

Oyster Bay 2014

After a very wet winter that saw the worst flooding in the UK for over a hundred years, the Thames finally got back to a navigable level in March.

2014-3-22 (Graham, Fee)

The river is now down to an acceptable level and, whilst it is still running fast, there are no Environment Agency warning boards up so it is the first time it is safe to go out this year.

With great excitement at 1 pm we get on board and head upstream. Shepperton Lock is still closed under maintenance which was delayed by the poor river conditions during the first part of the year, but the "Desborough Island Round-trip" beckons.

Having just passed under the new Walton Bridge, Fee happens to query the fuel situation. Hmmm - I'm sure I filled up before the winter - or did I? A quick check reveals that there is a dribble in the bottom of the tank. With great calmness I say that, whilst there is enough petrol in the tank, it might be better if we went back and filled up before we ventured too much further. Too calm - Fee knows immediately! A quick handbrake turn and we are on our way downstream. Luckily, with the high current, we are able to throttle well back and conserve fuel as we glided back with me constantly on the lookout for a safe place to pull over should the need arise. Fortunately we arrive back at Walton Marina in one piece.

After popping up to the local petrol station for a fill up, we set out again and had a very pleasant, and this time relaxing, trip around Desborough Island observing all the aftermath of the winter's rain and flooding.

A good first trip of the year.

2014-3-29 (Graham, Kev, Mark, Sam, Linda)



Fee was on a girly lunch so missed out on this one. It was a sunny day and I brought Kev over to collect his car from the night before. I mentioned that I was going out on the boat that afternoon and asked him if he fancied it. He said he'd find out what Mark was doing and get back to me. Before I knew it, Kev, Mark, Sam and Linda (Mark's Mum) were in the Jolly having a pre-trip drink.

After that we went down to the boat armed with wine, beer and picky bits to eat. We set sail at 2:30pm from Walton Marina.

We went round Desborough Island where Mark took over the helm. Then we went past D'Oyly Carte Island and round the backwater of Hamhaugh Island.

At that point Sam took the helm and guided us back down the backwater to rejoin the main river near Shepperton Lock. As we passed the weir opposite The Minnow, the current was very strong and swirly which made Sam's steering interesting. But she managed fine and took us down the Desborough Cut. At that point we did a naughty bit of acceleration which took the helmslady out of her newly found comfort zone. Then it was under Walton Bridge and on downstream to the weir just before The Weir pub.

At that point we turned around and Kev took us back upstream, past The Anglers to the marina where we moored safely and without incident.

We then adjourned back to The Jolly for further refreshments where Fee joined us to top up on her lunch intake.

A very nice impromptu day in the sunshine - not bad for March.

2014-4-19 (Graham, Fee)



Easter weekend and the weather is a bit variable. However, Fee is in need of some new clothes and I am in need of a boat trip. So we decide to take Oyster Bay downstream to Kingston.

After filling up with fuel we set off for Sunbury Lock, which takes about twenty minutes. First lock of the season, can we remember what to do?

Going down through the lock is a bit easier than coming up because you can drop the line over the bollard rather than having to throw it up and over. First lock successfully navigated, we move on towards Molesey lock which is another thirty-five minutes cruising through lower Sunbury.

A fifteen minute wait and then we have another safe transit of the lock which, once you are in, takes about five minutes.

Once through Molesey lock, it's a forty minute cruise past the lovely Hampton Court Palace and on down to Kingston. Fortunately there was room outside John Lewis so we moored up at 12:15 and went shopping. All in all, it was two hours door to door.

Two pairs of cropped trousers and two tops later it's time for lunch. We went back and moved the boat up outside Browns restaurant where we had fish and chips at a very nice outside table.

After lunch we headed back to Walton. The locks were a bit trickier because of the height we had to throw the lines and because the wind had picked up. You can get blown around a bit in the locks.

The trip back took two hours which seems to be the norm.

If you have to go shopping, this is definitely the way to do it!

2014-5-18 (Graham, Fee, Claire, Kev, Jenni, Leah, ????)

A glorious Sunday so we went for a picnic.



Leah is now getting used to "driving the ship"!



Kev gets put to work for his first time through a lock.



Lunchtime !!



Washing up time for the galley slave



...and relax!



2014-5-31 (Graham, Fee)

A weekend trip up to Runnymede for an overnight stay. Yellow warning boards showing "Stream Increasing" on Saturday morning so it was quite a challenge going upstream. It took three and a bit hours which is about right but we did use quite a lot of fuel.



Our favourite, favourite spot was already taken but we found another one just a short distance further upstream.

This must be the coolest boat on the Thames. A floating shed !!



and perhaps the least cool canocist on the Thames ?



What a lovely sight to wake up to in the morning.



Mummy swan brings the family over for breakfast and one little chap decides to have a piggy-back !



Fiona the "Lock Chick" has a little rest.

The weather was much sunnier on Sunday for the trip back. Although the Yellow Boards were now showing "Stream Decreasing" there was still quite a current and we made it back to Walton in record time - approximately two and a half hours and a lot less fuel consumed !

This was a dry run for our two week holiday in July/August. The gas appliances have been serviced so we needed to make sure the water heater was working - which it did once Graham switched the gas tap the right way !

Also we kept the fridge on most of the time to see how much it drains the battery. Still not 100% sure because we also used the solar charger to drip feed the battery.

Fiona now has a list of things to do before the big adventure ☺

2014-6-12 (Graham, Ernest)



Ernest and I had met up on Wednesday night whilst Jane was "up north" and Fee was out with a girly mate, so we planned a boat trip for the following evening. Jane was going out with a girly mate and Fee was planning to study. Boys Boat Trip then!!!!

The trains from London were rubbish and Ernest was cycling home from work but we still managed to get down to the boat for about 7:30pm.

A few quick checks and we were off to The Weir. On the way down we spotted Sean Duffy aboard 'Gideon'. Sean and his fiancée Louise work at the same place as me. We signalled our intention with the internationally understood 'raising of the beer glass' motion.

There was plenty of space outside The Weir so we moored up. A bit of an accident with the canopy, but nothing that a bit of tape couldn't solve for now . . . and we hadn't even had a drink yet.

Settled down at a table in the sun armed with Beer, Scampi and Chips wondering how the other half live. About fifteen minutes later Sean and Trevor, his full-time engine mechanic, joined us.

After a pleasant chat and a couple of beers we headed back to Walton. It was only when I got into work the next day I found out that 'Gideon' had broken down . . . again - I used to have a boat like that!!

All in all, a very pleasant evening.

2014-6-22 (Graham, Fee)



We had spent most of Saturday tidying up the garden now that the patio is finished. We even got money back on unused slabs. So we decided that Sunday would be boat day. We had had a gas leak which Bill Boat Gas had fixed in the week so it was a good opportunity to check it out.

It was another sunny day and we went down through Sunbury Lock and Molesey Lock as far as Hampton Court. We are definitely way past the novice stage for going through locks - practice makes perfect ! It's usually very busy at Hampton Court but fortunately there was a mooring right outside the Palace so we stopped for lunch.

Fee really likes the Garden shop opposite the palace so we paid a visit and bought a handy ice bag - a bit like an ice-bucket but it's a plastic bag so a bit more portable.

We headed back after lunch because there was the suggestion of a meet-up at the cricket green with Mark and Sam , and possibly Mr Doyle.

As it happens, the weather turned a bit cooler and also there was no cricket so it was back home to B-B-Q a piece of lamb. Unfortunately when Fee took the lamb out she realised that it needed 3 hours cooking. That's a lot of B-B-Q gas so we settled for Cafe Rouge.

2014-8-14 (Graham)

It's Thursday in my last week of holidays. Weather forecast is reasonably good (sunshine and showers). Fee is at work so I decide the time has come to take Oyster Bay into the Wey Navigation for the first time . . . and on my own !

We have people coming round for dinner and I am doing the cooking so I need to be back by 3pm to start preparing. How long can it take to go through two locks and reach the outskirts of Weybridge ?

I figure if I leave Walton at 11 am, it will take 1 hour max to get to Weybridge Business Park where Fee works, half an hour there and then an hour to get back so should be home by 2pm.

I decide to go and buy the ingredients early and before venturing out on the boat - good decision !

I leave Walton at 10:45, head up the Desborough Cut and arrive at the entry lock to Wey Navigation. There is a pre-lock, followed by the main lock, both of which are managed by the lock-keeper.

The lock-keeper helps me through the locks and then stings me to the tune of £11 for a day licence to Wey Navigation. There are two of us boats going up together so we help each other through the second lock. I arrive outside Fee's workplace at approx 12:15 which is perfect.

After a short while we take Oyster Bay back to the second lock at "Wey Bridge" and Fee helps me through. It's a very deep lock and, thinking about it, I've no idea how I would have been able to get back down onto the boat to take her out of the lock - something to bear in mind for next time !

I arrive back at the first lock on the stroke of one to find that the lock-keeper has gone for lunch until 2pm and the lock is padlocked shut!

One hour to hang around, which is OK except that the weather gradually worsens. By 2pm a thunderstorm is brewing.

By 2:05pm Oyster Bay is in the lock on her own. I am standing on the side with two lines, one bow, one stern. The heavens open and there is thunder and lightening. The lock is emptying so I step back on board.

A few moments later I notice that the bow line is stuck on the wooden bollard. I climb back off but cannot loosen the line. By the time the lock-keeper is able to close the sluice and stop the lock from emptying further, the rope has tightened further, the boat is being suspended by the bow line and then there is a loud BANG!

The cleat has burst off the deck, the boat has bounced into the water and I am left on the side with one stern line in my hand attached to Oyster Bay which is over six foot below me.

Rather than re-filling the lock, which could cause further issues, the best solution is for me to climb down the ladder inside the lock.

I do so, the lock-keeper hands me down the stern line and I head out of the lock and back towards Walton.

I guess the damage was minimal when you consider what could have happened and the repair costs for the cleat should be manageable.

I arrive home and begin the meal preparations well behind schedule. I change from what was meant to be a Nigel Slater type chef into a Gordon Ramsay type chef.

Nonetheless, the Boeuf Bourguignon seems to go down well with Ernest & Jane and Don & Liss.

Big Lesson learned today!!!

2014-12-6 (Graham, Fee)

If you have to do Christmas Shopping in Kingston, there is only one way to go !

Weather forecast is for one of those cold, clear, crispy days and it is certainly that. The days are short so we figure we have to leave Kingston by 2pm to make it back to the Marina before dark at around 4pm. That means starting off between 9 and 10 to allow for a couple of hours shopping.

We pop into Weybridge to Cafe Nero for a coffee and muffin to set us up for the day, then head off to the boat. Whilst we are preparing I realise I do not have my phone. This is where 'Find my iPhone' comes in handy. I'd left it in the coffee shop. Fortunately it's Weybridge and somebody has handed it in to the staff - Phew !!!

Temperature has been below zero overnight and Oyster Bay is covered in ice. There is no wind but it is still very cold. Big question is will the engine start ? Our fingers freeze as we undo the metal fittings on the canopy. The deck is like an ice rink and the windscreen needs more defrosting than the car did ! The engine starts after a couple of attempts which in itself is a miracle.

We pull back from the berth only to find that the windscreen has frozen over again and visibility is very limited. Fee dons her lifejacket and ventures out over the slippery deck to re-scrape. Eventually visibility is restored and we head out onto the river.

Not surprisingly the river is pretty empty of bigger boats - plenty of rowers but no cruisers and no sailing dinghies - happy days.

As we approach Sunbury Lock it becomes apparent that the main lock is closed for repairs and we have to use the old lock which is manual! A first time for everything :-)

The principle and sequence for all locks is the same, whether automated or manual, so we are able to figure it out. Fee has to become the main Lock Manager so that I am free to navigate the boat in and out. It's a bit slower both being manual and having no lock-keeper to operate things so we have to factor that into the return journey too.

We arrive at Molesey Lock in Hampton Court pretty much on schedule and, again, no lock-keeper. This one at least is automated though and a breeze compared with Sunbury Old Lock!

We've had the engine running more than usual due to the cold so we keep an eye out for likely petrol points and spot a pump at Thames Ditton Marina just where the Portsmouth Road starts to run alongside the river. Thought we should have enough fuel but don't want to run out in the winter as it's getting dark!

Approaching Kingston we see that our normal spot outside John Lewis is free - yippee - that makes life easier.



We have a very successful shopping trip, grabbing some hot food before setting off back just before 2pm. With Christmas music blasting out of the portable speaker we are feeling very pleased with ourselves as we cruise along.



Again the river is quiet so no queuing at the locks. This time there is a lock-keeper at Molesey Lock, which is great, but where was he earlier ??? In the pub, no doubt!

Sunbury Old Lock still has to be negotiated manually, but by now, Fee has fully mastered the art of Lock Management and we are soon on the last stretch heading into a bright orange sunset.

Back home and then up to Red's to finish off the day with Cocktails. How very civilised!