



Image: PlankPR

with a very real sorrow for those we have lost and for those whose have lost loved ones and friends of their own and all those whose lives that been changed forever over the last months. Maybe the space, the areas of quiet and the natural surroundings within the Marina can offer some comfort.

Feeling Strange

Almost everything is going to feel strange for quite some time for many different reasons, so maybe we just take things gently, making time for both ourselves and each other as we move forward.

Thanks to those who kept us going

And – importantly – thank you to those who have kept the Marina going since March. The Partners, the Office, the Housekeeping Team, the Grounds' and Maintenance Staff, Heg and Richard with the Beetroot Tree, Chrissy and Grahame with Still Waters and all our volunteers who fetched, carried, delivered and supported each other. Thank you, again, to all those in our community who are key workers and have been – and still are - making their invaluable contribution to the wider community.

The impact

All these people have had their own lives impacted by the virus just like you have but have worked extra hard to support you and took on the extra risk of infection in doing so.

Welcome – We're Open!!

As we take cautious steps towards a 'new' normal, it is a pleasure to see our retail businesses opening their doors to the members of the community and visitors. We should remember the benefits and advantage of 'shopping local' and rejoice that we have such an amazing range of high quality shops on our doorstep! So too we welcome back the leisure boaters, holiday lodge owners, visitors and (socially-distanced!) friends and family. Our willingness to re-engage

with each other and continue or renew our support for local shops and businesses needs to be matched with care and a patience as we must watch out for ourselves and our neighbours.

Safety Procedures

Each shop and business has established the required and appropriate set of safety procedures so please stay alert and watch for them.

This sincere welcome back is tempered



Pete and Sue Horridge brought their holiday lodges at Mercia Marina to our television screens and to national attention with their participation in *Four in a Bed* Channel 4 Programme through the week of the 15 June (though filmed last year). They (together with almost all the other competitors) were honest, fair and kind to their fellow hosts at the other three establishments. When it was their turn to host at Mercia, they did so with charm, their usual hospitality and genuine welcome. But there was a lot going on! The social media fan clubs became hives of increasingly outraged activity as time went by. With all these types of programmes, there is a 'game' to be played and a competition to be won, but the actual winners may not be those who manage to end up in first place!

Pete and Sue won many a great many new friends for their professionalism and friendliness and enquiries about booking their holiday lodges have flooded in!



BOATING BEGINS

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

All being well, from the 4 July leisure boaters will be able to join liveaboards/residential boaters on the water and stay on their boats overnight! The weather in July and August looks promising - somewhere between the Met Office’s “For many places it will turn drier with the area of low pressure disappearing to the south” and the *Daily Express*’s “basking in a scorching heatwave that could last for several weeks”. As you plan a bit of a getaway, here’s an idea or five. All chose to turn right out of the Marina and, read together, provide a comprehensive local guide to a series of local trips. For detailed navigation, use *Nicholson’s* (in this case Book 4, Four Counties & the Welsh Canals) and/or *Pearson’s* (in this case The Four Counties Ring book) though there are other guides.

The Caldon Canal with Clive and Kay Beadle (Missy Moo)



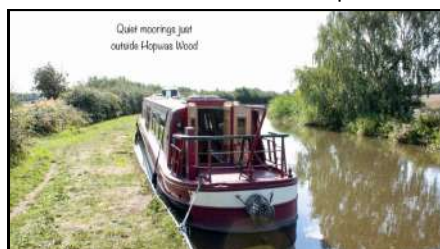
The Caldon Canal has earned a special place in our hearts. We started exploring the area while we were waiting impatiently for Missy Moo to be completed, and a trip there by boat came to our rescue when a far more exotic holiday was cancelled at the last minute by the volcanic ash cloud in 2010. On being asked where our fabulous tans had come from after 2 weeks away, we were happy to say “Stoke and beyond”! For us, the Caldon has the advantage of never taking us too great a distance away from home as it curls its way back from Stoke towards Leek and Froghall. Our daughter Katie (her nickname is “Missy Moo”) is disabled and our boat is adapted for her. Being only an hour away at most by car keeps us closer to her, and the canal’s route with the two arms crossing over each other allows for some interesting there-and-back day trips if she wants to join us on board for a few hours. The Caldon is delightful, narrow and winding through the gentle Staffordshire hills

and along the River Churnet, with some fascinating industrial history dotted along the route. But the best part surely has to be the pubs - mooring alongside the Hollybush Inn at Denford or the Black Lion at Consall Forge for an overnight stop comes with great food and beer and some beautiful views to wake up to. The end of the canal is only about 35 hours cruising from Mercia, but there’s really no need to hurry. **Extra Information:** 52 Locks (and an electric lift bridge) from Mercia to Froghall. No locks on the Leek Arm which is just about three miles’ long with moorings and a supermarket and shops at the end. Maisie Trotman’s log alongside Nigel and Jane Hunt’s log will take you from Mercia to Barlaston. From there to the start of the Caldon is about 5 miles and the 4 Stoke Locks (so a couple of hours).

Hopwas Woods with Bill & Jo Smith (Lady Victoria)

Day 1 Branston Water Park (2 locks)

Setting out is always exciting, no matter how well known the route. Slowly through Willington with the sun shining, people sitting outside The Dragon, always makes for a good start. First stop at Branston Water Park has good moorings and plenty to look at. It’s tempting to eat at The Bridge - if not on our outward journey the definitely on our return. There’s a pleasant walk to be had round the water park.



Day 2 Alrewas (3 locks): Onwards through Tattenhill and Barton Locks past Barton Marina and through Wychnor Lock. Then peace and quiet as the canal leaves the A38 and heads towards Alrewas. Look for any warnings displayed about the river section. Through the first Alrewas Lock there is a good choice of moorings (though it can be busy). For shopping, see Nigel and Jane and Maisie’s detail.

Day 3 Outside Kings Orchard Marina (5 Locks):

Bagnall Lock starts a straight section of canal towards Fradley Junction, via Common Lock, Hunts Lock and Keepers

Lock. The atmosphere at Fradley is one of everyone going to and fro, gongoozlers, motor bikes, a pub, two cafes and boaters’ services. The final lock is Junction Lock – then a sharp left onto The Coventry Canal. Volunteer Lock Keepers may be on duty doing a sterling job and are unfailingly cheerful and full of good advice. There is an easy-to-manage swing bridge almost immediately after your turn into a long lock free journey. The Coventry seems a prettier, gentle canal, cutting through fields and woodland. As you approach Streethay Warf the A38 reappears but soon after there are good overnight moorings outside Kings Orchard Marina.

Day 4 Hopwas Woods: The Plough Inn at Huddlesford does a great breakfast before you set off to Hopwas Woods. The canal carries on past farmland and through the pretty village of Whittington. There’s good mooring before the woods, with access to several footpaths and breaks in the hedge-row giving views over open farmland. There are plenty of walks through the woods following the canal into the village of Hopwas where you might visit one of the canal side pubs. Or cross the canal and climb through the woodland to open fields and footpaths.

Please note if the warning flag is flying do not walk in the woods until the all clear is given as the area is used as an army firing range. Firing times information can be found online.

Fradley with the BBC and Glynis and Michael Smith (Dolly Blue)

In Spring 2017 the BBC embarked on a series of six programmes entitled “Britain Afloat”. We were asked to participate in the episode entitled The Narrow Boat. We set off with great trepidation having been asked to arrive at Fradley Junction because of its history with James Brindley and the



canals. We were to arrive the day before filming, moor up at the caravan park and be ready to start at 6am the next morning.

We had no idea of what was needed other than this instruction.

The morning of the filming arrived and we were up with the lark making sure both the inside and outside of the boat were spick and span.

The film crew duly arrived and we were asked to take our boat and moor up right outside "The Swan" (the Mucky Duck) the historic pub at Fradley Junction. It dates from the end of the 18th Century and there is about to be a change of Landlords. We were miked up and asked to wait outside the pub while the crew went on board to film the interior. We had no idea what they were saying or doing!

We were then asked to get on board and take the boat and film crew into Junction lock. Here we spent the next 30 minutes going up and down in the lock while the crew filmed the lockkeeper operating the mechanism and a historian being interviewed. Our memory is of mossy walls and hairy lockkeeper's legs!

The next request was to take the boat through the next two locks while a drone flew overhead filming, Mary-Ann Kotecha the presenter who was absolutely charming joined us.

It was a most memorable trip to Fradley Junction and whenever we go through always think of our lovely adventure. A clip from the BBC Programme which shows Dolly Blue with Glynis and Michael at Fradley is at www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p05jv1vs

Stone – Two Week Leisurely Trip with Maisie Trotman (Global Spirit)

Left with my friend Doreen who had come along because she missed cruising with her late partner, one of my neighbours on Owl. Ordinarily I cruise alone but as I'd had a hip replacement, I welcomed the company in case of mishaps. So off we went – Doreen, me and Chip my faithful Jack Russell – stopping for fuel and pumpout on the way out. We arrived at Shobnall Fields about 5 hours later – fabulous mooring with 10ft deep drifts of daffodils.

30 June: A late start – neither of us are early risers except to take Chip out. Stopping to drop rubbish in the CRT bins just after Bridge 36 and later for a coffee and a bite to eat, we arrived at Alrewas some hours later. It's a favourite mooring and a lovely village with great shops and pubs as others have reported. Lots of open space to give dogs a run.

1 July: A late start and a stop above Shade House Lock (Fradley) for lunch. Usually busy but we struck lucky! Stopped for water past Armitage and the delightful Plum Pudding Pub – great food (next time!). Moored at Rugeley – big Tesco on

the right by bridge 66, Morrisons over the bridge on the left. Aldi about a mile up from Tesco.

2 July: From Rugeley, over the aqueduct and good ring moorings on the left for overnight. Through Wolseley (Shimla Palace will deliver to bridge 70; Pub up the road, an antiques centre full of bric-a-brac and a lovely shop for reasonably priced jewellery and handbags! Over the bridge to a garage for a newspaper.) Onto Stone with its M&S food store (near the towpath before the first lock at Bridge 93), pubs, post office, cafes, supermarket (Morrisons) and the Star Inn. A large playing field for dog walks down and along the river.

6 July (Winding and heading back): There is a water point on the far side of Stone on the left before lock 29. It's on a corner and awkward so if you're heading home here (as we did), wind before the water point and reverse up to it. Back through Aston Lock (by Aston Marina where Terry Darlington [*Narrow Dog series*] moors his second boat. Arrived just below Sandon Lock for the night. Moor near bridges 86 or 85 for a pleasant walk to Burston and the Greyhound dog-friendly pub with nice food!



7 July: Left for Rugeley. Hollybush Inn at Salt (moor on rings above bridge 82) has great food. Water stop at Great Haywood (see Nigel and Jane's account for more details here); onto over-

night mooring at Rugeley.

8 July: Back to Alrewas for a couple of nights – visit to Coates Butchers an absolute must!

10 July: To Branston Water Park for a couple of nights; quietest moorings on Mercia side of new bridge. Bridge Inn good for a meal.

Wedgewood Pottery & Visitor Centre with Nigel and Jane Hunt (Mary Ann)

Jane and I have lived on Mary Ann for 20 years and a favourite trip is to the Wedgewood Pottery & Visitor Centre Stoke on Trent, near bridge 104 on the T&M Canal. For us it is a seven-day journey, including a day at the visitor centre. There is a great factory tour, museum and shop (including seconds) and a restaurant which serves tea in china cups! All the details you'll need for a visit are at www.worldofwedgewood.com
Day One: (8hrs - based on 3 mph, 20 mins per lock). Mercia to Fradley Junction 10



locks and 14 miles with a short length of river before Alrewas. There is a good Co-op Supermarket, The Alrewas Fryer (fish

and chips), Coates butchers, chemist, post office and a Chinese Take away, plus several pubs. On to Fradley Junction for your first overnight stop. The Swan offers food and drink. Interestingly the Swan in its early days was only accessible via the canal. There is also a good café, elsan point, water points and refuse skips.

Day Two (5hrs 40mins) Fradley Junction to Great Haywood, 5 locks and 12 miles.

Rugeley has several large supermarkets, one right by the canal with very convenient moorings! Rugeley was once the home of the notorious Victorian poisoner William Palmer, and recently remembered as the scene, in 1839, of the canal murder on Christine Collins. Look out for the plaque after the sharp right turn and before the aqueduct over the River Trent. Travelling on there are moorings amongst the trees before Wolseley Bridge (bridge 70); a short walk takes you to the Garden Centre and The Wolseley Centre (Staffordshire Wildlife Trust).

Continuing on to Great Haywood, there are plenty of moorings after bridge 72 to the junction (1 mile approx). Shugborough Hall (once the home of Lord Lichfield - his mother was born Anne Bowes-Lyon, a niece of Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother) will appear on your left and is well worth a visit (National Trust) or just a pleasant walk around the grounds and gardens. There is good Canalside Farm Shop and Cafe just after Great Haywood Junction on the right. On the left side there is water, rubbish skips and an elsan drop (belonging to Anglo-Welsh. The Office will show you where in exchange for a pound or two).

Day Three (8hrs 20mins) Great Haywood to Bridge 104, 12 locks (lock 22 to 34) and 13 miles. The Star Inn at Stone (lock 27) is a traditional dockside pub, which dates back to the 14th century and claims to be the oldest pub on the waterways. Then to Barlaston; good moorings before and after the turning point before bridge 104. There is also a turning point past bridge 104 above Trentham Lock. The Plume of Feathers PH is just by bridge 103.

Our thanks to Midland Chanders for their support with this newsletter



NATURE SOCIETY
Making a real difference

Sadly, I have to announce that the Nature Society has come to an end. This is for many and varied reasons, nothing to do with Covid-19 I hasten to add, it has unfortunately been on the cards for some time.

There will be no more newsletters but wildlife reports of interest will appear in the Mercury and there will be monthly wildlife quizzes, word searches, anagrams etc. for you to think about. These will be sent out the same time as the Mercury with the answers the following month.

I would like to say a big thank you to all of you who have given your time and energy over the last few years. We have achieved much, some with a lasting legacy.

I am always here for any wildlife questions you may have, identification of strange and wonderful flora and fauna. My love for nature has not diminished so please keep me up to date with anything you think may be of interest.

The Red Mason Bee project will continue obviously each year as will the Cottage Garden project. Anyone wanting bird seed, feeders etc. these will still be available throughout.

Jane Wakeham



Derbyshire Gold Card Travel

Since March all

Gold Card holders have been able to travel free before 9.30am on weekdays. From 15 June free travel will go back to being only available after 9.30am on weekdays. Gold Card holders are still able to travel before 9.30am, but will need to pay for their ticket.

With numbers increasing on public transport, space is needed at the beginning of the day for key workers and others to get to work.

Passengers are also being reminded that from 15 June they will need to wear a face covering.

Mercia Messages

This is a private Group Page on Facebook for members of the Mercia Community set up by the Marina Office. Just ask to join. It will give you information and important announcements about the Marina. The page will cover: works happening, problems or disruptions to services, new procedures, etc. It is a Bulletin Board not a discussion board!

May's Mercia Photography Competition Winners

The winners' photographs for May are printed below and congratulations to Nathan Roome, Louis Jewell and Johvita for their spring-inspired images. Each receives either a bottle of Prosecco or a box of chocolates from the Marina Office.

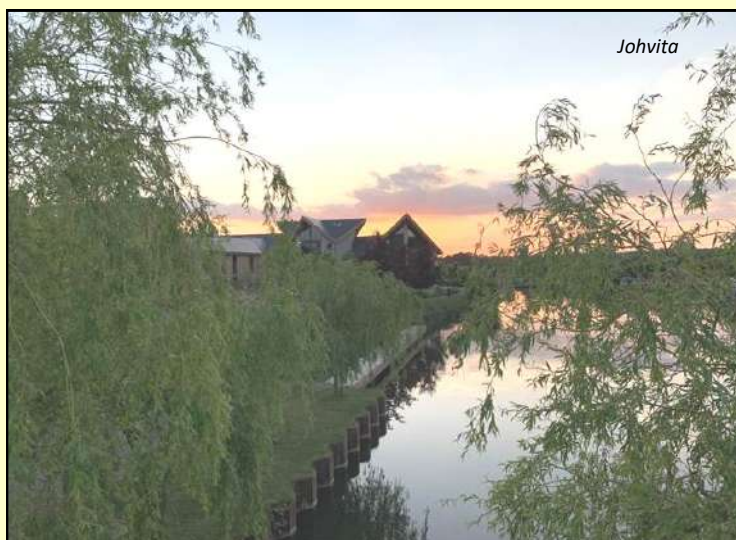
If you are out and about around the marina with your camera and take a photograph you think merits inclusion in the *Mercia*, submit your entries to tony@merciamarina.co.uk



Louis Jewell



Nathan Roome



Johvita