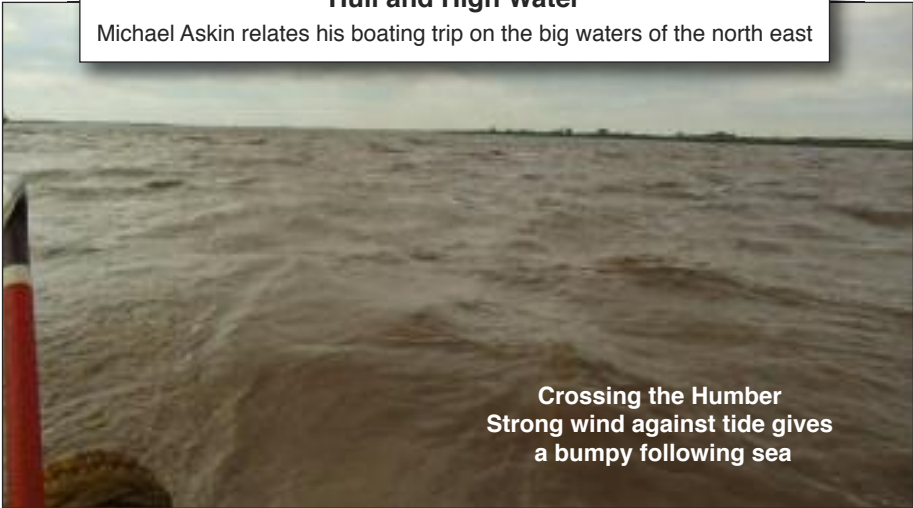




Hull and High Water

Michael Askin relates his boating trip on the big waters of the north east



**Crossing the Humber
Strong wind against tide gives
a bumpy following sea**

I love big water boating - it's just as well, as my Dad has always kept a boat on the Driffield Navigation, and so every year we need to cross the River Humber to get to the inland waterways system. When I saw the Royalty class boat **Victoria** for sale at Warwickshire Flyboat, while I knew little about historic boats, and even less of her history, I thought she be a good 'un. I had partaken in the bi-annual ritual that is the Jam 'Ole run a couple of times - before that I thought historic boats were only any good for sounding good, but slow and cumbersome (and uncomfortable) as cruising boats. I may have been right about the uncomfortable, but soon started to realise that owning an historic boat was the challenge I'd been looking for in my boating. I fell in love with the thump of the JP2, and the glorious lines of the Yarwood's built boat (much finer than the star and town classes), and wanted to take her on a tour of the system.

I'd heard of the Easter Gathering at Ellesmere Port, so that was in the plans, but I also wanted to take her out on bigger waters. While there is some debate regarding the reasoning about her design, the 4ft 11in hold depth suggests she was built for carrying on the tideway and large rivers - and the curved chines certainly help towards that goal. However, I personally like the idea that on a full load of 42 tonnes she draws 5 foot, which by chance is the maximum working depth of the Grand Union, and a manager came up with the numbers without knowing anything about canals!

St Pancras Cruising Club hold many tidal cruises, and so I booked myself on some, and found **Victoria** just loves the deep moving waters. She feels right, and steady in the swell. This was promising for my future plans of taking her back to my "home" waters. Since the IWA National Festival was at Red Hill, it was a perfect place from which to explore the north-eastern waterways, and so after weekending around the festivals over the early part of summer I got her to Newark ready for the main "push". On my way down the Trent I was unhappy to hear the lock keepers tell of how few working boats came down the Trent, and it seemed I was one of the few odd ones that year.

So on Friday 14th August, after an hour and a half on a train from Kings Cross I was back on board **Victoria**. I had to get her to Torksey for the following day, and without the echo sounder my Dad was bringing, I wanted plenty of water in the river. I set off at 6.30am on Saturday, down to Cromwell for 9.00 am, and off on the twisty section of the River Trent. There was a good flow, but not much depth, since the tides were neaps. Perhaps it's at this point I should explain tides, and how they affect rivers.



The tides as everyone knows are created by the gravitational pull of the moon, but it's not the only factor. The sun (and planets) all have an effect and so, as the moon and the sun line up, they cause the water to be pulled higher causing Spring tides. Neap tides are where the moon is at 90 degrees to the sun. Generally there is a few hours lag in the system caused by the slowness of the water to move, and so you get the biggest tides just after a full or new moon. In a river with fresh water coming down at a constant rate, for each bigger tide more and more water gets pushed upwards, and it can only flow away as fast as the river will let it. The narrower and more twisty the river the more this is prevalent - and you'll see why this is important later!

Even though the water was low, there was plenty of depth in the channel, however, keeping to it is not always obvious. If in doubt you can usually stay in the centre except where there are sunken islands, or parts of the old river bank now in the main flow, but these are well signed. However, I still managed to find some shallows - one second I was happily chugging along in deep water, the next a scrape, a breaking wash as the prop scrambled to get water, and a sharp upward rise. I jammed the boat into reverse, but she was already a well stuck boat. I had a bit of movable weight on board and since I wanted to minimise ventilation once on choppy waters had my stern well down. I started pumping out water barrels, and moving coal like I was sinking. It was a falling tide, and a minute too long on the bank would mean hours waiting for the tide to come back again. Thankfully she started to move, and I found the deep water again. Sissons and the Trent Boating Association make charts of the tidal Trent, however it didn't have the shallows marked that I found, so always be on your guard!

11.00 am saw me reaching Torksey Cut. A strong wind was blowing straight down it, and while I'd only seen two boats all day, as I was struggling to turn the boat into the wind (and there is a lot of side for the wind to catch on **Victoria**) another two boats appeared at the entrance! In the end I had to make the backend rail line longer by tying the stern line to it and motoring against it to pull the bow in. It was just as well I did manage to reach Torksey as my Dad was joining my here, and so after loading everything up went in search of a pub.

The next morning we set off down stream, the wind still blowing well. I managed to find a nice lump of timber in the hold to mount the echo sounder on, which was then roped into position on the backend rail. It didn't look very pretty, but it did the job nicely. Now another problem with tides is that you have to plan your journey with them in mind. Getting to Hull at low water is not very useful since the water in the Humber is lower than the bottom of the River Hull (by some feet), so over the years we have come up with various cunning plans to avoid waiting hours to get into the Hull, and then hours more for enough water to continue up the river. There is a very useful book, *Inland Cruising Companion* by John Liley, which has a graph of the tidal patterns of the Trent and Ouse. One thing you notice is that this far inland the tides don't rise for 6 hours, and then drop for 6 hours. At Trent Falls on a Spring tide the river flows in for only 3 or so hours, and so the ideal timing is to reach Keadby just before low water, push the incoming tide for 3 hours (you may be only making 1-2mph over the ground, but every little helps), thus reaching Trent Falls at High Water, and then it's only about 2 hours to Hull where there is still plenty of water in the river to push against the outflowing tide.

This, you will remember was a Neap tide, and so different dynamics are at play. The fresh water (and the tidal water from the last high water) delay the incoming tide, and while the water level may be coming up, the flow is still flowing out. Imagine my surprise when we reached





Burton Stather (only about 2 miles from Trent Falls) by the time the tide turned. This wasn't a problem per se, but a strong westerly wind even on a lack lustre neap would make the Humber messy, and I soon found pushing the tide at a slow 3.5 mph over the ground, and a heavy following sea was tiring on the arm. As the waves got bigger the echo sounder came out of the water occasionally, but by that state of tide the Humber is deep enough to go almost anywhere, so wasn't an issue. **Victoria** didn't mind the big waves, but it did get a little uncomfortable when we were heading across them. We were nearly at Humber Bridge before the tide even decided to turn - only minutes from the predicted HIGH water time! Weather conditions can have quite a profound change on tide timings.

ABP (Associated British Ports) were dredging the Albert Dock entrance, which left a large tug waiting for my passage across his bow before he could pull the silt into the deep water channel. We were then into the River Hull, and relative safety - at least from big waves, and more sheltered from the wind. It was a good job we were so early on the tide as the water in the river wasn't really deep especially as we went further up river. It hadn't rained for a long while, and so little fresh and neap tides meant the river never really got very full. We reached Hull Bridge after a 12 hour run, which isn't bad for 66 miles. A family meal was had in the pub, since it's only a half hour car ride from Hull for my mum and sister.

Heading up the River Hull towards Struncheon Hill Lock, to enter the lower chamber of the staircase, which is just a half tide lock to give enough depth over the cill at low water. It was tight for depth but the silt was soft.



I wasn't expecting much for the following day, since I was doubtful **Victoria** would fit through the nominal 62ft length of the Driffield Navigation. The first lock, near Hempholme called Struncheon Hill (or Top Hill Low) was

the problem. I'd measured it on Google Earth, and even made a 3D model and thought it would fit a 70 ft boat, but not a 71.5 ft GU one. Sod's law meant that the lock was not only against us, but a boat was coming down, the only movement all day (other than us). I was already in the outer lock (it used to be a staircase to get deeper drafted boats over the bottom cill of the top lock at times of low water), so after a bit more mud thrashing to move out of the way of the wide beam boat, we finally managed to get into the lock chamber. Image my surprise when I realised that when one gate was shut there was still enough room to squeeze behind it. We were through! I think I can safely say this was the first working narrow boat to travel these waters ever, and the first commercial cargo boat to travel the waters since coal was last delivered to Frodingham Wharf in the 60's.



Struncheon Hill Lock at the start of the Driffield Navigation

I drove **Victoria** past my childhood home at Bethel's Bridge, and then went on up towards Brigham straight. I knew I couldn't turn at the end, so went up backwards from the junction. The wind was blowing straight across the cut with nothing to stop it after it had whistled



down the Wolds some 8 miles away. In the end it wasn't so much the wind, but the weed that stopped us reaching Brigham, and since trying to get a full length working narrow boat sideways down the canal wasn't ever going to be an easy feat we had to give up. The wind was so strong it pushed the stern end so hard that Dad couldn't hold it with a boat pole buried in the mud. After getting some water flow back to the engine and a bit of engine thrashing we managed to get the bow to move away from the bank, and once moving the wind



was no longer a problem. Time however was starting to catch up with us, and we needed to be back at Tickton for tomorrow's Humber crossing. Going back I decided to see if the boat would go down the lock the correct way, but after a few minutes it became obvious that without another 2 or so foot of water height it wasn't going to happen, so we had to back out, wind, back in, back out the bottom, and then turn. Now I can safely say that not many 70 odd foot boats turn below the lock, and the low water wasn't helping, but just like on the BW waterways **Victoria** did some more dredging and we managed to get back to the pub just in time for them to have stopped serving food! Thank God for the internet, and an order to the local Chinese did us proud.

*In the next episode **Victoria** re-joins the River Humber and makes passage up to Goole and the Yorkshire Ouse*

Easter at Ellesmere Port 2nd - 5th April 2010

Cath Turpin writes:

All boaters will be welcome at the National Waterways Museum, Ellesmere Port over the Easter weekend. We intend to do more working boat based activities with which the involvement of skilled ex-working boaters will be welcome. Clothing up, loading & unloading etc. This will inevitably reduce the mooring available in the upper basin, as boats will need to move around and we will keep the entrance clear to enable boat movements during visiting hours. As usual, we intend to fill the upper basin for the mooring of ex-working boats and there will be plenty of room elsewhere. The pontoon bridge will be open every evening.

The Historic Boat Yard Project (HBYP) is well advanced and with boats now occupying much of the back yard. Come and find out more about this exciting project. Associated with this, a feature of the gathering this year we will be 'Celebrating Craftsmanship', to coincide with L.T.C.Rolt's centenary. Waterways Journal, launched on Good Friday will include an article by Joseph Boughey focusing on this aspect of his writings.

Once again there will be evening entertainments with a bar and real ale. At the BMS meeting on the Friday evening, Norman Stainthorp will be speaking on Ellesmere Port.

Boatmans' games Breakfast in the cafe!

With the HBYP occupying much of the back yard, parking here will be restricted, so please let us know in advance if you have reasonable special requirements, intend to bring a camper van or need car parking over the weekend. No charge for ex-working boats, £10 each for others.

Please let Mike Turpin know if you are coming, so that mooring can be optimised.

email: miketurpin@onetel.com Tel: 0151 632 5446 1, Market St, Hoylake, Wirral. CH47 2AD

Boats will be coming from both the Ship Canal and the S.U.C. If anyone is interested in joining Ship Canal movements before/after Easter, contact Mike for further details

We all look forward to seeing as many working boats as possible, although I am not sure that we can guarantee the superb weather we had last year – working on it though!