

## Cruising after Lockdown July 2020

2020 is a year that none of us will easily forget. When we welcomed in the New Year, it was unimaginable that less than 3 months later the UK would be in the grip of the most severe pandemic to reach our shores for more than a century. On 23<sup>rd</sup> March the Prime Minister addressed the nation and we entered 'lockdown'; leaving our homes only for essential journeys or for one opportunity a day to exercise in our local area. Shops, pubs, theatres, gyms and thousands of other businesses closed their doors. Our towns and cities became eerily deserted.

By July 2020, restrictions had been gradually eased enough for many businesses to be able to reopen, including the leisure industry, albeit with rigorous new procedures to try to ensure the health and safety of their guests. Social distancing had, for the time being at least, become our 'new normal'.

### Bridge Inn at Brewwood one week after reopening



On 4<sup>th</sup> July 2020, the boating holiday industry was given the green light by Government to begin offering holidays afloat and holiday companies were besieged by people wanting to be able to get away for a while, but in as safe a way as possible. Boating holidays seemed like a perfect choice – modern hire boats are fully equipped floating homes; you can bring all your own supplies of food and drink and be completely self-sufficient for a week or two.

So what would it be like holidaying on the canals after lockdown? Would the pubs be open? Would the boats be clean enough? My husband David and I decided to repeat a cruise that we had done exactly a year ago, to see what had changed and what measures were being taken to keep everyone safe, whilst still enabling us to feel like we were on holiday.

To see a full description of the route we took you can read our blog 'Gailey to Market Drayton 2019'.

In 2020, the first difference from last year was our arrival time; ABC Boat Hire guests are usually asked to arrive at 2.30pm to begin their boat handover. Now, if marinas know they are expecting several separate parties of guests, they are contacting them beforehand to arrange a more specific arrival time so that there aren't too many customers arriving at the same time. We got to Gailey Wharf just before 3pm and were the final guests they were expecting that day.

We were given a full description of the facilities on our boat by Katie at Gailey's reception, and she invited us to walk through our boat ourselves and then come back to reception where we could ask any questions. We were then taken through the external daily checks needed (weed hatch, oil, coolant etc) by a suitably masked marina engineer who was careful to maintain social distancing from us whilst explaining everything.

All the ABC boats are cleaned between guests with cleaning products that have been tested and proven to kill the Coronavirus, and every boat is 'fogged' with antiviral disinfectant solution which kills viruses both in the air and on every surface. We felt very safe and comfortable boarding our boat.

And we were ready to cast off! It felt amazing to be on holiday at last, and as we made our way along the Staffs & Worcs canal, we were delighted to be greeted by several private boat owners, welcoming us back onto the canals and saying how nice it was to see the hire boats going out again!

Lovely afternoon for  
cruising



Our 2020 cruise turned out to be a wonderful break. The world had been, and was still going through, a terrible time, but it felt healing and soothing to be

surrounded by nature and see the ducks, swans and kingfishers going about their daily lives.



Heron in flight



Pair of swans



Friendly duck on our boat!

The changes we noticed were:

Locks – you are requested to be careful to maintain social distancing with any other boating parties whilst operating the lock gates and it's also suggested that you can wear gloves/ensure you wash your hands thoroughly after carrying out activities such as going through locks and mooring up.



**MARSTON'S**

# WELCOME

WE'RE SO PLEASED  
TO SEE YOU!

WE'VE HAD TO MAKE A  
FEW CHANGES TO KEEP  
EVERYONE SAFE AND WELL.

WHEN INSIDE, PLEASE  
OBSERVE ALL DIRECTIONAL  
SIGNAGE AND MAINTAIN  
SOCIAL DISTANCING AS  
MUCH AS POSSIBLE.

WE ASK THAT ALL GUESTS  
USE THE HAND SANITISER.

WE MAY NEED TO LIMIT  
THE NUMBER OF GUESTS  
THAT ENTER THE PUB.

PLEASE DO NOT ENTER  
IF YOU ARE UNWELL.

MOST IMPORTANTLY  
RELAX AND  
ENJOY YOUR VISIT!

*Makes Sense*

**MARSTONS**

**OUR MENUS ARE ONLY  
USED ONCE AND ARE  
FULLY RECYCLABLE**

SO YOU CAN PAW OVER THEM TO YOUR HEART'S CONTENT!

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**FEEL GOOD FOOD**

**STARTERS**

**Roast and Red Pot £3.95**  
Served with roast and root vegetables

**Sticky Prawn Cakes £4.95**  
Served with sticky sauce and butter

**Golden Grilled  
Mushrooms £4.95 £3.95**  
Served with herb sauce or garlic  
mayonnaise

**Buttermilk Chicken tenders £3.95**  
Served with herb sauce

**Smothered Potato Wedges £4.95**  
Topped with Cheddar cheese,  
glacé ham, salsa and sour cream  
and onion, incredible.

**PUB CLASSICS**

**Fish & Chips £4.95**  
Served with mushy peas and  
tartar sauce

**Beef & Chips £4.95**  
Served with golden onion sauce and  
tartar sauce

**Hammer & Chicken £3.95**  
Topped with mustard, chicken and BBQ  
sauce. See also with chips and salsa  
served

**Chicken, Leeks & Cider Pie £3.75**  
Served with roasted potatoes,  
vegetables and gravy.

**Chicken Tikka Masala £3.95**  
Served with a portion of rice, naan

## Pub notice and menus

Shops were also operating one-way systems, with notices on the floor to tell you how far apart you should keep from other customers. There were notices informing us what the maximum number of customers allowed in the shop at any one time was, and a member of staff was controlling the entrance at the door for larger stores.

We cooked for ourselves on our boat for most of the week – the oven, grill and hob on our boat were really good and I was able to concoct some tasty and easy to make dishes including Chilli Con Carne and Spaghetti Bolognese. It's not Cordon Bleu, but I had no complaints from my husband 😊.



At Gnosall we decided to indulge in a Chinese take away, which was being operated out of the back of a building on the main thoroughfare through the village. There was a table with hand sanitiser and wipes before we approached the window and menus were handed out to us. We ordered by speaking to the staff from outside through the window, and when our meals were ready they opened the back door (with us standing back) and placed them on another table that was situated just outside. We then paid them (they did accept cash) by handing the money through the window!

### Chinese Takeaway!



By the way, may I recommend the boat we had this year to anyone thinking of hiring a boat who perhaps hasn't boated before, or is simply looking for a boat that easy to handle, moor and turn. At just 42ft, Oscar is the baby of the ABC

fleet, but with his cheerful yellow and red paintwork he attracted several comments from passing boaters; 'what a pretty little boat'; 'what a cute boat'; 'Oscar – how sweet'! Boats are usually referred to as 'she', but with a name like Oscar, what can you do?



Our verdict at the end of the week was that the canals remain an invaluable and special part of our world and boating on them is still the perfect way to 'get away from it all'.





