

Getting wound up about nothing

We've been living on the boat for a month now and I think it's fair to say that we can class ourselves as 'live-aboards'. Novice 'live-aboards' I'll grant you but 'live-aboards' all the same. We have also manoeuvred the boat in and out of marinas, through locks and swing bridges and battled sideways winds completely ineffectively.



Perfect day for a winding hole

Maybe you could call us seasoned novices. From here on I suppose it really is just a matter of practice and experience apart from one particular manoeuvre which had, until last Friday, eluded me. Or, more accurately, I had

avoided. The operation in question was turning the boat around on the canal. It's the watery equivalent of a three (or possibly five or seven) point turn and it can only be performed in specific places where the canal widens out into what is called a winding hole. There is much debate about the pronunciation of this canal feature based on whether or not you are thinking in terms of wrapping cotton around a bobbin, winding; or, encouraging a baby to burp after a good feed, winding. If you see what I mean. Based on the fact that narrow boats never

had engines in their original form then winding as in baby burping makes sense because the wind would have been used to assist with the turning procedure. I could wind myself up in knots discussing this but it isn't really the subject of the blog so let's leave it there. Pronounce it how you like.



Gill in full control

Back to my concerns over the actual turning business and why I was apprehensive. There are two issues really. The first is making a judgement as to whether or not the hole in question is actually big enough to turn our 57' boat

around in and the second, which is related, is the probability of getting stuck, grounded on the shallows at the edges of the canal. It's easy to blow these things out of proportion by over contemplating them and that's exactly what I had done. My mind was partially put at rest by a friendly lock keeper. When I told him that it was the only thing I hadn't yet mastered and that I was a bit nervous about it he came up with a bit of infallible logic to put my mind at ease. He pondered the problem for a moment and then said; "You know the canal network

is about 200 years old and to the best of my knowledge, there are no boats stuck in winding holes." I nearly replied that I might be the first but thought better of it and laughed heartily at my unfounded concerns instead.



Did we really come through there?

Last Friday was forecast to be wall to wall sunshine and, most importantly, dead calm. There would never be a more suitable opportunity for a bit of winding hole turning so having failed to come up with any plausible excuse for not going we sailed off under a cloudless blue sky. Forty minutes and two miles later we turned the boat around without grounding or wrapping any trees or submerged debris around the prop and we are not, as I imagined we might be, still stuck in the winding hole three days later.



In the hole



That's close enough

The whole process was completely without drama and I actually really enjoyed it. In other words, as is so often the case, I had been worrying about nothing. It was a classic case of the monkey on the shoulder whispering in my

ear; “you might get stuck”, “you might foul the prop”, “the winding hole might be too small”, and so it goes on until the problem becomes insurmountable.

Not listening to that pesky little monkey is a lesson that I have to just keep on learning over and over. The lock keeper was right, there aren't any boats stuck in winding holes but if that monkey has his way he'll drive you into a hole that you really may never get out of. Don't listen to him.