

Caz's Blog – Gailey to Great Haywood and return

May 2019

Crew: Caz, Clive, Manda, George, Rebecca and Sienna.

This is our second short break and we are super excited to be sharing the experience with a friend and her daughter!

Arriving at Gailey Wharf we are greeted by Katie. Working in the Booking Office I have spoken to her on the phone on many occasions, but it does feel strange to now be the customer. We unload our luggage and it isn't long before Ian, our engineer, arrives to show us through our boat. He shows us the engine and talks through the morning engine checks as well as the weed hatch; it all feels very relaxed and not as daunting the second time around! Ian lives on a boat and is very knowledgeable, answering all our questions (even the silly ones!) and reassures us that he will be on call later that evening if we need anything.

We plan to be on the boat for 2 nights, with 2 full days cruising, so the equivalent of a weekend break – I have done some research using the Nicholson's guide and the plan is to go north on the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal towards Great Haywood, where we join the Trent and Mersey Canal and turn around.

Gailey Wharf is located next to Gailey top lock and Ian offers to manoeuvre our boat into the lock for us because of the tight angle, much to Clive's relief! As Manda and Sienna are novices my two children (George and Rebecca) enjoy explaining how to operate the lock. I feel quite proud as they do a great job, making sure everything is done safely.



Gailey Lock

We all jump on board and we are off! There are a few moored boats near to the marina but once past these we find we are the only boat on the canal, it really does feel like we are getting away from all civilisation. The sun breaks through the clouds and before we know it, we are at the next lock. A great team effort and we are through in no time and with the next lock so close we decide to walk on ahead. Occasionally you can spot the motorway between the trees and hear the gentle hum of the traffic but otherwise the canal takes a winding path through green fields and it is so peaceful.



After Otherton Lock there is a relatively straight stretch before Penkridge so Manda has a go at driving the boat and surprises herself at how good she is... until she sees a boat coming the other way and promptly passes the tiller back to Clive! We can't decide whether to moor just before Penkridge, near to the Cross Keys pub, or find somewhere nearer to Penkridge Lock- after missing a few opportunities we end up just north of the village at the end of a long line of moored boats!



Cross Keys, Penkridge.

It's a lovely evening and I really want to walk back to the Cross Keys and sit in their sweet canal side garden but the kids are all hungry and want to find a pub which is closer. We walk back to Penkridge and the Boat Inn is right by the bridge. Built in 1779 and at the same time as the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal the pub is situated at one of the old 'gateways' to the village. The beer garden is busy and seems quite lively as does the bar but there are some quieter tables in a separate section of the pub so we make ourselves at home. The food is lovely and we are all very full so decide to take a little walk into the village and explore.

We can hear music as we get closer to the centre and as we turn the corner into the market square we can see why; there is live music at The Star Inn and it is so busy that people are spilling out on to

the road! The atmosphere is fantastic, so we decide to get a round of drinks, stand outside and enjoy the music. Clive takes the kids back to the boat to watch a film whilst myself and Manda spend a little longer sampling the well-stocked gin bar, all in the name of research, obviously!

After a full cooked breakfast everyone is excited to get moving. Considering themselves experts now the kids can't wait to get to Longford Lock which is only a short distance away. The canal is so quiet and peaceful it is hard to believe that the M6 is nearby. After Longford bridge we pass under the motorway bridge, the noise is brief and soon forgotten as we are straight back to trees and lush green fields all around. Teddesley Park runs alongside the canal and in its day the bridge leading to the park was known as 'fancy bridge' because it was so ornamental.



Peace and quiet.



Teddesley Park Bridge or 'Fancy Bridge' in its day.

Cruising through the village of Acton Trussell we are in awe of some of the amazing gardens that run down to the canal. We pass a man mowing his lawn and give him a wave, it strikes me how normal it must be for him to have an audience!



Acton Trussell

Its lunchtime now and we've been cruising for 3 hours so we moor up at a pretty spot by Meadow Bridge. We throw together some paninis and take them outside to enjoy in the sunshine – the weather is supposed to change soon!

We continue on for another hour as the canal bends in a south easterly direction and follows the pretty valley of the River Sow. Excited to see there is an aqueduct coming up I gather the kids at the front of the boat – it is a lovely view down on to the River Sow but I think I am more impressed than

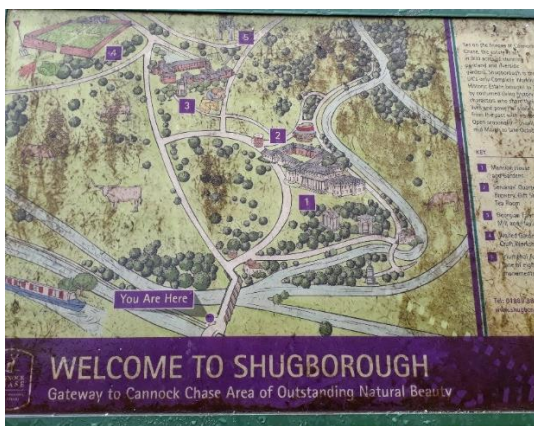
they are! We see dark clouds approaching and by the time we reach Tixall Lock the rain is coming down quite fast – the kids love this and are straight off the boat, running around getting soaked!



Milford Aqueduct.

Even in the rain Tixall Wide is beautiful. This attractive stretch which leads to Great Haywood was purposely built wider so as not to compromise the view from Tixall House which once stood nearby. Passing plenty of mooring places as we approach Great Haywood we decide it will be a good idea to turn the boat at the junction and moor up facing the right way for the morning. As we emerge from Haywood Bridge we notice a water point to the left and make a very quick decision to moor up! Every water point is slightly different, so after a little bit of discussion we let Clive get on with it! Much more skilled at reversing the boat now we manoeuvre the boat into the junction and find a mooring space nearby. It is only 3pm and with the entrance to Shugborough Hall located just off the Trent and Mersey Canal we decide to have a walk in that direction.

Just after Haywood Lock we see signs for Shugborough Hall and leaving the towpath we find ourselves on the stunning Essex bridge, built in the sixteenth century; it was used by packhorses to cross the merged rivers Trent and Sow which run below. The entrance to Shugborough Estate is just after the bridge and there is a gravel path down to the rear exit of the Hall. Surrounded by beautifully kept gardens it is very inviting and the kids make a beeline for the climbable trees – you're never too old! It's too late to go inside the hall but we enjoy walking around the grounds and having a look in the gift shop before making our way back to the bridge and into Great Haywood.



Map of Shugborough Estate, located at Essex Bridge.



View from Essex Bridge of the merged River Trent and River Sow.



Look at those trees! Beautiful gardens at Shugborough Hall.

As it is still a bit early to go to the pub we take a walk through Great Haywood in the direction of the farm shop, Katie mentioned it during our handover and we're keen to see what it has to offer but sadly we've left it too late and its closed! It is a shame but perhaps we'll get up early and visit before we set off in the morning...

Time for the pub then! The Clifford Arms is a proper 'local' pub, with home cooked food and a warm traditional feel. The food is good and we are so content sitting by the window that we stay for several more drinks and play a few card games. A perfect evening.

A very lazy start to the day (nothing to do with the Guinness last night!) and we decide not to go back into Great Haywood but to begin our journey back to the marina. Clive starts us off but after

Tixall Lock I decide it is my turn to drive and it is about time I took us into a lock! I have a nice quiet stretch to get used to the boat until reaching Deptmore Lock and I'm feeling confident. I manoeuvre into the lock without hitting the sides and as we're going uphill I don't need to worry about the Cill. I've done it and I'm really pleased with myself!



Now at the tiller I am happy to stay. It is incredibly relaxing just chugging along and although it is nice to have some company I'm also quite happy at the stern on my own, quietly contemplating life - as long as I'm being brought tea at regular intervals of course!

Feeling a real sense of achievement we arrive at Gailey Wharf just as they are closing. We don't hang around and instead take the short drive down the road to The Spread Eagle pub for tea.

Now I know I can handle the boat on my own the next trip will be with the girls and I think it will be a totally different experience...