

A TALL TALE OF TALL SHIPS

by

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At the end of 1990, when it became apparent that the Cutty Sark Tall Ships Race was going to come to Ireland for the first time, some members of the Northern Ireland Area Old Gaffers Association got to talk. Alan Hidden, our Area Hon. Secretary had received the rules governing the participation of craft in the Cutty Sark Tall Ships Race. He mentioned to Adrian Spence, the owner of VILIA, that his boat was eligible to enter the race.

Adrian queried this with Alan who told him that to enter a boat in the Cutty Sark Tall Ships Race, it had to have a waterline length greater than thirty feet and that half of the crew must be between the ages of 16 and 25. Adrian being an adventurous type had his imagination stimulated by this information and the next thing I knew was that I was being asked when my holidays could be taken the following summer.

I work in the manufacturing industry and my holidays are set from year to year, but when I checked the relevant dates I discovered I could go on the trip by extending my holiday by one or two days, I told Adrian this and although the furthest I had sailed previously had been various day sails to Scotland and the Isle of Man he said he would start the ball rolling to enter VILIA in the 1991 Cutty Sark Tall Ships Race.

The next problem to overcome was who was going to be the crew. Adrian and I are both over 25, so the other two members had to be younger than this, Adrian asked if my son Gary would be interested. Gary was 15 but by the time the race started would be 16 years and 3 weeks. His previous experience had been in dinghies and round the buoy races in Strangford Lough, aboard VILIA, he was showing an interest in sailing so I asked him if he would like to go. He jumped at the chance to go on the trip and after some discussion with Alison, his mother, I told Adrian we were a crew of three.

I have already mentioned Adrian's adventurous streak, on a previous trip to the Arctic in the Galway Hooker Saint Patrick he had become very friendly with his fellow watch keeper, a young man from Kinsale called Jimmy Conlon. Jimmy got the nickname of "Condom". He rang Jimmy and we were a crew of four. Adrian then applied to the Tall Ships Race Committee for an entry and was sent back a

set of regulations with which VILIA would have to comply in order to be able to compete. VILIA is a beautiful Gaff Yawl, designed by Mr. Vincent Craig F.R.I.B.A. and built in Belfast in 1910 by Paddy McKeown. Since acquiring the boat in 1985, Adrian had spent a lot of time and money bringing her into first class condition, so we felt that there could not be too much to do to meet the regulations. Although VILIA is 45' overall from bumpkin to bowsprit, the race organisers wanted VILIA's waterline length certified. Kirk Robinson, one of our local surveyors, duly measured her at 30' 1" and sent off the certificate.

The reply from Tall Ships Committee was to ask for the dimension to be checked again so Kirk re-measured the boat and found her to be 30' 2" this time. Having sent this information off, Adrian received his registration for the Cutty Sark Tall Ships Race from Cork to Belfast. VILIA had been issued with sail number T S K429, she was the smallest Tall Ship ever registered.

The Tall Ships Race of 1991 was to be the last thing that I would do on my two weeks holiday but the run up to it proved to be memorable. It all began on Monday 24th June, at Portaferry, when the Marchioness of Dufferin and Ava launched "an tULTach", a Galway Hooker that my friend Philip Kerr and myself had spent the winter of 1990/91

restoring, it was the culmination of many months of work. This was the press launch for the 1991 Strangford Lough Regatta for Galway Hookers and other Traditional Craft, held annually in Portaferry. VILIA as usual was to attend this great event.

On Saturday 29th June, after sailing with the rest of the fleet up the Narrows into Portaferry, Philip and I had successfully picked up a mooring for "an tULTach". Things began to get complicated for VILIA. Adrian had successfully berthed VILIA at the quay at Cook Street and was watching John Neilly approach with his gaff yawl ANADYOMENE. The current swung her bowsprit into VILIA's mizzen rigging, causing the mizzenmast to snap. VILIA was due to leave for Cork the following Wednesday so John Neilly's promise of a new mast before she left was a big one.

John Neilly is a big man and he lived up to his promise, when we arrived at Ringhaddy Quay, VILIA's homeport, the new mizzenmast was waiting. We stepped the mast, spent an hour fitting lights and aerials, bending on the sails, there was no varnish but at least we had a mast. The Navstar aerial gave some trouble but Davy Mullen our resident spark sorted it out.

I was still at work and couldn't make the first part of the trip, Adrian's Father, James, a friend, Harry Thompson, Gary and Adrian were to take the boat to Dublin to take part in the Nissan Regatta, Alison and I entrusted our son to VILIA, I still don't know if we did the right thing. I returned to work for two days but my mind was with VILIA and her journey south.

I finished work on Friday at 13.00 and caught the 16.00 train to Belfast from Bangor, where I live, to rendezvous with Claire Buckley. Claire, one of the regular crew of VILIA was going to travel with me to Dublin. We caught the Enterprise Express and arrived in Dublin at 20.00. We had arranged to meet

Adrian at the Point Centre where the Dubliners were giving a concert, so after finding VILIA berthed on the North Wall of the River Liffey and depositing our bags on board, we went into the concert and found the rest of the crew being entertained by good music.

After Friday night's festivities, Saturday dawned grey and calm with the prospect for the day's racing being for light airs. We took VILIA out to the mouth of the Liffey with the rest of the boats and when the start came all the boats remained in close proximity to one another. This led to a fair bit of banter between the boats, none more so than that between VILIA and EMERALD.

EMERALD is a beautiful Albert Strange designed Gaff Yawl, sailed by a guy called Joe Pennington. Three years earlier, Joe and Adrian had struck up a close friendship whilst riding out a SW gale in the Scottish port of Portpatrick. Joe's crew was a local character from Poolbeg Yacht Club called Tom Roche. The bantering between Tom and Adrian was very entertaining.

As the day wore on the zephyrs turned into a light breeze and the sun came out. The boats began to race as the crews started to harden the sheets to harness the wind. We worked hard to set the boat up properly and were rewarded by being in the lead after the first hour. The course took us out into Dublin Bay then north to Howth Head. The eventual race winner passed us on the beat to the last mark. She got too far ahead for us to catch her on the run up the Liffey so we had to be satisfied with second place. We joined in the post race festivities laid on in Poolbeg Yacht Club and had a great night singing and telling stories into the wee small hours.

Sunday dawned a lovely day and I was up and about from early on. I visited EMERALD and breakfasted with Joe. We lazed about all morning and at 12.30 The Clear Head Challenge started, this was a sail about in the Liffey for participating boats, EMERALD

led the way towards the centre of Dublin,. Stopping short of O'Connell Street Bridge, followed by VILIA. The Liffey had seen nothing like this for quite some time.

At 17.00 that afternoon we attended the prize giving, each crewmember received a commemorative wooden block, mounted and engraved, Adrian received an engraved Silver Ice Bucket for our race result. Again Poolbeg Yacht Club were our hosts for the evening, this was the last evening of the Regatta so the Club was packed with sailors from all over the British Isles.

Joe decided at this stage to accompany VILIA to Cork, he was going to act as "mother ship", offering to carry our excess baggage during the race, so plans were made to leave Dublin tomorrow to sail South. Paddy Barry, Skipper of the Saint Patrick, the Galway Hooker Adrian had previously sailed on, and his wife Mary invited us back to their house that evening where we had a lovely meal prepared by Mary's fair hand. We stayed the night after staying up late, singing along in a session with Paddy.

Monday dawned a miserable day with a forecast of gale force winds so we delayed our departure until Tuesday. VILIA's engine had been giving some problems with starting so we decided to pull the injectors and Tom Roche took them to a local expert for examination. Joe and Gary carried out some adjustments to the mizzenmast that was not locating properly.

Tom returned with the injectors that had been declared as good as new, when I was refitting them Joe re-stepped the mast, it was a much better job than before, it sat more securely in it's step. Although the injectors had been declared OK the batteries were flat so we had to hand start the engine and charge the batteries for a couple of hours.

We decided to spend the rest of the day in Dublin so took Mary Barry up on her offer to take us up town to a good restaurant. We had a good feed with some nice wine before eventually returning to VILIA, which was parked beside the pontoon at Poolbeg Yacht Club. Johnny Healion and Tom Roche came down to the boat after tea and asked us to come into the Club for a singsong, this we did, singing our hearts out for the rest of the night and going to bed in the early hours.

Tuesday 9th July, a bright morning with a good forecast. The wind had gone through in the night; we had heard various yachts calling Dublin Radio for forecasts. The man in Dublin Radio got a little irate because a number of yachts had called in a short time after one another; they were all heading north after a race at Dunlaoghaire and had been caught out in the blow.

We breakfasted early and set out to sail south. VILIA had Adrian, Claire and myself aboard, EMERALD was crewed by Joe and Gary. We left Poolbeg at 10.00 and motored out of the Liffey. When we rounded the end of the South Wall there was a pleasant sou-westerly breeze which took us across Dublin Bay on the next leg of our journey to Cork.

Dalkey Island was on the horizon and was the first headland that we had to round; as we sailed briskly towards it we saw the first signs that there was going to be a Tall Ships Race that summer. Asgard 11 was leaving her homeport of Dunlaoghaire, bound for the Cutty Sark Tall Ships Race start at Milford Haven.

Her sails were being hoisted in the morning sun, it was a beautiful sight, a 105' Brigantine with 90' masts sailing after us into Dalkey sound. She slowly passed us by, the crew waving to us as we sailed along beside.

The wind was picking up so Adrian decided to reef the main, he and Claire went forward to the mast to start the job, we were in the narrowest part of the sound. There are two sorts of reefing on VILIA, roller and slab reefing; Adrian normally uses the roller reefing. As he was rolling in the reef, Adrian ripped a cringle out of the luff of the new mainsail. We started the engine and dropped the mainsail to see if we could repair it on board. Although we had the necessary equipment we decided to put into Wicklow to see if we

could get it professionally repaired there. We hoisted as much of the main as we dared with the tear reefed out and set course for Wicklow.

Our course took us inside the Codling Banks but ASGARD 11 sailed southeast into the Irish Sea, leaving us alone with EMERALD to sail south along the east coast of Ireland. This was not the last time VILIA and ASGARD 11 were to sail in company this summer. We sailed past Bray Head, making good progress despite our problems. Brides Head with Wicklow Lighthouse atop was not long coming into view. By 14.00 we were dropping the sails to let us enter Wick low Harbour. We motored into the outer harbour and attempted to tie up but there was too much of a swell out here so Adrian decided to go up the river into the much quieter berths available there.

The outer harbour at Wicklow has a long outer wall onto which the local Postman, Pat would you believe, has painted possibly two dozen pictures of various types of boat, it is unique I believe.

VILIA motored up the beautiful river harbour at Wicklow and was soon berthed on the South Wall. As EMERALD was about to join us, the Harbour Master asked us to move onto the North Wall because he was expecting a commercial vessel, we obliged him. It was a beautiful summers afternoon and we lay about the deck for a while, basking in the sun. Someone made a late lunch that we all enjoyed, before going to look for a sail maker.

We tried three establishments, all of whom dealt in things nautical but none of them could repair a damaged sail. What was to be done?

The Bridge Tavern appeared in front of us so we crossed the threshold to find a wonderful bar with a witty landlord. After the first pint I decided that there was enough room on the floor of the bar to repair the mainsail so I returned to VILIA to get the necessary equipment.

I spent the next two hours, firstly repairing the damaged eye and then reinforcing all the rest of the eyes on the luff. Whilst this was happening a search party from Dublin who needed Adrian's skills as a lawyer found us. Adrian was taken back to Dublin to return much later that night, he took the sail with him just in case a sail maker could be found to do a more professional job on the damaged sail.

Claire, Gary, Joe and myself returned to VILIA, we prepared and ate our evening meal that made us rest for a while. Joe suggested that we take a trip to the Wicklow Sailing Club that lay at the end of the river on the south side so we launched Joe's dinghy and made the journey. They made us most welcome and when they found out that we were a "Tall Ship" were able to tell us that many of their members were also going to Cork for the festivities. When we returned to VILIA after midnight, Adrian had not yet returned so we put the kettle on to make some tea.

I must at this stage tell you that VILIA has a tradition that when the kettle boils or a meal that has just been prepared is ready, some thing always happens!. On this particular occasion Adrian appeared with Johnny Healion and the repaired mainsail.

The repair to the sail was an excellent one, with the area around the cringle having been reinforced with heavy sailcloth. We sat and talked for a while over a cuppa, before wishing Johnny safe journey and going to sleep.

Wednesday 10th July dawned a beautiful morning. I got up about 07.00 and bent on the mainsail. It took me about half an hour to do the job and just as I was finishing, Joe's curly head appeared from EMERALD's hatch, he was bearing a refreshing cup of coffee. We sat for a while, enjoying the early morning sun before rousing the rest of the crews. Breakfast, sunny side up was soon being devoured and the passage plans being worked out by Adrian and Joe.

The forecast was sou-westerly 4 to 6, not great, but not enough to stop us, so at 09.00 VILIA and EMERALD left the peace and tranquillity of the Wicklow River and headed

out into the Irish Sea, bound for Crosshaven in Cork Harbour. This was always going to be a long run, but little did we know how long.

In the early part of the day the wind was about force 4 and of some benefit even though it was a beat. We sailed south past Mizzen Head, leaving the Wicklow Mountains behind as we passed Arklow. The sailing was far from comfortable but very enjoyable. On down south, very little was visible on the low lying Wexford coastline as we passed Courtown, Cahore Point and headed for the Tuskar Rock, the light house that marks the south east corner of Ireland.

The wind had been steady all day, but as dusk approached it started to rise. We could see the bright lights of Rosslare on the starboard quarter and the loom of the flashing light on the Tuskar rock dead ahead. The wind was not only rising but was also coming round into the south so the engine was started to maintain our good progress. Claire decided to make our evening meal; she prepared 3 of the boil in a bag variety. These meals are very palatable and we had just sat down to enjoy the feast when the curse of VI LIA took over.

The wind blew up to a fierce speed to put VILIA on her ear. Adrian dropped his meal and asked me to bring the reefing bar up to the mast. We stuck a quick reef in the main and went back to our meal, which we polished off very quickly. Claire's curry was on the cockpit sole and inedible. Things settled down for a while as we headed towards the Tuskar, Adrian had decided to go inside the Tuskar Rock but Joe had decided to go around the outside, so we lost contact at this stage of the trip. The wind was blowing a good force 6 and Adrian and I went forward to put another reef in the main. We had long ago changed to our smallest headsails but this time we dropped the staysail before starting on the main.

VILIA was travelling about 12 knots over the ground, 7 knots through the water and 5 knots of tide. We were passing the Tuskar Light, moving about a fair bit in the swells when Adrian dropped the reefing bar, we watched it, I can see it yet, bounce on the coach roof, the side deck and pirouette through the safety rails and into the black waters that surrounded the Tuskar Rock around midnight on that dirty night in July.

This left us no option but to put in the reef using the slab reefing points. Whilst resetting the sail after tying in all the reefing points, one of the reefing cringles pulled out of the sail and started the sail to rip again. We dropped the main and repaired it with sail tape, a repair that lasted until VILIA reached Cork.

Two hours south of the Tuskar, we changed course to sail southwest, and for the first time in eight hours we were able to stop the engine. We started to sail along the south coast of Ireland in a favourable southerly wind, this was very pleasant. I had taken no sleep up to now so I took the opportunity to take my off watch sleep, it was 02.00.

We sailed for two lovely hours before the wind shifted back to the southwest, on went the engine to drive us forward into the swells. The day that came with the dawn was bright and sunny but there was no let up in the direction or strength of the wind, it was blowing five to six. VILIA was taking all of this in her stride, I cannot say the same other crew. Adrian was used to long sea trips but Claire had taken no sleep and I had only had the two hours during the night. This left us both very tired although we were excited enough to be awake.

Another element that had disturbed Claire was the news from Richard that she had received at 21.00 last night on the VHF that there was a problem at home and she would have to leave at the earliest opportunity. We told Richard that the first place we would make landfall would be Crosshaven so had arranged to meet him there.

VILIA sailed past the landmark of Hook Head, past Tramore and on towards Mine Head, leaving Dungarvan astern. The views over the Monavullagh Mountains were beautiful in the bright sunshine. We had long ago stowed the mainsail and were driving into this unfavourable wind with only the small jib, staysail and mizzen. When the sun

disappeared and the first of many rain squalls passed through the crew became less comfortable but VILIA was fairly revelling in it.

The sou'westerly was pushing us ever closer to the coast so just short of Mine Head we put in a tack and headed out to sea for a few miles. The radio forecast was not encouraging so it was suggested to Adrian that we put in somewhere for shelter. The next suitable place was Youghal; although it said in the Pilot that it was a dangerous entrance it offered some respite from the weather. We decided to go in and find a mooring or at worst we could sit at anchor.

Youghal is a sheltered estuary, but it takes care when entering or leaving to avoid the sand banks. We dropped the remaining sail and motored into the peaceful waters of the estuary, into the wide river, past the drying quays before spotting a possible mooring. As we swept around to inspect it, Claire spied a new looking quay further up the river. We made a pass close to this quay and decided that it would not dry out, came around again and berthed VILIA for the first time in 35 hours.

This new quay had been built in the past two years to be used by commercial shipping to carry cargoes into and out of Youghal. There were warehouses along the quay but no-one to ask if there was any shipping due in so we decided to find a warmer place. In the 1950's Youghal was used as the location for the film "Moby Dick", starring Gregory Peck so when the first welcoming door belonged to the Moby Dick Hotel, we were not surprised.

We went into the Hotel and were made welcome by Paddy Linehan, the owner of the Hotel and also the Mayor of Youghal. We ordered some food and drink before hanging our wet oilskins up to dry, they dripped onto the floor forming a sizeable puddle. With the food came 4 scrapbooks that Paddy had collected over the last 40 years, we enjoyed looking through them after our meal. They contained everything that Paddy could find that was ever written about Youghal, a lot of pages were taken up about the making of the film "Moby Dick". A phone call established that EMERALD had safely put into Dunmore East. Claire had contacted Richard, ordered a taxi, and gone to meet him in Cork so Adrian and I had a few drinks before going back to VILIA to find our bunks and get some well deserved sleep.

Adrian and I awoke after a good night's sleep at 09.00, on Friday 12th July to another bright sunny morning. I prepared a good breakfast that we enjoyed before hanging out all the wet things to dry and opening the hatches to air the boat. We filled the diesel tank from our jerry cans then set off into the town to get them refilled. The nearest source of fuel was at a local filling station, a good 10 minutes walk from the quay.

After getting them filled, we left the full cans back on board and set off to explore Youghal, it is a lovely little town, well worth a visit. After lunching at the Moby Dick we decided to get a replacement-reefing bar made so we set off to find an engineering workshop. This we did in the nearby industrial estate where a local engineer soon cut up and welded into shape, a piece of bar which he made into as good a reefing bar as the original although not as pretty. I wound some insulating tape around it to make it look a little better and it is still in service today.

We decided to leave Youghal to make the next step around the coast to a little fishing village called Ballycotton. The weather was a little bit more settled but the winds were still sou'westerly and blowing about force 4. As we picked our way out of Youghal Harbour, being careful of the sand banks, the first of two squalls hit us, but thankfully it did not last long and no harm came of it. When it passed the sun came out and we hoisted the sails to make the most of the more southerly course we set to clear Capel Island and Knockadoon Point.

Once around the headland VILIA's course was again into the prevailing wind which meant we were back to the incessant pitching into an uncomfortable sea, although it was not as bad as it had been on Thursday. It took about four hours to reach

Ballycotton that we reached about 19.00. There were no other yachts in the harbour but it was full of fishing boats, we tied up outside one of the bigger ones. One of the local fishermen came aboard and spent half an hour telling us, over a beer, about the local conditions pertaining to Ballycotton harbour.

We made an evening meal to maintain our balanced diet before going ashore to sample the nightlife of Ballycotton and just as we finished another yacht came alongside. It was a modern cruiser, crewed by Nicky Hannigan and John Lyons from Waterford. We offered them a beer before we left for the evening.

The inevitable Harbour Bar was the first port of call, a very friendly place with lots of memorabilia around the walls. We left and walked along a road, high above the sea with a good view to the east. We scoured the horizon for signs of EMERALD but she was not to be seen. The wind had eased a bit but was still in the southeast, we reckoned that Joe would be out of Dunmore East as soon as the wind would let him; the forecast was for that to happen tonight.

Adrian and I visited the two other pubs in Ballycotton before returning to VILIA, Nicky and John were still up so we sat up drinking and talking into the middle of the night. They were also going to Cork to see the Tall Ships and were intrigued to find that they were aboard one. Their plan was to sail to Crosshaven the next morning; we decided to leave then too.

Saturday at first seemed a nice morning, but when I looked over the harbour wall I could not see Ballycotton Island, which was only a quarter of a mile offshore, through the sea fog. Adrian decided that we would still be able to go after breakfast.

VILIA followed Nicky and John out of the harbour but when they turned off to go between the Island and the mainland we kept on straight ahead, going south far enough to miss the outlying rocks before turning south west and heading for the mouth of Cork Harbour. The visibility was poor, a few hundred yards, but we kept a good watch for other boats and proceeded with our voyage. When we reached the vicinity of Power Head, the fog at last started to lift. We saw various other yachts all making to catch the tide into Cork Harbour although we were still ten miles off the entrance. Ever so slowly we changed course to the north and we set the sails to maximum effect, so much so that the engine was stopped. We left Roches Point Lighthouse to starboard as we passed through the narrows that are the entrance to Cork Harbour and negotiated our passage between the myriad of little boats that were fishing these waters.

We rounded the point at Meagher Fort and headed into the beautiful, peaceful Crosshaven, home of the oldest yacht club in the world, Royal Cork. We were shown to a berth in Royal Cork's own marina where the local representative of the Irish Cruising Club gave us a rundown on the facilities. We went up to the clubhouse to make use of their showers but ran into Nicky and John and were detoured to the bar. As we sat over a drink speculating about when Joe and Gary might make an appearance, through the window the unmistakable form of EMERALD rounded the point to enter Crosshaven, she was about a mile away.

We went down to the berth and helped them to settle in beside VILIA. All four of us went up to the showers to remove the grime of the last few days. EMERALD had left Dunmore East the previous evening at midnight and made good time to arrive here at 16.00. We went into Crosshaven that evening and after a feed joined in a singsong in a local pub, returning to the boats late for a well earned sleep.

Sunday morning was beautiful; we breakfasted outside to absorb the warm rays of the early morning sun. As both boats were tidied up a discussion ensued as to where to go to next, Kinsale, twenty-five miles to the west was the destination chosen. We left Crosshaven at 10.00 bound for the gourmet capital of Ireland.

The wind was light and more in the west so we set the big genoa and full main to get maximum advantage in the calm seas that the offshore winds produced, this was very pleasant.

I had bought two lovely steaks in Crosshaven that I decided to turn into a meal as we passed Barry Head. I prepared a feast of boiled potatoes, steaks fried in wine and onions, with peas as the vegetable. As this magnificent creation was nearing completion Adrian reported that the weather was looking as if it might blow up. He suggested that we do a headsail change from genoa to yankee to make VILIA more comfortable to eat our meal.

We changed the sail and the boat settled down in the slightly stronger wind, we were still making 5 or 6 knots. We sat down with our hot meal ready to enjoy the succulent steaks when the curse struck. There was a desperate flapping of sails, the sheet had come off the yankee and the sail was flogging in the wind. The meal was set aside and the problem sorted before any damage was done. We came back to the cockpit and finished our meal before VILIA played any more tricks on us. Oysterhaven passed on the starboard side, followed by Frower Point. Joe had moved slightly ahead of us was already starting to turn north into Kinsale Harbour, the estuary of the Bandon River, the wind was still strong.

We followed EMERALD up the estuary, past the old castle, Charles Fort on the port side and round the bend in the river into view of the marina. Joe was getting berthed as we arrived; Adrian circled around waiting his turn to approach the pontoon. In the strong breeze Adrian circled around and on one of these circuits let VILIA come too close to a large plastic yacht flying the French Tricolour. The current pulled VILIA down onto the French boat and our port shroud caught on his pulpit, I freed it almost immediately but there was a loud noise that brought the occupants of the yacht on deck with a rush. No damage appeared to have been done and pleasantries were exchanged with the French folk before we left the scene to head for the marina.

VILIA berthed beside EMERALD in the Marina in Kinsale and Giles, the Marina Manager told us that we were to have free berthing because we were a registered Tall Ship, this was very well received. We sorted ourselves out as is done when a landfall is made before deciding what to do for entertainment that evening.

Kinsale is a beautiful place and the recognised gourmet capital of Ireland, so we decided to have a meal in one of the good restaurants in the town.

Jimmy Conlon, our fourth official crewmember, lives in Kinsale and Adrian had told him to watch out for VILIA arriving this weekend. We walked into the centre of the town and found a pub that Jimmy had told Adrian we could meet in. Jimmy arrived within the hour and recommended a restaurant to us, giving us directions as to how to get there. We made arrangements to meet Jimmy later at the Marina.

We had a beautiful meal and a few drinks before returning to the Marina, we returned to find that Nicky Hannigan had arrived, this time he had a new crew, his nephew Seamus. They came aboard and another night of story telling ensued, Jimmy came down but left early as he was working on Monday.

Monday started with another beautiful bright sunny morning. After breakfast, we noticed a familiar boat, LEEMARA of HOWTH, a 44' sloop in the Marina, she came from our home port of Ringhaddy so we went to speak to them to find out that they were also a Tall Ship. We spoke about the news of the Race from Milford Haven that the boats were getting a rough passage in the sou'westerly winds.

I was delighted later in the morning to be accosted by an old mate of mine from home, Tom Higgins, who had come down from Belfast by road to see the Tall Ships in Cork. Tom and his wife Carol spent the day with us and we had a singsong at the pub beside the Marina with the crews of two other yachts in the Marina who had come aboard VILIA last night. When Tom and Carol left I went for a walk to explore Kinsale town. It is a

beautiful place, hiving with all kinds of activities. The local yacht club was hosting an event for Mirrors and the place was crawling with enthusiastic youngsters and their parents. We whiled away the rest of the day just relaxing and enjoying the atmosphere of Kinsale.

Tuesday 16th July, this was the last day in Kinsale before going to Cork. The 208-mile run from Milford Haven by the main fleet was due to finish tonight. The course was to take them around the Fastnet Lighthouse, before finishing across a line due south of the Old Head of Kinsale. The force 6 head winds had slowed the fleet up and a lot of the boats had their finishing position worked out by the handicapping system peculiar to the Cutty Sark Tall Ships Race, this is a time plus distance formula which makes each of the vessels a finisher even if they don't cross the finishing line.

We had a lazy day in the marina, not doing anything too strenuous. We took Jimmy's kit on board at lunchtime and moved some of the surplus kit onto EMERALD. IN the evening we went to another pub, when the barman was asked to turn off the piped music, he obliged immediately and another singing session was underway. Star of the evening was Nicky Hannigan who when asked to sing broke into a fabulous blues number about a wee dog, not to be rivalled that evening. We returned to VILIA to get ready to leave Kinsale the next morning.

I awoke early on Wednesday and prepared breakfast for all, we dropped our lines at 07.30 and VILIA led EMERALD down the Bandon River towards the Celtic Sea. I was not ready for the sight that opened in front of us when we reached the open water. Eight square rigged sailing vessels were moving east towards Cork, about three to five miles away, sailing on a flat calm sea. The reflections of their form stretched out towards VILIA as if beckoning, we turned to port and became part of the Cutty Sark Tall Ships Race.

We motored east towards the entrance to Cork Harbour. As we approached, the rest of the fleet came closer, I had never seen so many large sailing vessels before, it was very exciting. We entered Cork Harbour at 10.00 ready for a further 20 miles journey through the estuary up to Cork City Docks on the banks of the River Lee.

VILIA pushed forward towards the spectacular sight of Cobh Cathedral before passing Spike Island, Cork's own Alcatraz, and leaving the historic Naval Base on Haulbowline Island to port. Malcolm Miller and Sir Winston Churchill, large staysail schooners, both passed VILIA on this passage on the way up river. The crowds on the banks as we passed Monkstown and Passage West were solid, only disappearing as we turned west into Lough Mahon. The atmosphere was superb, everywhere people waved, trains blew their whistles and as a jazz band on one of the spectator boats passed us, they played the tune "Vilia oh Vilia".

We passed Blackrock Castle to port to make our entrance to the River Lee. The traffic on the river was quite busy so we were approached by the harbour control boat and were told to berth at the north wall of the north channel of the River Lee. We tied up outside a big modern ketch called FRITEDEN from Germany and EMERALD tied up outside us.

We made VILIA secure and took stock of the situation. On the other side of the river, berthed on the south wall, was ASGARD 11, LORD NELSON, the Jubilee Sailing Trusts Tall Ship specifically built for the disabled and SIR WINSTON CHURCHILL. All the boats on our side of the river were yachts of various sorts with other bigger boats of various types further down river. The Docks were full of beautiful sailing ships of all types, I felt privileged to be part of this international festival of sail.

A young lady came aboard VILIA and announced that she was our Liaison Officer, appointed by the Cork Tall Ships Committee to see that we had all that we needed for our stay in Cork. Her name was Carmel Murphy, she proved to be a valuable addition to the crew of VILIA. Carmel told us where to register with the Tall Ships Organisation

to enable us to get our I.D. badges, various registration forms and other paperwork and VILIA's very own Tall Ships Flag.

After completing these formalities we then went to see the activities that were going on in Cork. We explored the docks area and looked at all the various types of boats that were berthed along the walls. There were yachts of all types, sloops, cutters, ketches, yawls and schooners. There were workboats, pleasure boats, boats from all over the world; I had never been in such a cosmopolitan gathering before.

We located a pub called the Sextant that we made our base for meeting people over the next few days. It was a place not used to the crowds that passed through its doorways during the Tall Ships period, but the staff were very friendly and helpful, they always made us welcome. Thursday was spent exploring the rest of the Tall Ships fleet and getting invitations to visit other boats. I visited the Lowestoft Trawler EXCELSIOR; a magnificent boat built in 1921, beautifully restored and operated by the Excelsior Trust. The PRIDE of GALWAY was also on my itinerary, it was being worked on during the visit to Cork, a team was repairing the bulwarks when I was aboard. Both of these visits were arranged by Carmel, she had connections.

We were waiting for an Emergency Position Indicator Radio Beacon, E.P.I.R.B. to come from Belfast to enable VILIA to compete in the Cutty Sark Tall Ships Race. This was one of the stipulated regulations that the race committee had given Adrian when he had entered VILIA. He had ordered it to be delivered to his home, but when it did not arrive he made arrangements to have it delivered to Cork by train. If it did not arrive then VILIA could not compete in the Race.

As I had previously mentioned at the start of this Tall Tale that there had been some trouble with the Navstar Aerial before VILIA left Ringhaddy. This trouble started again with the machine telling us that there was an aerial fault every time it was switched on. Gary brought down the aerial and we tried to fix it. We found nothing-obvious wrong but when it was re-erected it was working again.

We were to be inspected by the Race Scrutineers, to ensure that VILIA met all the stipulated regulations. We discovered that they would do it on Friday that left us free to go to the barbecue organised by the Cork Tall Ships Committee. Carmel organised tickets for us so we joined the bus queue for Blackrock Castle and along with 2000 other crewmembers enjoyed an extremely well organised event. There were musicians on the roof to entertain us and good food a plenty, Some one threw a barbeque bun and all of a sudden the air was filled with flying bits of barbeque, what a mess, but it was all taken in good humour.

Before returning to VILIA we visited the Railway Station to be told that the package for Adrian had reached Dublin and would be here tomorrow. We went to the Sextant that night and had the biggest music session of the trip so far. The nightlife in Cork was fantastic, with the whole population of the place entering into the spirit of things. Gary and Johnny Healion left the Sextant to go busking on the bridge outside the pub and returned in a half an hour with over twelve pounds, they turned it into fish and chips for the supper that night. It was almost impossible to move along the quaysides until about 02.00 when people started to drift home, the atmosphere was a memorable experience. We got up early on Friday morning and went for a swim at the local swimming pool, another facility provided by Cork City for the crewmembers. It was well supported with a lot of crews making use of the opportunity to take a bit of exercise. We returned via the Railway Station to, at last, pick up the E.P.I.R.B. When we got back to VILIA the Scrutineer was waiting.

Adrian was away somewhere so I started to go through the inspection with the Tall Ships Official. He made a full inspection of the whole boat, finding that we had no bowsprit net and that one of the bottle screws on the port side was bent. This must

have been the result of our minor collision in Kinsale. I asked the Scrutineer to come back in a couple of hours and told him that we would have VILIA put to rights by then.

Gary went below to get a bottle screw for the shrouds and I started to make a bowsprit net from a length of rope. Adrian returned to VILIA just before the Official returned and we were able to get a clean bill of health for the race, we were now Racing Team VILIA. The Scrutineer was quite impressed with our team but expressed some reservation about VILIA's overall size compared with the larger ships in the fleet.

Adrian and I went to the Skippers briefing in the City Hall where we learned all we needed to know for racing to Belfast. At the City Hall was a team from the Belfast Tall Ships Committee, giving the crews details of the Belfast Tall Ships arrangements. One of those on the Belfast team was my mate from home Brian Morrison, with whom I played squash regularly; it was good to see a friend after almost two weeks away.

We returned to VILIA and relaxed for a few hours before the evening's high jinx would start. The Navstar aerial was checked again and once again found to be faulty. Gary again brought the aerial down and we remade the aerial lead connection, again when replaced the machine worked.

As this was the last night in Cork we had all decided to take Carmel out for a meal so later on Friday evening we all assembled in one of Cork's Italian restaurants for a lovely meal of pasta. All female crew of Louise from Dublin and Anna from Germany who was intent on getting to Aberdeen with the Tall Ships.

The crowds along the banks of the Lee in its upper section were thick; people were waving, shouting and generally having one huge party. As we went into the less populated parts of the river we would see car parks in the fields, isolated houses were having garden parties and the river was alive with small boats. We went down past DAR MŁODZIEZY, the tallest of all Tall Ships just before Haulbowline Island, then past SEDOV, at 400 ft., the largest of all Tall Ships. She was being manoeuvred by tugs just upstream of Cobh.

The Irish Navy minesweeper R.L. EITHNE was anchored off Cobh and the Taoiseach of the Irish Republic, Charlie Haughey, was saluting all of the Tall Ships as they passed between the Gunboat and Cobh. We sailed past Mr. Haughey and received our salute before turning south for the outer part of Cork Harbour.

There were thousands of boats of all sizes milling around the vast expanses of Cork Harbour and the police and coast guards were under pressure to control the melee. All the crews were in good humour and there were no incidents to mar anyone's day.

We sailed towards the entrance to the Harbour and made for Crosshaven to let Carmel off. We thanked her profusely for her good work and wished her all the best, promising to keep in touch. Standing on the pontoon in Crosshaven she looked disappointed as we sailed away to join the rest of the fleet. Adrian took VILIA to an anchorage on the eastern side of the narrows of the entrance to Cork Harbour where we made a meal before getting ready for the Tall Ships Race from Cork to Belfast, which was due to start four miles off the coast at 18.30. Joe and EMERALD had fallen behind us and were not to be seen for the next few days, the next time I saw Joe was the following Wednesday in Portavogie in Northern Ireland, but that is another story.

The next two hours were spent making a meal and preparing for the race. We were due to start half an hour after the Class A ships, the likes of SEDOV and LORD NELSON.

At 17.30 we started to prepare for the race. We weighed anchor and headed for the start line. Adrian called for a headsail change and Gary and I made the worst sail change ever, I think it was lack of practice; in any case we got it out of the way before the race started.

The start line was a mile long, between a yacht flying a large flag and the R.L. EITHNE. As we approached the line we could see the DAR MŁODZIEZY, SEDOV and the other Class A boats sailing off into the distance, they looked magnificent.

As our start time approached we got ready, arriving right on time, just behind the PRIDE of GALWAY, who luffed us in order to keep us behind them. The wind was perfect for VILIA, NW force 3, enabling us to carry all sail and compete against the larger boats in the race. We set off in pursuit of the Class A boats and ahead of all the boats in our Class except the PRIDE of GALWAY. The wind was a steady 3 and we sailed VILIA as hard as we could.

We started our watch rota with Adrian and Gary doing the first from 19.00 to 22.00, Jimmy and I turned in to be ready to relieve them. They had a good run with the wind remaining NW force 3 during all of their watch. Jimmy and I took over the watch with this same good wind, but during our watch the wind started to ease.

In the dark we were surrounded by other vessels, it was impossible to tell which was which but not too many boats were passing us, if anything we were making ground on the rest of the fleet. 00.00, wind was down to a zephyr, force 1 NW but when we handed over watch to Adrian and Gary at 01.00 it had lifted slightly to a force 2. It remained this way until Jimmy and I come back up at 04.00. Dawn was lightening the sky and we started to make out the boats around us.

The sea was flat calm and just to the south of us was ASGARD II and HENRYK RUTKOWSKI, a lovely Brigantine from Poland. ROYALIST, the Sea Cadet Association's Brig was also in view. As the sun came up the morning started to get warm. We wakened Adrian and Gary and left them to try and find some wind in these very light conditions.

The Cutty Sark Tall Ships Race was originally started to enable young people to go to sea and become a working part of the ships crew, to this end twice a day each boat was to use the VHF radio to report their position, this involved the young people keeping an accurate position and also using the VHF

VILIA's Navstar had again broken down just before leaving Cork so we were using dead reckoning navigation with the help of our trailing log and whatever sightings we could obtain from the distant shore. At the first reporting time, 08.00 Adrian called in our position, 51 55'N, 06 58'W to the R.L. EITHNE, which was acting as race escort boat.

Jimmy and I came back onto watch at 10.00 and enjoyed the drifting match that was the race. There was no wind at all and the boats were just ghosting along. The radio crackled into life at 11.00, the results from the earlier reported positions were being called out from a list aboard R.L. EITHNE, VILIA was about 50 miles from R.L. EITHNE's position but because our VHF aerial was mounted at a low level on the mizzen mast we could only hear the responses to R.L. EITHNE's calls from the boats in our vicinity.

When the official broadcast finished LORD NELSON started to do link calls to the smaller boats in our vicinity so that they knew their official positions. Eventually Adrian was able to contact LORD NELSON and the reply to the question, "LORD NELSON, LORD NELSON, this is VILIA, VILIA, could you tell us our race position please?" was, "VILIA, VILIA, this is LORD NELSON. You are first in your class and first overall, and we all hate you". This produced an understandable reaction in that suddenly all of us were wide-awake and excited at this unexpected news. We started to congratulate ourselves, and did not go back to bed.

It was an absolutely beautiful morning and we all enjoyed the peace and quiet of the Celtic Sea and the sunshine. At 11.30 we were south of Hook Head and heading for the Conningbeg Lightship. We ghosted along in the almost non-existent breeze keeping in close proximity to the other ships in the race.

Aboard ASGARD II one of the crew was reported to have an illness and we watched as an inflatable was lowered and sent to another ship, I think HENRYK RUTKOWSKI, to bring a doctor aboard. ASGARD II eventually turned north to head for Dunmore East

and put the sick crewman ashore. It turned out that it was only a minor fever that the crewman had and he recovered with no further problems.

We passed the Conningbeg at 14.20 and set course for the Tuskar Rock.

The wind was in the West, force 2 or 3 so we set the sails to goose wing and started to make slightly better time. As we sailed towards the South East corner of Ireland I went below and started to make an evening meal. Four steaks braised in red wine, that were christened Entrecote a la Tuskar because we ate them just as we approached the Rock. There was a tidal gate that we had to make at Tuskar Rock so that the tide would take us North. We inched our way around just on the turn of the tide, this gave us a considerable advantage over those boats that were astern of us, we pulled away visibly from boats that should have been passing us.

The sight as we rounded the rock was beautiful, with the sun setting in the west. We reset the sails to our new northerly course but had not travelled far when the wind backed to the south and we had to reset to the goose-winged configuration. It was getting dark by this stage so we rigged preventers to the boom in case there was a wind shift that would catch us out.

As the night progressed the wind steadily rose to about force 4, this gave VILIA a good turn of speed, VILIA is quite a tender craft, fast but needing her sails attended to regularly to cope with wind speed changes. She was very slightly over canvassed when Jimmy and I were on watch but we decided to let her run on, after all this was a race. Goose Winging was still the order of the day as the daylight started coming back, everything was straining just a little but neither Jimmy or I was going to slow down, remember we had led this race and had a reputation to uphold. A boat called FRITEDEN, the boat we were moored alongside in Cork, was behind us, she was over 40 ft long and was not catching us.

VILIA was yawing slightly and the tiller needed concentration to stop the wind getting onto the wrong side of the mainsail. We succeeded in this until it was almost time for watch change when we did an accidental gybe. As everything was roped with preventers, there was no damage done but it took 15 minutes to get everything eased off and the sails reset, FRITEDEN passed us. As the day grew older the wind eased again to a force 2, this was very comfortable but not very fast. By 13.55 we were passing the Codling Lambay, still goose winged. The Monday was not as nice as Sunday had been and visibility was only about a mile or so, we could not see any other boats except FRITEDEN.

We pushed on North, making as good a time as was possible in the conditions. The race was due to finish at midnight, if we continued at our present rate we would not make the finishing line at Mew Island. Adrian explained to Jimmy the formula the Cutty Sark Race Committee used which took account of where each boat that had not crossed the finishing line was at midnight and awarded them a finishing position in the race.

This is done to facilitate the deadlines that an event such as the Cutty Sark Tall Ships Race has to operate to. Each port that the Race visits has such a lot of arrangements to tie together that they cannot let the vagaries of the weather upset the arrangements. The finish of the Race always gives enough time for the vessels to motor to the finishing port in time for the berthing plan to be put into place.

At 21.40 we gybed and changed course to run for the finish, we were still well south of St. Johns Point, still goose winged, the wind still in the South. We were looking out for this landmark and I thought we could see it a number of times. At 00.15 we called in our midnight position to Race Control, N54 05' W05 34', somewhere south of St. Johns Point and 2 miles behind FRITEDEN, according to their broadcast position.

I went to bed and slept until the next watch at 06.00 when I awoke we were still sailing north, back in my home waters, having just passed the South Rock Lightship,

approaching Portavogie. Jimmy and I sailed VILIA up the Co. Down coast, through Donaghadee Sound to see some of the other competitors anchored off Bangor or sailing in from further out to sea.

There were a fair number of local yachts in the vicinity and they were all out to make every visiting boat feel welcome. As we came around the South Briggs Buoy we set the sails for the southerly breeze and for the first time in two days VILIA heeled to the wind. We started the engine 200 yards off the entrance to Bangor Marina and dropped our sails. We had sailed a race distance of 236 miles, plus a few more at the end, the longest distance any of us had sailed before without using auxiliary power.

VILIA motored into Bangor and for the first time since Saturday lunchtime she was securely fastened to the shore. I made my way up to the Marina Administration building and phoned my wife Alison. She came down to the Marina and by 11.00 I had bade farewell to my mates and was on my way home to a welcome shower and a good feed. I was in my work by 14.00 and envious of Adrian, Jimmy and Gary who had continued on from Bangor to the official berthing in Belfast's Pollock Dock. I thought of Joe who we had heard nothing of since Saturday and wondered where he could be.

Alison had not seen Gary in Bangor because of the time factor, VILIA had to rendezvous in the Pollock Dock at 12.00, so in the evening we went down to see VILIA's crew in Belfast.

Pollock Dock was jumping, the place was jam packed with spectators as well as the 2500-crew members. I still had my pass badge and was able to get into the crews reserved area, we found Adrian, Gary and Jimmy in the restaurant area where mother and son made a happy reunion. We stayed at the party as long as we dared before Alison and I returned to Bangor.

I returned to VILIA after work on Friday afternoon, and stayed up half the night, catching up on the Belfast leg of the Cutty Sark Tall Ships Race. I met all sorts of people there, some of them I had met in Cork. There were Russians, Germans, French and many other nationalities, it was tremendous. The atmosphere in Belfast was if anything more exciting than it had been in Cork.

Saturday morning we left the Pollock Dock behind LORD NELSON and sailed into Belfast Lough in the most spectacular Parade of Sail ever to be seen there. VILIA sailed in company with some of the worlds most famous ships, we were the smallest, but by no means the least of all the vessels that had left Cork Harbour exactly one week earlier. Adrian, Gary, Jimmy and myself had proved that a team of enthusiastic amateur sailors could take on the worlds Tall Ships and compete. VILIA finished eighth in the in the 1991 Tall Ships Race overall.

Joe and EMERALD had turned up in Bangor on the Thursday for the Old Gaffers Association Classic Sail event at Royal North of Ireland Yacht Club, his engine still not working. He took my place on VILIA when, on that same Saturday afternoon of the Parade of Sail, VILIA left Bangor to sail on to Aberdeen to successfully complete the next leg of the Race. I leave that story for someone else to tell.

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