

ISW Ireland 2018

15th - 22nd June

By Gillie and Robin Whittle (Photograph Montage by Ruth Tayler)

Preparing for the journey to Ireland turned out to be quite complicated. The trailer needed some repairs which were completed the day before we were due to leave and the car had problems with the automatic gear box. We decided to hire a Ford Transit for the trip.

Tuesday and Wednesday, 12th & 13th June: We had arranged to split the journey to Holyhead into two and stop off with our daughter in Sheffield. Apart from arriving late due to traffic delays all went well and we arrived in Holyhead about lunchtime on Wednesday 13th June, in good time to be directed aboard the Ferry, 'Ulysses'. There were plenty of white horses on our crossing but the ship felt very stable and the 3 ¼ hour crossing soon passed. We disembarked at 5.30 and eventually arrived at Lough Erne at 9pm. The weather had deteriorated and it had been a long wet and windy drive. The rain eased as we arrived at Lough Erne Yacht Club. We called in the club house to see if the bar was open, but everything was closed up apart from the kitchen, where we found Andy Mullins, Whimbrel of Watton (No. 345), heating up his supper. He'd arrived a day earlier and had been sailing until the rain moved in at lunch time. He warned us of strong winds coming in overnight, and we moved 'Bumble Chugger' so we would be more comfortable with the wind direction. We had some soup and bread and were ready when Andy came round to join us for a drink. Unfortunately he has to leave for home earlier than expected to get back for work on Monday, and Lois will not be coming over at all.

It was a very wild night. A strong wind, force 8 to 9, that broke two yachts off their moorings, brought down a tree and many branches and rocked 'Bumble Chugger' around on the trailer until it felt that she might topple over, and now and then sheets of rain. We were glad not to be afloat!

Thursday, 14th June : Still blowing hard and it kept it up most of the day. Andy went out sailing with 2 reefs and very little jib. He survived but he did say it was rather hairy.

We sat in the club house for a while, and soon after 10am Peter and Derek with Peewit (No. 125) arrived and joined us for a coffee. Although we hadn't planned to launch until the next day, we decided to rig and get our boat in the water straight away. There was still a strong wind but with the smart new LEYC pontoon and two helpers to hold ropes, it was not difficult and we motored round to the T pontoon in front of the club house.

In the afternoon we drove to Castle Archdale, where we had planned to spend Monday night. It was as well that we went, because nothing opened until the beginning of July and the marina didn't look very inviting. We decided to change the plan and return to LEYC on Monday night.

Numbers had risen by the evening - John Gardiner and Deryk Rhodes in Skylark (No. 410) had arrived and we drove into Enniskillen for a meal. After a bit of exploring the seven of us sat down in the Cafe Merlot which we found to be a very pleasant place in a cellar and we had an excellent meal.

On our return we found Tim and Ruth had arrived with their Shrimper 21, Sapphire (No. 17) pulled by a huge camper van. They had just returned from a very exciting few months aboard the Tall Ship 'Tenacious'. They had sailed from Auckland, to Easter Island, to the Falklands, and then another trip to Africa. Part of the latter trip Tim had taken over the medic's role.

Friday, 15th June: A still morning, though cloudy. Bob Whitehouse and Roger Thompson-Yates had arrived with Boudicca (No. 423) and were rigging their boat. We spent some time in the club house and then set off in the car to get provisions for us and some of the others. We returned to find Tom Bailey,

Vice-Commodore of LEYC, had arrived and he and Raymond were starting to lift the Shrimpers in with the hoist. We gave some help and then returned to 'Bumble Chugger' for lunch just as the rain started. The rain cleared about mid-afternoon and we and the other Shrimpers set off for a shake-down sail. All seemed OK except the lacing on our gaff which Rob fiddled with. Some wind had come in with the rain and there were some puffy patches around the islands, but nothing too heavy.

On our return the last Shrimper arrived from Sligo. Kevin Collins, his wife, Heather, and son, Fergus arrived with Purple Haze (No. 369). Then, just as we had put the kettle on for tea, Simon Wilton arrived to complete the Rally numbers. We heard a bit about his army career and his helicopter flying. He seems to have had an exciting life. He had come without a Shrimper as his is moored in the Falklands where he spends 6 months of the year. The other 6 months he lives in Aberdeen. We introduced him to some of the other sailors and he went off to find his B & B.

That evening Jen Bailey had opened up the bar for us, and we all gathered there for a drink. After a while Bob went off to get fish and chips for everyone and the rest of the evening was spent in the Club

Saturday, 16th June - Race Day: This was race day and all seven Shrimpers took part. Briefing took place after lunch and soon after we were out on the water waiting for our start after the J24s and the Yeomans. There was a strong wind gusting down the Lough - force 5 with gusts of 6 to 7. There were 3 races back to back, so by the end everyone was feeling quite stretched. Purple Haze won all 3 races quite easily and the rest competed hard with quite a lot of changes of position. Overall results were:

1. Purple Haze,
2. Bumble Chugger,
3. Sapphire,
4. Boudicca,
5. Whimbrel of Watton,
6. Peewit
7. Skylark.

The evening party at the LEYC celebrated both its 200th birthday and the welcoming dinner for the Shrimper fleet. An excellent buffet was produced, including a slice of the Club's Birthday cake. The Commodore made a welcoming speech and presented Robin with an LEYC pennant. Robin thanked LEYC for their hospitality, and presented the Commodore with a framed picture of a fleet of racing Shrimpers (taken at the ISW meeting in France). He also presented the Shrimper Regatta Challenge Cup to Kevin as helm of the winning boat, Purple Haze (No. 369). The cup was passed round filled with malt whisky for all to sip.

Sunday, 17th June: LEYC regatta continued, but the Shrimpers' rally was to visit Magho on the south side of the Lough for lunch and then on to Lusty Beg for the night. Before leaving we visited Tom on board his fine motor boat 'Ida' for a cup of tea. It was unfortunate that Andy had to leave early and was due to take the Ferry back to England later that day. We said our 'good-byes' before setting off.

It was still quite windy and soon after we set sail the rain started, so it was a rather unpleasant trip. We arrived at the Magho pontoon close to a wooded shore on the edge of a steep sided mountain extending into the low clouds. The rain stopped and the sun almost came out in time for lunch. Simon had come with us and he and Rob regaled each other with exciting stories from their pasts! We warmed ourselves up with G & Ts and John Gardner joined us. Everyone else had their lunches and then set off on the path up the cliffs to the lookout point, 1000ft above. They didn't get any good views at the top - everything was shrouded in clouds and mist and it wasn't possible to even see the other side of the Lough.

The rain returned and we set off into the murk, not really being able to see where we were aiming for on the other side of the Lough, 3½ miles away. There is a very good system of numbered posts in the Lough

which correspond to numbers on the charts, so one never has to be worried about getting lost. We did a bit of a roundabout route, but after an hour we sailed into the calm waters of Lusty Beg. They had reserved sections of the pontoons for us, but in fact the marina was empty apart from 1 motor boat. We checked in the office and collected and paid for the milk and bread that we had asked them to get in for the fleet's provisions. The rain came and went, and we sheltered in the cabin playing Black Jack until it was time to join everyone in the bar and restaurant for a very good meal.

Monday, 18th June: Dry and less wind, and we actually had some sunshine for a couple of hours. We were the first to leave and had a good sail across to the south shore, back in amongst the islands. We wanted to explore a couple of places where we might have a barbecue on Thursday. They both looked possible though dependent on the direction of the wind and absence of rain. Our fallback plan would be a barbecue back at LEYC.

We sailed back to LEYC to do some jobs, like checking the trailer for a leak in the pneumatic suspension system and setting up the mast lowering system with our hinged bowsprit, in readiness for going through bridges on the Upper Lough Erne to Crom Castle. Later in the afternoon the other Shrimpers started arriving back. Boudicca and Peewit had gone up the river to Kesh, and had had the same problems that we encountered the previous year with overhanging trees (one bent antennae and a bit of wind direction arrow lost). Peter saw three kingfishers. They had also visited White Island and Castle Archdale, but had not crossed over to Castle Tully which was a shame: the wind seems to have freshened while they were out there. Sapphire had sailed to Castle Tully where Tim and Ruth did the walk round the headland.

Tom was opening the bar that evening especially for the Shrimper fleet, so we went along. Some of the sailors had already decided to go off and do their own thing, but we were there with the Collins family and Tim and Ruth. Tom kept us well entertained with his anecdotes, and talked us through our trip to Crom Castle - he is a mine of information about everything! After a meal of eggs and bacon on board, Rob returned to the club for further socialising.

Tuesday, 19th June: A still, grey morning. Rain showers came and went. We set off soon after breakfast heading south towards Enniskillen. The wind was heading us all the way and we had to motor sail. We stopped at Devenish Island where there had been an important religious settlement, and spent some time wandering around the ancient ruins. Tim and Ruth had planned to call in there but they continued on to Enniskillen as did the other 4 boats (one boat had been left at LEYC and her crew joined two of the other boats.) The Collins had decided not to sail down, but they were there at Enniskillen to greet us. Before we left Devenish Island, Rob had the engine out and gave it a good inspection. The slow running was not working, but he couldn't solve the problem. Apart from this the engine was working well, but it made it rather difficult to arrive at a pontoon in a controlled way! He had a brief discussion with Kevin (a mechanical engineer) when we arrived at the Round 'O' Marina in Enniskillen and was reassured that it was just the slow running jet in the carburettor which was blocked.

After a pause for shopping and getting masts lowered, we all continued under the Enniskillen bridges and moored up on a pontoon close to Waterways Ireland headquarters. We had arranged to meet there at 1 o'clock. The modern headquarters building is a very impressive place, and we were welcomed by Nuala Reilly, who we had met on our visit last year. She took us up to the boardroom where there was a wonderful spread of sandwiches laid out with tea and coffee. Once we had eaten and chatted Nuala gave us a presentation about Waterways Ireland and answered our various questions. Next we were led down the backstairs to the archives room - a wonderful collection of drawings and records covering the history of the rivers and canals of Ireland. Quite amazing draughtsmanship and beautifully written up logs in immaculate copperplate handwriting. Heavy rain had started while we were there, and Nuala presented us each with a large blue Waterways Ireland umbrella, which was a very welcome gift.

Back down to the pontoon and into our wet sailing gear, and we were away heading for Carrybridge as the 'half-way-house' to Crom Castle. It was a 2½ hour trip motoring against the wind with the rain continuing to sheet down. We were leading the flotilla to start with, but then we took a wrong turning and led everyone astray up a dead end waterway so we finished the trip bringing up the rear! We arrived thoroughly soaked and scurried up to the Carrybridge Hotel to revive ourselves with drinks and a good meal.

Wednesday, 20th July: The day started grey and overcast, but after a while blue patches of sky appeared and some sunshine, and the wind was in the right direction to be able to sail the whole way. Everything looked so different and pleasant with fields and trees showing lovely patterns of different greens, and the banks of the islands bordered with rushes and many yellow flag irises and yellow water lilies. We saw many herons throughout our trip. There were two bridges to pass under. The first, at Carrybridge did not require mast lowering for the Shrimper 19s. The second did require us to lower the masts but this turned out to be an easy manoeuvre.

We arrived at Crom Castle with plenty of time to spare. The grounds and all the outlying cottages are now owned by the National Trust, and they had a very interesting visitors' centre full of information about the history of the estate and the castle (rebuilt after 2 fires) and the Earls of Crom. It was a 20 minute walk up to the castle, and soon after 2 o'clock we set off - some going along the shore path past the ruins of the earliest Crom Castle, and some going round the lake.

The present day Crom Castle is a very impressive building, built in 1841 after the previous castle had been burnt down. We were cordially welcomed by John Creighton, the current Lord Erne, who took us into the main hall of the castle and started his talk on the history of the family and the history of the castles, pointing out various interesting portraits and tapestries and two 12,000 year old Irish elk skulls with magnificent antlers that had been dug up out of the bog. We went through to the library, the sitting room and the dining room and in each room Lord Erne continued his talk, each room full of memories from his childhood, when he had free range to run all over the castle. He now lives in the West Wing and has a continual battle to keep the castle in good order. This is largely achieved by hosting weddings and parties of Americans. The Americans love the experience - they are great fans of the Downton Abbey series and delight in being able to live the life with a real butler and banquets in amazing surroundings - and they pay well! Sad for Lord Erne to have to commercialise his home!

We were finally led into the old Orangery, set up with a long table laden with sandwiches, scones with butter and raspberry jam, and banoffee tarts. Lord Erne and a helper dished out tea and coffee. A very pleasant end to the tour. Lord Erne answered more questions and sold us postcards (signed if required) and received £25 from each of us. Rob offered him a sail in a Shrimper (which he declined) and congratulated him on his forthcoming wedding to Harriet. We then went out onto the lawn where Heather organised a group photo, and we said our farewells to Lord Erne, returning to the boats via the boathouse.

Not such a pleasant journey back to Carrybridge: the wind was on our nose and had got up a lot. It was quite uncomfortably choppy across some of the larger patches of water. We all negotiated the two bridges successfully and by 7 o'clock we were back in the Carrybridge Hotel enjoying their drink and food. The hotel looked after us very well and opened up an en suite bedroom for us to use both mornings, and provided towels for us if we wanted showers, all at no extra cost.

Thursday, 21st June: Beautiful clear blue sky when we got up, but by the time we left the clouds were gathering and we even had a little bit of rain. The wind was on the nose again, though we did manage to sail along a section of the winding waterways. By the time we got to Enniskillen the wind had got up a lot and it seemed a long haul back to LEYC, even though the sun was shining. Tim and Ruth, who had Simon aboard, stopped off at Waterways Ireland as Simon had missed our visit on Tuesday and was very

envious of our very fine blue umbrellas. He was hopeful that he might beg one, and was successful! They then stopped off at Devenish Island.

The other Shrimpers arrived back at LEYC several hours after us and all were very pleased with an enjoyable sail back. We had decided to hold the barbecue at one end of the clubhouse specially set aside for this activity. Everyone provided and shared their offerings and the table was soon filled with an assortment of tasty foods. During the meal we noticed a GP14 out on the water which was having difficulties and then capsized. Peter, Roger and Tim dashed off to the rescue in 'Peewit'! They successfully brought the boat and sailor back to shore. We moved into the bar later after Tom had arrived to open up, and while we were there three bottles of wine were delivered as a thank you to the rescuers.

At 7.30 the club historian, Michael Clarke ('The Admiral') gave us a talk about the history of LEYC. It was interesting to learn about the war years when LEYC became an important centre for the Catalina flying planes.

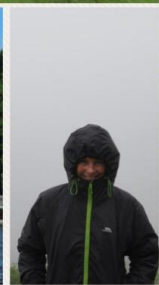
The evening progressed with more drink and music from Bob on his mandolin and John on his ukulele. It was a late night for most people and Tim was suffering the next morning but got little sympathy from Ruth!

Friday, 22nd June: A perfect calm morning with a clear blue sky! There had been vague plans to visit the gin distillery across the water, but we all agreed we should be out sailing. There were slight differences of opinion as to whether to go racing round an island or just to potter. We chose the latter and set off with Simon aboard at the helm. We did our pottering round a couple of islands and ended up on the pontoon for the Manor House Hotel. Ashore we spent a pleasant half hour sitting in the sun on the hotel patio drinking coffee. There was no sign of the other boats, but once we started sailing again, we rounded an island to see four boats chasing after one another.

The other boats were all back at LEYC in time to be craned out before lunchtime, while we did a bit more sailing round another island before tying up on the pontoon to eat our sandwiches. There was a bit of time before we had to tidy up to go out for the final dinner at Tulana on the Green restaurant, 3 or 4 miles up the road. We were joined by 'the Admiral' who came aboard and chatted to us with more amusing anecdotes before rowing out to his J24 to do some repairs. Kevin also came over and sat chatting for a while. Soon after 6pm we set off for Lisnarick to the restaurant for the final dinner. We were given a very good meal, and Rob presented the trophies - The Lady Daphne Seamanship Trophy for the rescue work in Peewit, and the Plymouth Plate to John Gardner and Deryk Rhodes on their first ISW, hoping to encourage them to attend future Shrimper rallies. We were then presented with a lovely jigsaw puzzle made from a photo of a row of Shrimpers moored up in Holland (from a couple of years ago) with a card signed by everyone giving their thanks. There were fond farewells, some people going straight off and others going back to their cottages/B&Bs. We were concerned that Tom might have opened the bar for us, but on our return to the clubhouse we found it was all in darkness, so we headed for an early night on 'Bumble Chugger'.

Saturday, 23rd June: Another lovely morning, and we had time for a last short sail before ending up on the pontoon by the slipway. We retrieved 'Bumble Chugger' on the trailer and de-rigged her in a leisurely way. There was time to have a wander around the area and we eventually left soon after 4pm for the drive to Dublin in good time for our ferry. This left promptly on time but there were 'technical' delays on the way and we didn't get in to Holyhead until 2am Sunday morning. There was then the long drive home - we took it in turns with the driving and the roads were clear of traffic but it still seemed a very long way and it was a relief to get home at 8am.

It had been a really wonderful week and we had renewed friendships and forged new ones!



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