

Drama in Market Drayton

We may have broken a record of some kind today having covered a total of one and a half miles before mooring up for the night. The achievement hasn't come easily, we have had to work our way down with a couple of five mile days and then a three and a two until distances and times become meaningless and what dictates our stopping place is all about location. I think we made our break through on the day that we stopped for an early lunch in a

beautiful elevated location and never got round to starting again. It's amazing how much time you can spend sitting on the back of the boat watching the wildlife and just being lost in the peace and quiet.



Tyrley Wharf – sans pub

We spent last night at a place called Tyrley Wharf just outside and above the small town of Market Drayton. It was another case of stopping before we had really got started but we were so struck by the setting and the weather was so enticing it seemed like as good a place as any to pass an evening. We were actually so close to the town that we were able to walk down the flight of five locks and do a bit of shopping for our evening meal but we weren't tempted by bright lights and strolled back to our quiet

backwater. Our mooring was in the shadow of the old wharf cottages and associated buildings which have all been lovingly restored and converted to accommodation. Sadly the ale house that served the old working boatmen didn't survive. We had no phone signal or TV to entertain us but it didn't matter at all. There were other boaters to while away the time with and as the evening sun went down the bird song and activity more than competed with anything that the BBC might have to offer.



Plenty of neighbours to chat to

In the morning we topped up with water before beginning the descent of the locks in more glorious sunny weather intending to travel beyond Market Drayton and another set of five locks. An elderly couple on a very old traditional

boat were behind us in the queue for the first lock so as the lock was 'set' and it didn't need filling we let them go in front of us to save them a bit of work. Big mistake.

As we walked down and back up the flight yesterday we had learned that these particular locks had a few tricks up their sleeves just waiting to catch out the unprepared.



Looking back up the flight of locks
One boat had become completely
stuck on a concrete shelf just as
we were passing and other boaters
had warned us of fierce by-washes
that could push a boat off course
and onto the shallow off side
banks.



The dreaded by-wash – think narrow boat
in a washing machine

With the help of a friendly
volunteer lock keeper we passed
through the first two locks
without too much problem but then
things started to get complicated.
Other boats were coming up the

locks so there was a bit of careful manoeuvring around each other and then on entering the fourth lock everything came to a halt. It seemed that the people on the old boat that had gone ahead of us had been washed to the off side by the strong current and then having got themselves unstuck had fallen foul of the concrete shelf on the other side. All movement of boats through the system came to a standstill and I found myself sitting in an empty lock for half an hour. This was the lock with the very strong by-wash at its exit and I was

grateful to pick up a few tips from the lock keeper while I waited. It seemed that the trick was to use power to drive through the current and head for the next open lock in the manner of an express train entering a tunnel. The difference of course is that express trains are on rails and can't really miss the tunnel, whereas I was not and the prospect of missing the entrance to the lock with sixteen tons of steel moving at full tilt wasn't worth thinking about. These locks are much longer than our boat so I backed up and took a run at it.

I'm not sure which was running faster, the by-wash or my adrenalin but with a bit of a shimmy and a hasty application of reverse I managed to land myself in the target hole without destroying anything more substantial than my nerves.

<http://www.gillandtony.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Bywash.mp4>
Video of the by-wash

That was quite enough excitement for one day so with a mile and a half of travel and five locks behind us we pulled up in the town

and put the kettle on for a
calming cup of tea and a second
breakfast.