

# Drift A Wey 2016 April to May

We purchased this lovely Shetland 27 on 7th April 2016 having spent nearly a year without a boat.

She was called Elizabeth Mary but that was not really a name with any relevance for us.

After much deliberation we decided upon "Drift A Wey"



## **2016-4-10 (Graham and Fee)**

Now that the niggles identified in the survey have been fixed, it's time to take our new Shetland 27 home to Walton Marina.

Boat collection day is quite a logistical challenge.

First we take two cars down to Walton Marina and leave Fiona's car there. Then we drive over to Windsor Marina in Graham's car, board the boat and cruise down the Thames back to Walton Marina. Then we drive in Fiona's car back to Windsor Marina and finally drive both cars home !

We take a minimum of supplies for our first real journey. The idea being just to get the boat to Walton as quickly as possible because the calculations show that it could take up to six hours to get from Windsor Marina to Walton Marina, much depending on how many boats are on the river and the timing of when you arrive at the locks. If the locks are against you then it can take 20 minutes just to get through one lock.

Such is the leisurely nature of river cruising but on this occasion we just want to get from A to B before it gets dark.

Although we have boated before, every boat is different. The way the boat handles at close quarters and in reverse, the positioning of the mooring lines and cleats – all this has to be considered before we head off so we will be prepared for the first lock.

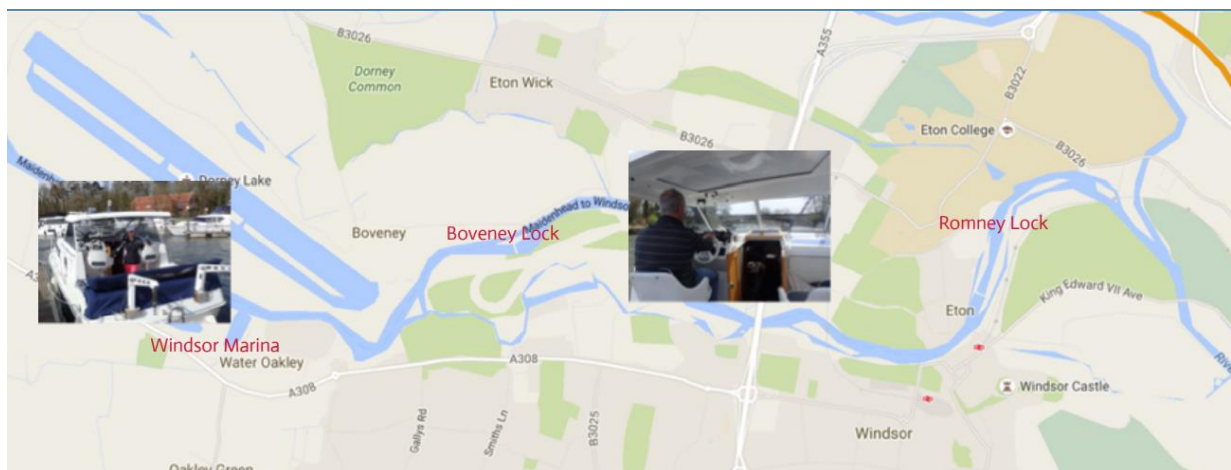
The weather forecast is for dry weather all day. The engine starts first time which is also a good sign.

There are seven locks to negotiate today which means stopping and starting the engine about a dozen times – fingers crossed.

What a pleasure it is to have a bow-thruster – how did I manage without one before ? – at times, not very well !

We are ready to go.

The first stretch takes us through Boveney Lock, past Windsor Racecourse and then on through Windsor town to Romney Lock.

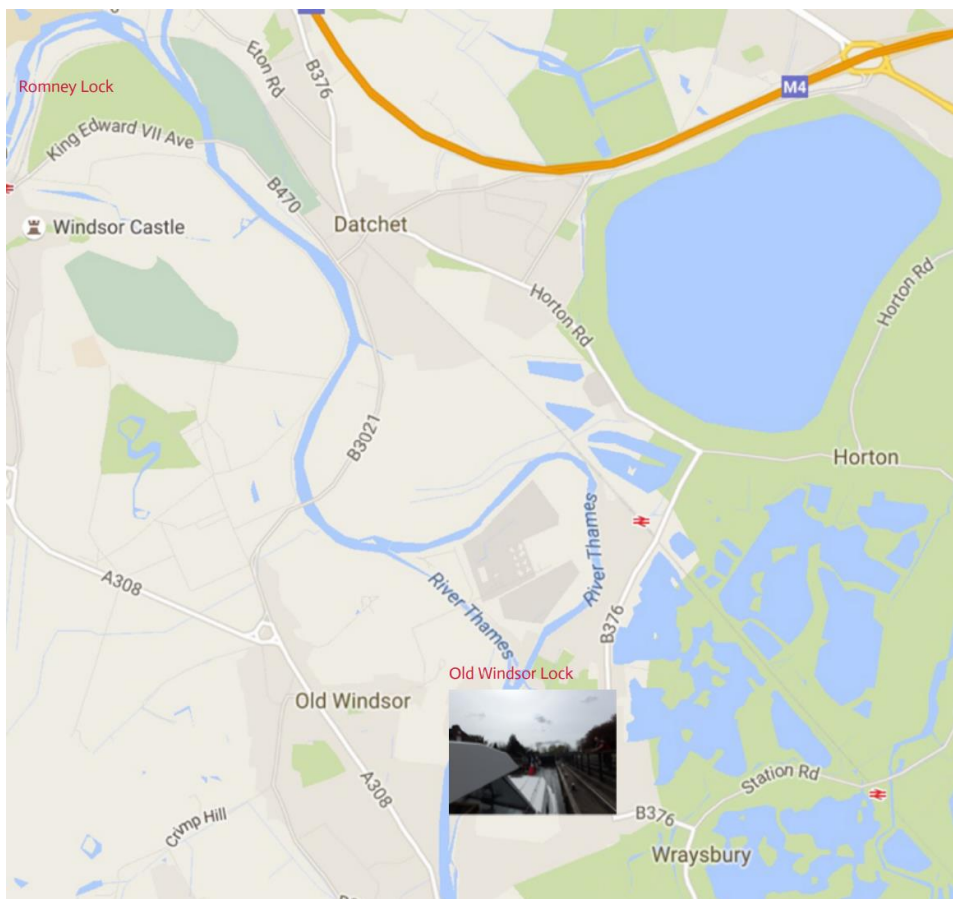




At Romney Lock we meet up with a family aboard a lovely old wooden boat. They are taking her from the Kennet and Avon all the way to Penton Hook marina where she can be lifted out and maintenance carried out before the 2016 boating season gets fully under way.

We follow them through Datchet, alongside the Windsor estate to Old Windsor Lock. Old Windsor Lock is unmanned today so we have to manage the lock between us. At least the electricity is working. The Lock Keeper at Romney Lock had pre-warned us that this might not be the case as there had been a power cut earlier.

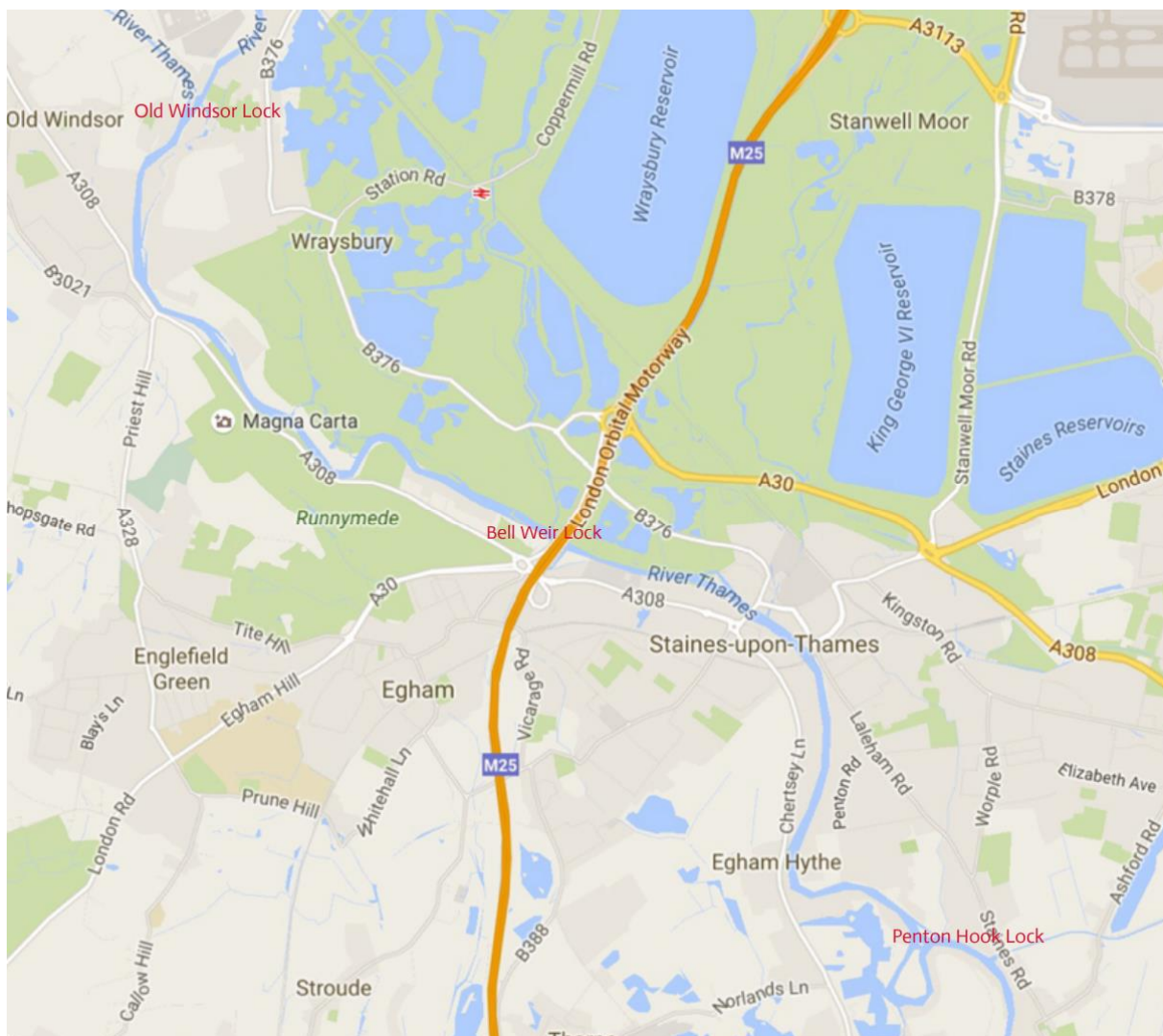
Fee still has time to chat to the team leader of some students who have stopped for a break midway through their 10km walk.



The next stage takes us through one of our favourite places for stopping over – Runnymede. But on this occasion we push on through to Bell Weir Lock by the Runnymede Hotel.

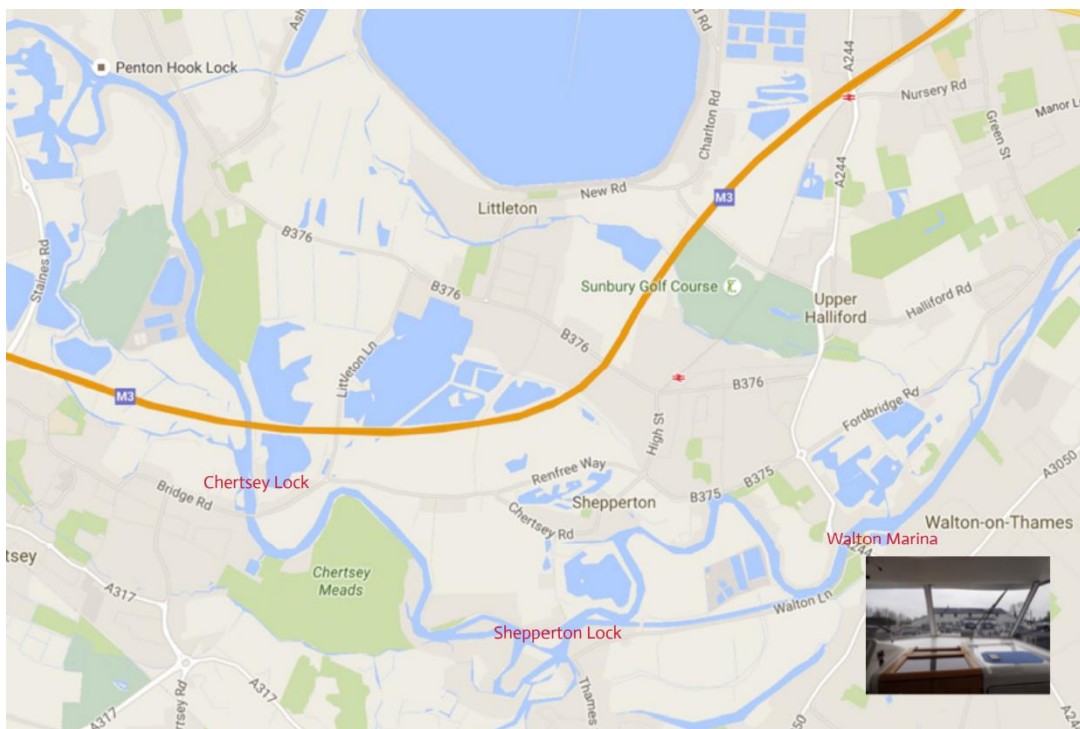
From there we cruise through Staines-upon-Thames (as it is now known), being careful to watch our speed as we spot the bright yellow Environment Agency boat which is patrolling the area today.

Once through Penton Hook Lock, our travelling companions take a sharp right into Penton Hook Marina and we head on down on our own.



Only two more locks to negotiate but the wind is picking up. This presents a few challenges manoeuvring in the locks. We start off trying to moor on one side but before we can secure the stern, we are blown across to the other. This is OK today when the lock is not busy, but could be a problem when we have to squeeze in beside another boat – more practice required !

Chertsey and Shepperton Locks bring us down to the final stretch and home to Walton Marina. We have made very good time. The locks have pretty much all been with us and we make it in just over four hours.



We have a nice wide mooring berth and it is not long before we are all secure.

All we have to do now is go back to Windsor to collect Graham's car.

We deserve a beer after all that !!!!



2016-5-7/8

(Graham, Fee)

Spring finally arrives and the weather forecast for the weekend is hot and sunny – mostly! We decide it is time for our first overnight stay aboard DRIFT AWAY at Runnymede.

Saturday morning we load up the car and head down to Walton Marina. Sure enough, the sun is shining. Having filled up with diesel and pumping out last weekend, we just need to top up fresh water and we are ready to go.

A short trip along the Desborough Channel, dodging the rowers and we reach Shepperton Lock. We follow another boat in and negotiate the lock without incident.

When we reach Chertsey Lock we feel the impact of the Environment Agency no longer paying for Lock Keepers – it is unmanned. Technically this is not a problem because we, like many others on the river, know how to operate the locks confidently. However, it does add considerably to the journey time as the Lock Keepers are much more efficient at getting boats through quickly and safely.

The same is true for Penton Hook lock which is also unmanned. We are about to close the gates when we see "Ricochet" approaching at great speed. Ricochet also lives at Walton Marina and she was still warming up her engine when we left the marina. She must have been going some to reach Penton Hook at the same time as us! We let her join our convoy, close the gates behind her and open the sluices. Soon we are making way along the next stretch of river but notice that Ricochet is nowhere to be seen. Has she broken down in the lock? Did she decide to turn around and go back – that would be a bit unusual because you wouldn't normally bother going through a lock, just to turn around and go straight back through. Who knows?

As we approach our final lock for the day – Bell Weir – we notice what appears to be a wedding party at the Runnymede Hotel. In the river, moored to the bank, is a yellow floating Jacuzzi! Such is the surprise that we do not have time to get a picture of the people drinking champagne and enjoying bubbles of all kinds. We do capture one on the way back though.



We pass through the unmanned Bell Weir lock and moor up at one of our favourite spots on the bank at Runnymede.

It costs £7 for 24hrs or £35 for a 12 month unlimited Season Ticket.

We go for the Season Ticket as we will be here quite a lot!







The Lucy Fisher was built in 1982 as a replica Victorian paddle steamer, as used on African rivers. Her purpose was to appear in the 1984 British movie Tarzan - the legend of Greystoke and she was taken out to Cameroon for this role.

After completion of filming, she was shipped back to the UK and French Brothers Ltd purchased her in 1989.



After reading the papers and enjoying the sunshine, Fee cooks some delicious filet steak for dinner al fresco. Then a short walk along the bank takes us to the Bells of Ouzeley Harvester. An opportunity to sit outside for a drink but, more importantly, an opportunity to make use of their toilet facilities. We do have a decent toilet on board, but much better to use someone else's facilities whenever possible! Walking back to the boat we are attacked by many swarms of flies just as the sun is going down. Once back on board we are safe from bugs with our canopy fully closed.

Then it's time for bed. We have a new fitted sheet, v shaped duvet, v shaped duvet cover and pillow cases. The berth is more comfortable and noticeably bigger than Oyster Bay's, so much so that the fitted sheet ordered by Graham does not fit at all. Likewise the duvet cover is too small for the duvet. We use the fitted sheet to cover half the bed, the duvet cover for the rest of the bed and then use the duvet without a cover. Fortunately it starts off as quite a warm night, but does get a bit cold by morning.

Fee suggests we re-assess the bed-linen situation before the next overnight stay.

By the time we get up in the morning, the sun has heated up the cockpit like a greenhouse and we look forward to breakfast in the warmth. Fee goes to make a cup of tea – no tea bags!

Never mind, we have some sachets of latte coffee which we enjoy with a croissant before Fee goes to make an omelette – no eggs!

Graham suggests we re-assess the catering situation before the next overnight stay.

It's then time to head back downstream. The daisies are out at Runnymede park.





On the cruise back, we enjoy a mixture of manned and unmanned locks and a mixture of helpful and not so helpful fellow boaters. You know you have those days when you get stopped at every red light? well we seem to turn up at each lock whilst the previous group of boat are still going down. We then have to wait until they leave the lock and the next group of boats come up. All in all, this probably added an extra hour to our journey but the sun is shining on the hottest day of the year so far and we are not in any rush.

Although it is very hot, there is a bit of a breeze at times, making some of the locks a bit tricky. Going through locks is a bit like playing golf. You get one just right and think "that's it - I've cracked it" only to find that you completely mess up the approach to the next one and can't get the stern close enough to get a rope over the bollard. The good news is that you are not the only one who messes it up now and then.

By the time we get to Shepperton Lock we are starting to get a bit hungry and looking forward to Sunday Lunch somewhere.



We now have a neighbour at Walton Marina but we negotiate the mooring with precision.

Oh, and we notice that Ricochet is safely back in her berth.

We have very much enjoyed our first overnight stay on DRIFT AWAY but Fee has a long list of things we need to do to make the next trip even more enjoyable.



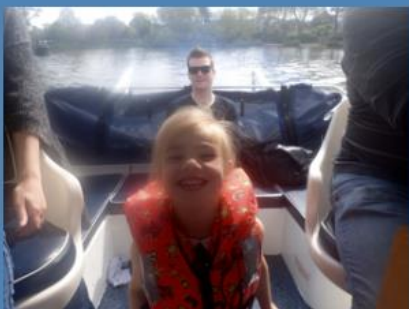
2016-5-15 (Graham, Fee, Jenni, Kev, Leah, Harry)

Another sunny Sunday heralds the arrival of Leah and Harry for their first voyage aboard DRIFT AWAY. Graham and Fee go down early to prepare the boat and arrange for Jenni, Kev, Leah and Harry to meet at the marina.

At first Leah is a bit reluctant to put on her lifejacket but, after a little coaching from First Mate Fee, she is happy to obey the boat rules. With Harry there is no debate – straight into his new yellow lifejacket.



Leah is full of enthusiasm and excitement. She kind of remembers being on Oyster Bay but it's a bit vague. Harry, on the other hand, is not one to feel penned in. The constraints of being on a boat are something new and not something that he immediately responds to. This all changes however when Harry takes the wheel.



We go around Desborough Island avoiding the rowers and moor up alongside the bank at Shepperton for lunch. Leah is happy to stay on board, walking up to the bow and sitting on the cabin roof with the school class bear who has come along for the experience.



Harry prefers to get off but wants to jump into the river, rather than stay on the bank. We all decide it is best if we set off again and eat on the move.



As expected, Leah enjoys every minute of the experience.

None of us are really sure if Harry is going to take to boating – maybe when he is a little older and can play a more active role in the proceedings – after all, he is not even two years old yet!





2016-5-28/29

(Graham, Fee)

Another Bank Holiday and the forecast is good . . . at least for Saturday and Sunday so the plan is to go up to Windsor.

On Friday Fee phones up to book a table at the Windsor Racecourse Marina restaurant (Go Go's) and the only available time is 5:45pm. That's a little early, but better than having to resort to the Harvester up the road.

Saturday morning looks fine so, having filled up with fresh water and done the usual checks we head off at about 10:15.

We have the normal slow journey up to Shepperton Lock as there are a plethora of rowing boats and we don't want to sink the skiffs with our wake – do we ?

As it's Bank Holiday weekend, all the locks are manned which makes for a smoother journey over all.



Between Shepperton and Chertsey Locks Fee calls ahead to Windsor Racecourse Marina to book a mooring. It's a good job she did – apparently half of Walton Marina are on their way up to Windsor this weekend and visitor berths are limited.

As usual we move up through the locks with pretty much the same boats, one of which is Harriet, a fairly new Viking 24. As it turns out, Harriet is also from Walton Marina and the couple on board are very pleasant. We discuss the relative merits of a newer Viking 24 vs an older larger Shetland 27 with them and it's all down to priorities and preference. He is a chef and she is a hairdresser and they live in Mitcham which is a 45 minute drive to Walton. They are doing a four day trip up to Marlow and back. Apparently they have a friend in Marlow who used to be in Depeche Mode? Initially they are going to also stay at Windsor Racecourse Marina on Saturday night, but later decide to push on up to Cliveden as the weather is so nice. No doubt we will bump into them in the future – not literally!

Nobody in the yellow floating Jacuzzi, known as a Hot Tug, outside the Runnymede Hotel today!



And the famous floating shed is not on the move today!



A gentle cruise with several heron on guard



Fee catches up on some reading between locks



The approach to Windsor Racecourse Marina is a narrow channel, winding its way through the trees – always makes us think of a boat trip in the upper reaches of the Amazon – not that we've been there, just what we imagine.

Unfortunately on this occasion there is a very small day boat called St Trinians coming the other way. It is narrow but there is ample room to pass each other and it wasn't really necessary for a troubled girl on St Trinians to shout expletives in between gulps of wine as we passed.



We arrive at Windsor Racecourse Marina at about 4:30 and are offered a berth very close to the bar/restaurant but it is tricky reversing in avoiding large expensive boats on either side – thank goodness we have a bow-thruster!

One of the boats nearby is a Viking 26 centre cockpit. It has pink balloons on the bow. Two middle aged men are sunbathing. The boat is called Nancy - figure that one out for yourself.

We later find out that there are also two ladies aboard Nancy and they are preparing for a charity ladies 100km night cycle ride in aid of cancer – we wish them luck.

A quick shower and it's time for a little glass of fizzy before dinner.



We chat to our next door neighbour who has a 36 foot Broom – it's a boat, not something to sweep up with, nor a witch's transport!

Lawrence (or Lol as he likes to be known) has long hair and looks like a middle aged rocker. We later find out that he is growing his hair for a year for charity and only has six weeks to go! But more of Lol later!

It's time for dinner. Graham opts for a fillet steak and Fee goes for a Zulu steak. This is chunks of fillet steak arranged vertically on a skewer over a bowl of spicy rice.



The meal, as expected, is delicious. We have to leave the table by 7:45 to make room for the next shift but this is no problem and we adjourn to the bar. The bar has been completely refurbished since we were last here. It took them quite a while to do this because the first attempt failed a health and safety check – apparently the roof had to be able to withstand a hurricane and three feet of snow.

Anyway, we buy more drinks and settle down for a chat with Lol who is nursing a pint of lager.

Lol and his wife Trish have developed a small marina on the Medway at East Farleigh in Kent. To make room for paying customers, they have moved their own boat (SANDS) up to Windsor for the summer.

By 9 o'clock we are ready to retire to Drift a Wey where we enjoy some cheese and a nightcap before bed.



Next morning we are awake early as usual. On the way up to the toilets, the two Nancy men are sitting on the bar terrace drinking champagne. They have been up all night in support of their wives who had finished the cycling at about 5am. How drinking several bottles of wine and champagne demonstrate support we are not too sure, but good on them anyway.

The weather today is not quite as nice as yesterday – a bit overcast and not as warm but it's not raining, so roof down and off we go.





On the approach to Old Windsor Lock there is a narrow channel to negotiate – a bit scary when you see the big pleasure boat approaching in the other direction.



With Graham's expert helmsman-ship we pass each other unscathed and arrive at Old Windsor Lock. This is an unusual sight, especially for a Bank Holiday, a completely empty lock with no boats coming up !



By midday we are approaching Runnymede and it seems an appropriate time to stop for lunch alongside the meadow.



After lunch we head on down to Walton Marina, arriving around 4ish to complete a great weekend away. The forecast for Bank Holiday Monday has turned poor so we cancel any plans for an additional trip out tomorrow.

After a shower and a change we retire to the Jolly Farmer where Ernest, Jane, Don, Liss, Frank and Rachel have been enjoying Sunday lunch. We join them for a drink and recount our tales.