed up and caught train home. Too hot to do anything without the breeze from moving, walked to co-op to stand in the freezer aisle and get some bottles of drink. May get round to doing anchor once in the shade late afternoon!
