

Addition to Bill Culshaw's Day. From Bill we've a new phrase to add to our vocabulary. It's probably somewhat more risqué than, 'Can't be arsed!' – my sister introduced me to that. Now, when you have a day when things keep going amiss it's a 'fuckity-fuck' day!

Sunday 2nd September: Stratford on Avon

The marker was just on the edge of Green for "All OK" when we cast off and slipped through the prescribed arch yesterday morning. The weather was fair to middling as we worked our way up through Welford and Binton Bridges. By then we were safely in the green zone, tho' the weirs were still pretty powerful.



For me, Stratford is as 'tasteful touristy' as you can get. Yesterday afternoon the hand-driven ferry operated all afternoon ahead of us amid dozens of rowing boats and pleasure craft. The sun shone on the scene as families and couples sat on benches and on the grass enjoying at one of the precious few lovely summery days of 2012. I watched a rowing boat get stuck under the arch in Clopton Bridge reserved for serious boats but there was no problem – the tourist boat awaiting passage did not blast its hooter impatiently, but just hovered among the summery amateurs until the unfortunate boat had sorted itself

out.

A tower has erupted from the RSC – I'm not sure about whether it enhances the building that much, but other minor improvements certainly have. And quite honestly it did need enhancing! Nick was less certain about the changes in Stratford but I think it's remarkably unchanged.

I am anxious to make the most of our time here and last evening sallied forth to see if I could get a cheap seat for anything.

I had been quoted a price of £32 in the afternoon for a seat in The Courtyard for *Much Ado* but managed a stalls seat (albeit with minimal obstruction of a pole) for £12. This production was a *Much Ado*, Bollywood-style. I've never known a production that isn't a bit slow to start but within a while the plot was racing along. I loved the colour and exuberance of the production, the music and the special effects at the end.

This morning was grey, but at least dry and I found the way to the Stratford Meeting House. Whereas most of the Meeting Houses in the Area Meeting are historical, this one is housed in a newish property, originally owned by Geraldine Cadbury. The meeting Room is light and airy and looks out on the most beautiful garden, awash with roses and a host of herbaceous plants. This was a sombre meeting with local thoughts focused on a recently bereaved member. And a record! – a foreshortened meeting for Worship, followed by PM: 80 minutes!



Wednesday 5th : Bancroft Basin, Stratford

We are having some summery weather, glory be; temperatures just perfect between 11.00am and 5.00pm! This is a lovely



place to be ... not so the night before last! Up in the basin, it took a while for things to quieten down and it took a while to get to sleep. We heard the 'dining on the water' boat return up from the river, late. I had hardly settled to sleep when there were the most ominous gloopy gurgles, glugs all around the boat – were we sinking? After a moment or two cogitating, Nick worked out that water was leaking from the basin and we were hovering on the muddy depths. He was soon up and was correct in his supposition – some 'pilchard' (Angela's term for a f.i.) had opened the paddles on the lock down to the river: and Nick sorted it by closing said paddles – this at three in the morning, but we were still 18 inches down and some boats were tipping.

We were still gurgling and Nick rose a second time to check again. It was nearly dawn when we finally slept!

Nick has been taking the Eberspacher, our hot water boiler, to bits and has discovered that we need a component which he has ordered and hoping will be delivered today! We did a backstage tour (of the RSC) yesterday and saw the remodelled main RSC theatre; it is not entirely glamorous but much more in keeping with Shakespearean theatre. Seeing the backstage control room, high above the stage with 'state of the art' lighting and the roof where actors, scenery and props are flown up and down is amazing. And wardrobe, wigs, armour, in various stages of stress!) all organised and marked, fitted exactly for understudies and regular leads Just amazing!



At school almost 50 years ago, I played Viola, and remember walking hesitantly onto the stage, having been shipwrecked. Here, the actress waits beneath the stage and when she receives the green light (I imagine, after storm and sea effects) dives into a tank and appears in front of the front row of stalls, creeping out of the water on to the beach! A-a-a-mazing! What a way to start a show! We're seeing it tonight!

Rick and Wendy finally caught up with us yesterday. It is good to see them again but it won't be for long. They are off to town this weekend to see Lady Gaga and we need to be heading Aylesbury-way. We have a load of locks to cope with in the next few days ... well, next few weeks.



Last night, I sallied off by myself again and managed to get a ticket for Richard III in The Swan. So much memorable stuff in there; especially, 'Now is the winter . . . ' and 'A horse, a horse, my kingdom . . . ' among many others. This also, must be the best Shakespearean play for amazing parts for women! And Richard ... well, he was something else!

Thus morning, on my way back from a quick recce/shop I fantasised that I would bump into the man himself and he'd come back to the boat and share brunch. Wen presumed that I hoped he'd ravish me and that she trusted I was wearing my clean, sexy underwear! I didn't like to explain I wanted to discuss the play, his interpretation, the acting rigour etc, though I guess I might have been a tad weak-kneed! As it was, it was just Rick and Wen and Nick for a farewell brunch!

Friday: Stratford canal, Lock 32

I can think of no better place to linger than, anywhere, on the Stratford Canal. Lock 32 is quite acceptable though there have been any number of places on this lovely canal, revisited after a good many years.

Yesterday we left behind a sunny, busy, bustling, civilized Stratford, and in the evening finally moored up in the quiet countryside and spent a peaceful night with no noise except the occasional owl calling, and under a waning moon. Next time we see a waning moon we'll be at home in Hungerford; my experiences today in idyllic conditions tell me I'm a fool to give up this life! Last evening we caught the scent of the last of the meadowsweet as we cruised to our mooring; this morning it was the wonderful smell of freshly combined field of wheat. This morning early we saw autumnal touches, blackberries, elderberries, sloes, hips turning from orange to red and hedgerows and trees laden with blood-red hawthorn berries. Some giant evening primrose flowers greeted me as I came through my first lock and a gentle cow, knee deep in water acknowledged me sleepily. I was reminded of the special Stratford Canal bridges and barrel-roofed lock cottages as we continued though some of the latter have been incorporated into 'bijou' canal-side homes.



and later... Kingswood Junction



Whether today has seemed so perfect because a) the blend of lovely canal in near perfect weather after we've had such a lousy summer and/or b) I'm aware that we're near the end of our serious live-aboard time ... I don't know. We are just short of the Grand Union and tomorrow we have the Hatton Flight, but we are awaiting Geraldine and Terry who will help us and possibly Angela too – she is boat-sitting in Stratford and may 2bob up this way" (Lancashire terminology!)

Before I forget though, I haven't mentioned 'Twelfth Night' at the RSC on Thursday night. Nick came too this time though we had separated seats in the stalls. In spite of insider knowledge about Viola erupting from a tank of water just 6 ft away from me, I was still startled when it happened. It was a really interesting performance; very theatrical! Viola was delightful and I wondered how I could possibly have coped with the part. I remember much of the text, I remember my costume, I remember the building, the stage, the wings but not much else. Malvolio was tremendous; he set himself up for his downfall from his first appearance with his facial expressions – a 'recurrent bad smell right under his nose'; a wonderful mix of pomposity, stupidity and gullibility. His yellow stockings and cross gartered appearance with leather thong, bare bum and chest, and conservative suit jacket was bizarre and some!!!! When he said he'd be revenged on us all after his humiliation he addressed the audience; we were all guilty. Olivia was a haughty lady of the house and a dizzy juvenile in love. I loved it.

9th September: Bridge 36 east of Leamington Spa

We have had a very sociable and lovely weekend one way and another, the warm weather continuing to enhance activities big time. G&T arrived from Potters Bar around nine-ish and after catching up with essential family news we got some sleep in preparation for the Hatton Flight on the morrow.

I had forgotten how lovely the canal is approaching Hatton from Kingswood Junction. There's one especially lovely stretch where the canal is high on an embankment and the land to the north drops away to farmland and an especially pretty group of farm buildings. Angela had opted to join us for the day, bright and early; we saw her waiting by Bridge 58 as we emerged from the dank, dripping Shrewley Tunnel. Then it was all hands to the locks, all twenty of them, ploughmans en route, scones and cream to celebrate the grand descent and later some curried dishes I'd prepared the day before. We said our goodbyes to all and slept like the dead!



This morning I walked into town – much further than I remembered to a busy Warwick Meeting, all quiet. Although close to Stratford this is part of a different Monthly Meeting. Last week it was worship and pm in 80 mins; today worship and just notices in 90 minutes. This is clearly a vibrant, busy meeting, with lots going on. About twelve minutes before the end of meeting a number of children came in with parents and helpers, all, I guess, under eight, a number under three. I wished I had a camera or video to capture the delightful tableau of these 'innocents,' cuddled, draped alongside or upon parents, the older ones sitting sedately. I thought how privileged they were, learning to share the quiet, communal warmth of the gathered meeting.

I was quite hot and bothered by the time I had toiled back to the boat but there was not time to put my feet up. Nick had bought a piece of beef and veg and fruit salad had to be prep'd. We lingered for the afternoon over the meal in the cratch catching up with all of Matt and Eileen's work and social news; plenty of it as always, and always entertaining and fun. Nick took over the final catering arrangements (apart from gravy – that's me) including the washing up!



After they left we mossied on down the cut and found a pleasant spot, just to the east of Royal Leamington Spa. (whoever made it royal?)

Tuesday 11th September Bridge 100 near Braunston

Yesterday we proceeded cross country with Dave and Margaret on Trad lee with whom we travelled down the Hatton Flight and with whom we are still with, continuing to lock down through Bull Bridge, down Fosse locks, towards Bascote locks and the staircase lock there. We topped up with diesel and gas bottles taking advantage of the better prices on a travelling boat which had a little dog sitting on the roof of his boat looking at me quizzically; could have dog-napped him happily!



Nick and I walked into Long Itchington in the afternoon and passed a lovely old church though I had no camera to record its lovely random sandstone and golden stone (Limestone?) building materials and its strange tower which lost its spire in the late eighteenth century.

This morning we tackled the Stockton Flight very efficiently. (mostly!) And then the Calcutt Flight before passing Napton Junction. We're passing through lovely countryside, most of it freshly harvested, golden fields and we've found a more than pleasant mooring with great outlook, plentiful blackberries and plough in distance being followed by wildfowl; very autumnal! Though quite chilliy and blowy this morning it's been mostly bright and sunny this afternoon.

