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BEYOND THE LOCK GATES

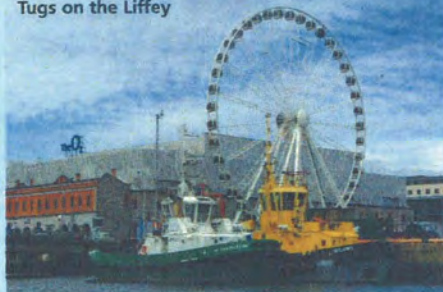
Alison Alderton & Roger Harrington

After twelve days moored in Ringsend Basin it was time to move on, to lock down onto the River Liffey in preparation for our voyage back to the UK. We had been waiting for a decent spell of weather to enable us to reach either Holyhead or preferably Liverpool but with a slow-going craft (about 5kts) we were looking at ideally a 24 or 48 hour window of good weather and it finally looked like one was on its way.

Over this time we had watched various types of craft come and go, all eagerly cruising the *Green & Silver* route. We were sad to leave without completing the whole route but after the trials and tribulations of our journey from Shannon Harbour, neither of us were in the right frame of mind to negotiate another canal. Besides we had other fish to fry, a new job waiting in Denmark and the chance to boat in central Europe – our lifelong ambition!

As many more of you embark on the *Green & Silver* route, it is worth taking time out to explore the Liffey and part of Dublin Bay. Our last few weeks onboard our barge in Ireland helped to restore our broken hearts and lift our spirits. We discovered safe, secure moorings, friendly welcomes and great hospitality in places a barge owner would normally dismiss. Leaving the inner basin at Ringsend, we did a few circuits of the outer basin before locking down to sea level. You need to liaise with Waterways Ireland to gain access onto the Liffey as it is only possible to do so at certain states of the tide and they will help and advise you. As the great gates creaked open to reveal the Liffey on its journey to the sea we felt elated. We had escaped the confines of Ringsend Basin and all the disappointments of the Grand.

Tugs on the Liffey



Cruising out into mid-stream, the skyline of Dublin behind us was a spectacular scene, one seen so many times before but never from the water. We were joined and escorted downriver by a pair of black guillemots, their bright orange feet acting as guiding lights, passing by the O2 Arena and The Wheel, the retired lightship *Kittiwake* and then under the East Link Bridge passing the working tugs breasted in pairs down to Poolbeg Marina.

We were given a warm welcome and allocated a mooring space for as long as we needed. The facilities were good and we enjoyed the hospitality of the club house on several occasions. A fee is charged to moor here but we felt it was worth paying for we had direct access to the sea when the time came to leave. What we had not realised was we would be in the heart of the working docks!

What a great place this turned out to be! We whiled away many hours watching a variety of ships coming and going at all times of day and night. Our mooring was opposite the cruise ship dock and the day we arrived the massive *Azura* was in port with all her bunting flying. *Lily* looked like an insignificant row boat in comparison.



One of the most enjoyable events was when the services of the tugs were required, watching them push and pull slowly easing ships in or out of their berths was amazing, like watching some sort of water-based ballet, and we had the best seats in the house!

Shackleton takes the strain



After a failed attempt at crossing the Irish Sea one evening, which saw us some distance off Howth Head in a particularly nasty swell which *Lily* was not riding well, we returned to Poolbeg Marina with our tails between our legs. There was no foreseeable weather window ahead and our holiday time was running out so we reluctantly resorted to having the barge transported by road. MGM Boats based in Dun Laoghaire had a lift capable of raising *Lily's* twenty tons and so on a sunny morning a few days later we left Poolbeg Marina for a second time!

The Liffey carried us past the busy cargo and container docks, the twin towers of the power station and towards the sea. *Lily* raced

alongside the Isle of Mann fast-cat for all of a few seconds before we were left standing in a bubbling wash of foam. Fishermen at Poolbeg lighthouse threw us waves and then we were out into the wide expanse of Dublin Bay in amongst ferries and cargo ships as we followed the marked channel to buoy number four before turning to the southwest and heading towards Dun Laoghaire. Seeing all these familiar markers from our own craft instead of the decks of a large ferry is fairly strange, suddenly they are so much bigger!

Once we were well clear of the marked channel, Roger did some fishing for mackerel whilst the rest of the crew kept a sharp look out for the resident pod of dolphins. We never got to see them but vast shoals of jellyfish and flocks of diving gannets were enough to keep us entertained as were the amazing views of the Dublin Mountains which stretched out before us. With calm weather we decided to make the most of our time in the bay and headed south along the coast passing Sandycove and on towards Sorrento Point. It was a wise manoeuvre as over the horizon appeared the Dun Laoghaire fast-cat: we



wanted to give that as wide a berth as possible. Finally with an increase in the wind we turned and headed towards the safety of Dun Laoghaire. As we approached we were surrounded by a small flotilla of youngsters in sailing dinghies and RIBs. Surprised at seeing a barge on the sea they had come over to investigate and with bewildering looks on their faces escorted us into the harbour entrance. We were allocated a mooring space in the huge marina and settled in for a weeks stay.

With the visitor moorings being on the outside pontoons, it was quite a walk to reach dry land. Access in and out is by fingerprint recognition, this was a first for us and we were quite amazed by the modern technology. The fishing harbour was close to our berth and we were entertained by their comings and goings. The resident seals are very inquisitive and would suddenly appear alongside the boat if we made any noise as Roger found out one day. Whilst tinkering with the engine, the tapping attracted a seal who remained with us for the whole of our stay.

Resident Seal



There is a lot to see and do in and around Dun Laoghaire. The massive harbour was designed by Scottish engineer John Rennie and constructed using local stone from Dalkey Quarry in 1817. Considered to be one of the finest artificial harbours in the world, it is vast, home to several prestigious yacht clubs and with the sun shining and the harbour busy with boats of all shapes and sizes you could have easily been somewhere in the Mediterranean. A walk along the seafront will take you to Sandycove where there is a museum based in the Martello Tower dedicated to James Joyce. The tower features in *Ulysses* as does the nearby Forty Foot bathing place.

We thought Dun Laoghaire had the appearance of a typical English seaside resort and as Roger and I both come from seaside towns on the south coast of England felt very at home. The harbour at Howth is also within

easy reach and we met some very nice yachting folk from the sailing club out for a day trip to Dun Laoghaire. If time had allowed we would have liked to have visited them and explored the area around Howth Head but it just wasn't to be although they assured me that any IWA members venturing that way will receive a warm welcome!

All too soon it was time to leave; a wet grey morning dawned, signalling the end of three years in Ireland. We dismantled *Lily's* wheelhouse in the damp, both silently reminiscing of the journeys we had undertaken. Gently *Lily* was hoisted up in the slings high above the harbour. After *Lily* had received a much needed jet wash to remove the salt deposits, we were pleasantly surprised to discover the magnesium anodes had stood up well to our sixteen days in salt water. MG Duff the suppliers state that these may be used in salt water for up to seven days at a time but no more than fourteen days in any one year so we were pushing our luck!



Fish out of water

As Hutchinson's reversed their lorry beneath our barge for onward transport the sun broke through and shone down on us just in time to dry the iroko panelling of the wheelhouse before it was covered with a tarpaulin for the journey ahead. Everything went without a hitch, MGM Boats were fantastic and guided *Lily* safely out of the water and onto her transport. We all travelled back together, *Lily* on the lorry, us in our car laden with the last of our belongings from *Dunrovin* and towing our RIB. The fast-cat soon had us back in Blighty and in convoy we travelled through Wales and back home to our base on the River Trent.

It wasn't exactly the ending we had planned, not crossing the Irish Sea was a bitter blow, but as one old boating friend said to us, 'there's no shame in turning back' and he is right. We live to tell the tale, have had an amazing adventure, made friends to hold dear and have numerous Celtic memories to treasure and share.

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