

July 2020 Windsor (Knot Again !)



This year the world has been shaken up by a Coronavirus which has spread globally and introduced a new phenomenon called Social Distancing.

This has meant people pretty much restricted to contact with only their immediate household for four or five months.

Those restrictions are now lifting to the extent that boat trips on the Thames are once again back on the agenda, albeit with a few precautions.



Hooray !!!

Last year in May we took Don and Liss up to Windsor for a overnight trip on the boat.

We stayed at Windsor Racecourse marina and it was very successful.

So much so, that this year we are being even more adventurous.

This year, the plan is to go up to Cliveden Islands and have a play there.

That means four days and three nights together aboard Drift A Wey.

Day 1 will take us to Eton banks and hopefully a pint or three in the Watermans.

Day 2 will take us to Cliveden Islands where we can play for a day with the dinghy.

Day 3 will take us down to Runnymede, where hopefully we can find a quiet mooring.

Day 4 will take us home. (I think by then we will be needing a proper shower)

That's a fair bit of travelling, but this time we have a fully trained crew which should make for plain sailing !

With a week to go, we have our first challenge.

We have discovered that the fridge has given up the ghost !

It's unlikely that we can get a replacement sourced and fitted in time so we will have to be a bit inventive when it comes to food planning for the four days.

We will be taking the dinghy so we need to remember to charge the battery for the electric engine.

Otherwise Liss's arms will get tired with all that rowing !

Monday 20th July

We go down to give Drift A Wey a bit of a clean.

Fee calls up Windsor Racecourse Marina and we now have a slight change of plan.

We now have a berth booked in for Wednesday night and also Go Go's Bar and Restaurant at 6pm (Better not spend too much time at the Waterman's !)

Wednesday 22nd July

Day one and we are on our way by 9:15

The first lock, Shepperton, is on Self Service which means extra work for the crew.



By the time we get to Chertsey Lock, Don is fully retrained and working the stern line while Liss starts gathering photographic evidence of all our endeavours.

At Staines Bridge Liss tidies the lines



while First Mate Fee explains to Don where he has been going wrong !

Don has that 'naughty boy' look



We are in the lock by the Runnymede-On-Thames Hotel and Spa where Fee gets chatting to four guys aboard 'Tipsea' who are on their way back to Harleyford Marina.

They went all the way down to London as far as the QE2 bridge in one go. That is about fifteen locks in total.

Sounds like way too much hard work !



Near Old Windsor Lock, Liss and Don both take a turn at the helm



By the time we are approaching Windsor, Liss is proficient in taking a stern line



We make good time. So much so that we have time to stop at Eton for a pint in the Watermans which is most welcome by all

We have one last one for the river at The Waterman's Arms.

Liss misunderstands the time constraint for the last leg of the journey to Windsor Racecourse Marina and has to neck a large white wine in fifteen minutes.

But she manages it - what a trooper !



We arrive on time at Windsor Racecourse Marina and moor in our allocated berth next to 'Hare of the Dog'

Is this a sign of things to come ?

We have booked at Go Go's restaurant for six o'clock.

So, after a welcome hot shower, we head for the restaurant and are shown to our table and given the now customary Covid Briefing on the Do's and Don'ts.



We tuck into some delicious sharing platters, washed down with Windhoek beer.



Unfortunately we have the last two bottles, so have to switch to wine.

After returning to Drift A Wey we settle into a nightcap.

When Liss announces she wants to get their bed ready, Fee says that we have to move the boat first.

Liss has a perplexed look on her face.

It later transpires that Liss thought we needed to switch berths in the marina !

In fact we just needed to move the dinghy out of the way so they could get to the bed !



Don and Liss are in the double berth in the bow. Graham and Fee are amidships in the converted dinette which can best be described as a cosy one-and-a-half berth. Privacy is difficult to achieve in such circumstances but we do our best.

At one point, once we'd settled down for the night, Liss is fast asleep and Don is dozing.

Graham needs to turn over so he leans over the edge and puts an arm down on the floor to take his weight. Fee thinks he is falling, grabs his boxer shorts and tries to haul him back onto the bed.

This results in a rather painful 'wedgie' for Graham.

Laughter is suppressed but suddenly Liss sits bolt upright and asks what's going on ?

This will take some explaining in the morning !

Thursday 23rd July

We awake to a lovely day and start our journey upstream, past Oakley Court near Bray. This is new territory for Don and Liss as we only went as far as Windsor on our previous trip with them.



Oakley Court was the site of an historic occasion, some years back, whereby a skipper and his mate moored up for lunch on the terrace.

Lunch turned into afternoon tea,

Afternoon tea turned into dinner.

Dinner was followed by nightcaps.

An accident with a glass of port meant that the money to pay the bill had to be washed first.



On the way back to the boat that night, the skipper badly twisted his ankle on a protruding tree root.

Fortunately there was a cold bottle of Crabbies to help reduce the swelling.



Determined not to risk a repeat performance, we sail on by 😊

Liss, who is now fully proficient in taking a stern line, helps get us through Boulders Lock



while Don helps with the washing up



We arrive at the islands below Cliveden.

There is no room on the islands but we find a great spot on the bank with a view upstream towards Cliveden House



After a couple of beers it's time to pump up the dinghy for a bit of fun



Believe me, my young friend,
there is nothing
- absolutely nothing -
half so much worth doing as
simply messing about in boats



Fiona radios in to say that the battery for the motor is flat and we are drifting ! Graham does a pathetic attempt at semaphore with the oars.

Liss believes us, Don doesn't.

Or does he ?



Don and Liss go for a walk up the river bank to the Cliveden Estate.

With a history peppered with intrigue, the Grade I listed stately home's most infamous scandal shook the British parliament.

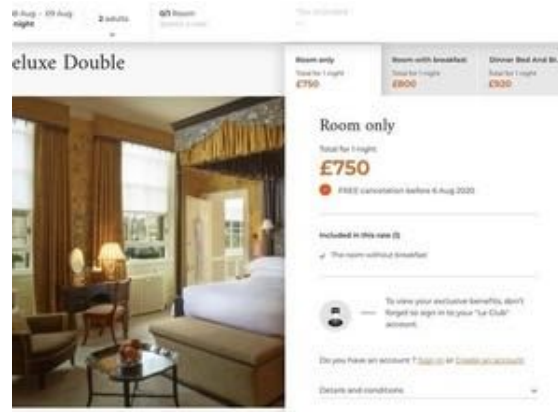
The year was 1961. While the Cold War was slowly chilling British politics, Cliveden House was engulfed in a sultry summer of sweltering heat. Cooling off in the now famous outdoor pool, was Christine Keeler, a nineteen year old mistress of a suspected Russian spy.

Attending a hot mid summer's party hosted by the then owner Lord Astor, the young woman was one of a few exclusive guests enjoying the luxurious celebrations held within Cliveden House's magnificent gardens. Also in attendance was John Profumo, an up-and-coming Conservative Secretary of State for War and husband of well-known actress, Valerie Hobson.

Profumo and Keeler embarked on an illicit affair following their chance meeting at Cliveden House; an affair which was to force his resignation, irrevocably damage the Prime Minister's reputation, and impact on the course of British politics forever

Don considers booking a room for the night as a treat for Liss.

However, on seeing the room rates, realises it would be cheaper to buy a small car.



Dinner tonight is chicken fajitas, specially prepared by first mate and chef Fiona.

The aroma, wafting from the galley, attracts comments from two ladies walking along the towpath.

They happen to return just as food is being served. After further complimentary comments from them and our insincere offer to join us, they continue on their walk.

The fajitas are delicious and the food is accompanied by fine wines.

Just because we will be back in civilisation tomorrow does not mean we have to consume all remaining alcohol on board this evening.

But it will lighten the load and save on fuel !

So, as the sun sets, we give it our best shot.



Friday 24th July

After a good night's sleep we decide to have a cup of coffee and then head off for Runnymede where we will spend the last night of our voyage.

We pass through the cut near Boulters Lock where an old man on a rocking chair, who is always there, now wears a mask.

Covid has got everywhere !



At Boulters Lock, Don is promoted to bow line duties.

Meanwhile is Liss looking rather stern at the stern ?

Or is she just concentrating ?



As we pass through Windsor at around 11 o'clock a strange magnetic force draws the boat over against the Eton bank.

Don, Liss and Fiona go into town to stock up on drinking water.

Don returns with the water, and one or two other supplies, in a shopping trolley he inherited from his grandmother.



The skipper has been preparing the boat when Don, Liss and Fiona return.

Clearly they have been scheming !

“Hey skipper. It’s 11.30 and we were just thinking. The pubs open in half an hour. Why don’t we hang around for a pint before we move on”

The mutiny succeeds and by five to twelve we are standing outside The George waiting for them to open their doors (something one usually associates with teenagers or seasoned drinkers)



After limiting ourselves to two drinks, we make full use of the facilities before leaving.



Clearly someone has spent a lot more time in here than we have.

By the time we reach Old Windsor Lock, Don has decided to take on supervisory responsibilities.

Not sure that Liss needs that right now !



We arrive at Runnymede to find that our favourite spot has been taken up by fishermen on the bank.

The skipper slowly approaches and the sight of Drift A Wey and the dirty looks from the crew is enough to encourage them to move.

Actually, they are very nice and accomodating.

We make sure we leave them enough room in front to continue with their fruitless task.



The First Mate negotiates with one of the Queen's swans and explains that we are only staying for one night.

The swan does not look convinced !



Graham improvises to keep the beer cold.



We are booked into the Italian Concept restaurant near the park at Runnymede. Graham and Don both treat themselves to a rare pizza, Liss has chicken in a cream sauce and Fee goes for homemade lasagne. All very delicious.

On the way back Fee and Liss steam ahead.

I wonder what they are scheming ?



We have the customary nightcap and Liss ensures that the Sauvignon Blanc wine box is completely empty.

Well, we think that's what she's doing !



Saturday 25th July

As expected, the weather is taking a turn for the worse today so we plan to make an early start.

We just have to wait for a passing crocodile to get out of the way.



Soon we are through Bell Weir Lock.

As Liss puts it “The journey back in the rain will be a new experience for us”

And it is. But we cope.

But Don and Fee both look a little forlorn.

Don mostly, because after a substandard performance at Penton Hook lock, he is temporarily demoted away from line duties.



Don gets a chance to redeem himself with excellent seamanship at Chertsey and Shepperton Locks.

Liss continues with her consistent performance astern.

We manage to avoid some, but not all, of the rain and reach our final destination in time to get home for a shower and a rest before an evening reconvention in the Jolly Farmer, a recap and a nightcap.

Another fun trip with Don and Liss who have now officially qualified as Third Mates.

