

**Captain Slog**  
**Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> March 2010**

An uneventful trip to Heritage at Scholar Green from Hexham, a quick transfer of luggage to Matt's car and off south to Great Haywood to collect Winthorpe. First impressions are good – the satellite TV works with minimal fuss, the minor changes to the layout are for the better and the black granite tops in the kitchen (or fake equivalent) adds a further touch of class. Evening meal at the Clifford Arms was fine although Pam's vegetarian broccoli offering was distinctly lacking in broccoli – could only be a good thing as far as I was concerned. Back in the dark to for our first night on Winthorpe.

**Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> March 2010**

How come the Archers is on at 9am! Because the clocks changed and we forgot – so a late start after all. Weston by lunch time and then a gentle climb to Stone helped by the fact that all the traffic was heading south and the locks were all set in our favour. Who is responsible for that architectural monstrosity south of Bridge 86!

Moored between Star and Yard lock under the Christmas lights and next to the daffodils. A slow walk around Stone town centre – ideal shopping time, everything was shut and then back to Winnie for a pre-prepared pasta. The idea was to reduce the amount of cooking gear we brought so that everything would fit in Matt's car but this is definitely the strategy for future trips.

A grand day, mostly in sunshine.

**Monday 29<sup>th</sup> March 2010**

Woke to the rattle of rain on the roof, so in no hurry to head north. Pam headed for the shops and then persuaded me to join her for lunch – not quite the Cliff Bay Hotel but the fish and chips and cottage pie tasted great on a wet Staffordshire morning.

After lunch we set off for Barlaston in occasional sunshine and more than occasional rain. Hardly a cracking pace but we were not out to set any records. The forecast is for worse to come so the Caldon can wait until later in the year.

**Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> March 2010**

The Caldon abandoned we were set for another slow day from Barlaston to Etruria and the Festival Marina – or more significantly, the Toby Carvery where we made pigs of ourselves, well, Turkeys to be precise. Then the skies opened and down came the hailstones and the decks turned briefly white. Battened down, the stove burning fiercely there was no better place to be than aboard Winnie – the dank Harecastle can wait another day.

Event of the day was meeting Beeston Castle (our former boat) emerging from Lock 37 in the capable hands of the Sutherills. Like meeting an old girlfriend, the initial excitement of attraction resurfaces from the depths – a fine looking boat (but Winnie is finer).

### **Wednesday 31<sup>st</sup> March 2010**

Rain and sleet all day, the type that tries to pierce the skin. Consequently we saw just one boat on the move between Festival Park and Congleton Wharf. No queuing at Harecastle and no wait for boats heading south – moderately drier inside than out.

Turned at Congleton Wharf and moored overnight, eventually joined by four other boats – how glad are we that we didn't attempt the Caldon – just tying the boat with freezing wet ropes was painful enough. Walked down to the town when the shops were closed but it mattered not – the usual mix of local shops at the end of their shelf life, charity shops and 'To Let' signs – do pedestrianised high streets work or do they just remove the last vestiges of passing trade.

The walk to town took us past the Congleton Cottage Hospital (well, that's what it used to be called) – birthplace of both Patrick and Matthew Down

March 31<sup>st</sup> – December 31<sup>st</sup> more like, but we still enjoyed it. Reminds me of the boat we saw at the top of the T&M in 2008 – Madassa Soles.

### **Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> April 2010**

A walk in warm spring sunshine towards Buglawton in the morning and then headed south to Heritage in the afternoon. The marina is compact but well organised and very helpful – bodes well.