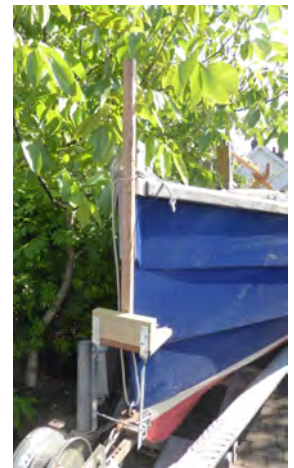


Bumbling round London – Robin & Gillie Whittle

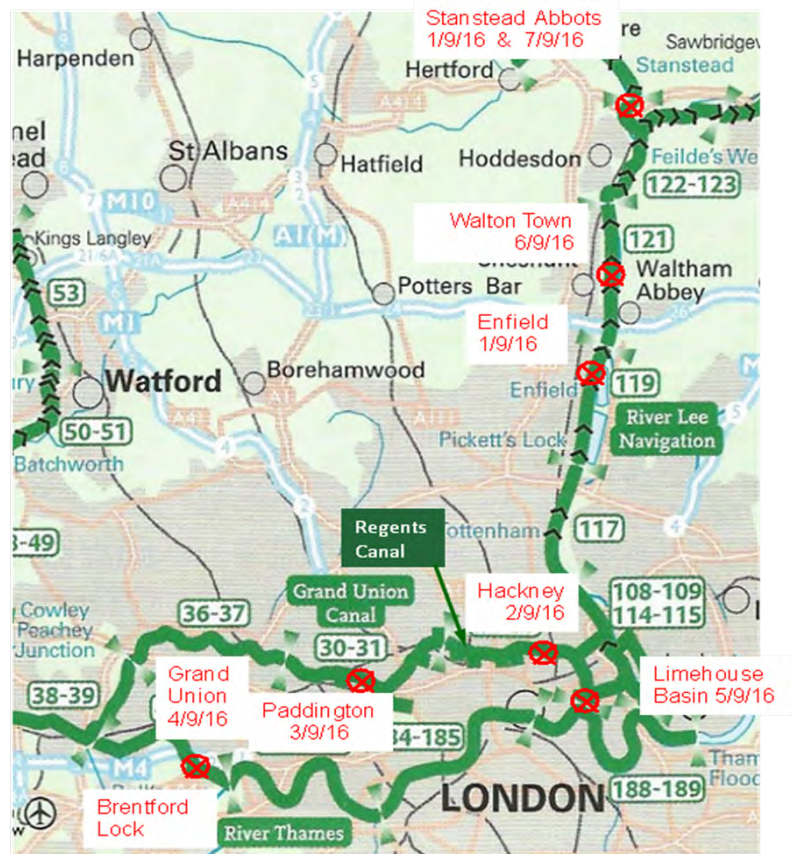
1st-7th September 2016:

This was an unusual trip for *Bumble Chugger*. She had her sails taken away and her mast, gaff and bowsprit stored in the garden. The mast was replaced by a stumpy mast that could hold the boom at the correct level for the cockpit tent. The stern end of the boom was held firmly on a crutch on the horse. Her bows were adorned by a special Whittle invention, which was to collect the weeds and reeds and divert them from the engine (a bit like a cow-catcher).



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We started our expedition at Stanstead Abbots, where we could use the marina slipway, leave the car and trailer and purchase the necessary windlass and key for the locks. It was a speedy launch, not having to do any rigging, but there was a near disaster when boat and trailer were positioned on the quite steep slipway, and the gear lever of the car was inadvertently put into 'reverse' rather than 'park'!



The slipway was positioned on a small tributary of the River Lee that was lined with moored boats and covered with quite a lot of weed. We didn't want to start the trip with a clogged engine, so we paddled the ½ mile to the main river, which we were relieved to find was clear of weed. And so started our 80-mile trip taking us through 50 locks. All through our trip there were many interested enquiries as to where we were going.

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We headed off southwards, getting into a good routine for passing through the locks. There were dozens of families of coots and moorhens, many with tiny chicks looking like balls of fluff. We saw herons and swans and a kingfisher. There were not many other boats on the move, but we were amazed by the number of narrow boats moored all along the waterways. We passed a boating centre at Broxbourne with small electric pleasure boats and canoes. Nearby a group of canal officials were trying to fish a motorbike out of the water.



Just before Cheshunt Lock we stopped for lunch. It was a glorious day and the sun was quite hot. After giving the decks a bit of a clean we headed on for Enfield Lock, first passing through Waltham Town Lock, which was being used as a swimming and diving pool by more than a dozen youngsters. At Enfield Lock we were meeting old friends from Arups whom we had not seen for over 20 years. We arrived early and tied up to the bollards close to the lock and had a cup of tea. It was a busy spot with many walkers and cyclists passing along the tow path. One lady walking by asked us if she was going in the right direction for Luton - she was but it was probably a two-day walk to get there. She pressed on saying she had no money but needed to get to Luton to see her two kids. Hope she got there.



We were moored rather illegally - too close to the lock, but stayed where we were till morning being mildly rebuked by two narrow boats passing through. We left at 9 after a big washing-up session and a clean-up under the floor boards where much wine and nearly all the sugar had been spilt! Friday was a cloudier day and rather cooler. Enfield was a deep lock, down and under a bridge, and it was the first place to need our lock key. It took us a while to operate it all successfully but we got through in the end. All the following locks on the Lee were electrified. Our surroundings were pleasantly rural for a while, and then it became more obvious that we were moving into the London suburbs.

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On through Tottenham and Hackney Wick and soon we branched off onto the Hertford Union Canal. More weed was appearing and the engine was beginning to sound erratic, so just before Bottom Lock, we tied up to some railings to a pathway round a housing estate to inspect the engine. We decided to stay there for lunch and had two interesting conversations: one with a catamaran owner who knew many of the places where we had sailed, and then with the Burroughs family, who had recently bought a Shrimper and sailed at Chichester. Rob did a good sales job and they were possibly persuaded to join the SOA!

We woke to a calm, sunny day and had time to explore Broadway Market, which was busy with stalls being set up, buy a Saturday Telegraph and find some loos, before our friends arrived bearing exciting goodies for a second breakfast and for lunch. They were joining us for our morning's journeyings. They were very excited seeing buildings and parts of London that they knew well but were now seeing from a very different angle. It was amazing going through the heart of central London along a tree-lined canal with moored narrow boats on either side, with the towpath busy with walkers and cyclists and the water busy with boats full of sightseers and partying groups. We paused for our second breakfast - tea and croissants and currant buns, and then it was through the Islington Tunnel. We had to wait for a couple of narrow boats to come through, and then it was into the pitch dark through the one-kilometre long tunnel with a tiny pin-prick of light at the other end. Quite spooky! We emerged not far from St.Pancras Lock and tied up just under the Arup gas holder development. A very impressive site.



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We had a sumptuous lunch and watched Eurostar crossing overhead just beyond us, and then sadly our friends had to leave. We moved on through several locks with two pleasure crafts helmed by Pat and Toby, who were very friendly.

Through Kentish Town and Camden the sides of the locks became packed with sightseers, but then we were in the comparative calm of Regent's Park, flanked by fine Regency mansions and with a glimpse of the London Zoo aviary.



On into Little Venice, with a couple of stops to clear weed from the engine. We did a short trip down the Paddington Basin, but it was quite noisy so we moved on along the canal and onto the Paddington arm of the Grand Union Canal. We tied up in a spot between two narrow boats and got the tent up just before the rain arrived, ready to welcome my nephew and his wife for the evening. The rain had cleared by morning, but it was windy and rather chilly. We were moving out of London proper and into fairly boring suburbs, lined with factories and power stations, but interspersed with more pleasant country areas.

We stopped to pick blackberries at one overhanging bush and enjoyed them later for supper, stewed with an apple. At Bull's Bridge we met the main Grand Union Canal and headed south on it towards Brentford. Again, several stops were required to clear the engine of weed and plastic bags. We had had a long stretch with no locks, in fact all morning, but we then got to Norwood Top Lock, which was close to the top of the series of six locks of the Hanwell flight. We stopped for lunch before tackling the big drop. While we were moored a narrow boat arrived, helmed by a Polish lady, Eileen, with her two children. Her daughter went on ahead and got all the lower locks prepared for us, and with a couple walking on the tow path helping with the gates, we had an easy passage to the bottom.

We continued on, hoping to get into Brentford for the night. Unfortunately at the next lock, Osterley, the bottom gates were not closing properly, which meant the lock was not filling sufficiently for us to get in. We tried various combinations of opening and shutting gates and paddles but with no success. We even got 'Bum Chug' out and blew her up and paddled around the bottom gates, prodding the

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bottom with a stick in the hope of dislodging whatever was stopping the gates closing. We tried ringing the help line of the Environment Agency, who were not helpful, and then the Waterways help line. Within half an hour Sam and a mate had arrived, which we thought was rather impressive on a Sunday evening. With their brute strength they managed to get the top gate open and locked us through which was a great relief to us after a two-hour delay. They were going to close the lock for the night and assess the situation in the morning. It was getting dusk and we decided to moor up before the next lock at Clitheroe. It was good to stop after a rather frustrating time and relax with a drink and eggs and bacon.

Monday morning - grey and a misty rain. We set off early to get to the Thames Lock in time as it's opening was tide dependent. All went well until we'd gone half a mile or so down the Thames, when the engine stopped. Rob was having trouble getting it going again, when fortunately the narrow boat/barge *Cassoulet*, which had come through the lock with us, caught us up and gave us a tow while Rob sorted out the problem.

We made our own way to Chiswick Pier where we were meeting Peter King (Minnow No. 92). We tied up just behind an RNLi rescue boat *Dougie & Donna B*, whose crew were extremely helpful - filling up our water carrier as the tap on the pontoon was not working, and giving us the code for loos at a private building at the top of the gangway.

After coffee with Peter King we continued our journey down the Thames and through London. It's a trip we have done several times before but it never ceases to be fascinating seeing all the familiar landmarks. It was still rather misty and inclined to rain, but after a while it cleared and we had a pleasant afternoon.



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The river was quiet until we got near Westminster and then we got into pleasure boat and water taxi territory and it became really uncomfortable and bumpy from the wash of the boats. A vast motor yacht *A* was tied up to HMS *Belfast* almost dwarfing her - owned by a Russian billionaire and currently for sale at \$300m! We finally reached Limehouse Basin, where we were being really thrown around on the river and it was a great relief when the lock gates were opened for us and we could go into the calm of the basin. It had a similar feel to it as St. Katherine's Dock.



Tuesday morning was cloudy but warmer. As we were not booked into the marina but just passing through, we were not allowed to use the marina's loos. Rob had the good idea of visiting the Cruising Club, which was just on the edge of the marina, and we used their very comfortable loos on the pretext of getting some membership forms! We made a leisurely start, finishing off the crossword before we set off up the Limehouse Cut, which would take us back on to the River Lee. Almost immediately we were into thick, green blankets of duck weed right across the water filled with all sorts of reeds and debris, which meant many stops to clear the cow catcher and the engine. We diverted off the river a couple of times hoping to get into the waterway system through the Olympic Park, but each time our passage was blocked by a chain barrage.

On Wednesday it was grey and still and quite warm work operating the final six locks, and then we were back to the entrance of the tributary running up the side of Stanstead Abbots Marina. We expected to have to paddle again, but the weed was so light compared with what we had been through earlier that we motored happily up to the slipway, and by late morning we were on the journey home.

Gillie & Robin Whittle – *Bumble Chugger* (124)