

Quibus- a cruise from the east coast of England to the west coast of Ireland

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THE FAULKNER CUP

THE CLUB'S PREMIER AWARD



Inishbofin, August 2018

Murray's Doonmore Hotel is not the usual starting point for a log but I think it's where the cruise of the yacht *Quibus* started.

It was dark by the time my crew Kieran Wynne and I stood at the bar contemplating whether to buy hot whiskeys or pints: we ordered both, it had been a long day. We left Galway docks early that morning in company with five Mayo SC boats returning home after the WIORA regatta that never was. (That's another story.) The weather offered a brief window

to round Slyne Head and we went for it. It wasn't a pleasant sail. To make passage we suffered hours of lashing rain, horrid seas and finished with a rip roaring wet reach into Bofin. At the bar, food was ordered and we relaxed as we exchanged details of the day's voyage with clubmates. This included Michael, a 'rookie' sailor from my home village. It was his first offshore passage and he had come from Galway docks on a pure racing machine in considerably more discomfort than us. I enquired would we ever see him on a sailing boat again? His

Cold sailing off Beachy Head

reply was 'Oh yes! I loved it, every bit. Great fun' Our travails were forgotten, we were on Bofin and the hospitality and craic were, as ever, very enjoyable.

Mayo, January 2019

The phone rings, it's Michael. He sounds a bit sheepish and tells me he put in a low offer on a yacht at auction. Unexpectedly he's now the owner of a Verl 900 sailing boat, unseen and condition unknown lying on the east coast of England. I reassure him, boats of that era are good and solid, everything can

be fixed. We agreed to fly to Stansted and have a look, when the worst of the winter has passed. Then Covid came...

Lowestoft, November 2021

Vaccinated, boosted, Michael and I had landed the previous evening. It had been a tough almost two years for him, his business heavily reliant on foreign visitors. The boat had to be put aside for more important matters. Our hotel was just south of the harbour and we had breakfast overlooking the sea. A



Where it all began - Doonmore Hotel, Inishbofin

dozen or more boats exited the harbour and headed southeast at speed. They looked like fishing boats but why the speed? Marine traffic website revealed they were wind turbine service vessels. Further study of the calm sea and we spotted a breaking wave half a mile offshore, a sandbank. Sailing in this part of the world was going to be very different to the west coast of Ireland.

The boat was ten miles away in Southwold Harbour which like many harbours on this coast is a river. Its banks are a mixture of leisure and commercial use. There's little rickety wooden jetties all along the riverside and an unpaved road. Behind that, laid up for winter, is just about every sort of craft you could

Quibus - a sound Robert Clark designed 1970's 29 footer

imagine. At the very back, beside a World War 11 motor patrol boat that looks very unlikely to ever see the water again, is Michael's acquisition *Quibus*. It was plonked here after arriving from Holland with persons or goods unknown but unwelcome. The boatyard hasn't been near it since, for fear of association, even after Michael's purchase from the Suffolk police.

Without getting close we could see that *Quibus* was a good solid boat but the sails and sprayhood were still rigged and in tatters. Over the next two days we pulled out everything, checked what we could, and made lists. The engine was found to be old but



George's home in Southwold

sound. It started with just a little protest and was rewarded with new oil and coolant. A serviceable inflatable in the forepeak, an outboard in the pilot berth, ten bags of rubbish were removed. Generally it was a sound Robert Clark designed 1970s twenty nine footer.

We befriended George, who lives on the MPB, he's not young, he hasn't electricity or heat. Life can be tough. We headed home via Knock airport. Over the winter plans were hatched. Michael made a couple of trips back to Southwold. We picked a date to go for it...Destination Westport!

15 March 2022

Michael had arrived a couple of days earlier and had been busy bending on new sails, getting the

VHF working and 101 other jobs including victualling. *Quibus* was launched at 0800 well before I left Knock airport. It was past 1800 before I stepped aboard. There was water over the floorboards. Michael had been away much of the afternoon and was now furiously pumping and removing stuff to get to the seacocks. They were all OK. A small but steady flow was eventually detected from the stern gland, a supposedly dripless type I am not familiar with. We monitored it overnight, and the leak was minimal without the engine running. We decided to leave the river on the 0700 tide. The mood was tentative rather than the excitement that is usually felt at the start of a voyage. Michael says goodbye to George, who thanks him for the duty free procured, still no electricity or heat but he's happy because he's just got a job for the summer.

Southwold Harbour





ABOVE: Boats on the River Blyth, Southwold Harbour

BELOW: Southwold Harbour is still a working harbour with original fishing huts



Day One - 16 March

What should have been a triumphant departure was, like the day, grey and subdued. An hour south, 12 pumps from the bilge, not too bad. 0900 another 12 pumps, at least it wasn't getting worse. We relaxed a bit and had breakfast. The day remained grey and windless. The coastline is flat, the only point of interest being the stark outline of Sizewell nuclear power station and by early afternoon we could see the cranes of Felixstowe. Still under engine, and still at 12 pumps an hour, we made shapes to go into Harwich. Tom Cunliffe describes Harwich Halfpenny Pier as convenient but uncomfortable in any wind in the N sector. We tied up alongside a disused lobster boat, no wind, none forecast, it started to rain hard. We went below to eat, sleep and planned to cross the Thames Estuary the following day.

St Patrick's Day 0015

Shortly after midnight *Quibus* was bucking like a mad horse. We eased the lines and fortunately were blown off from the lobster boat. The small harbour was alive with waves and I had no idea how they were getting in? It was blowing hard directly from the North. An hour later, wet and anxious, we retreated below but couldn't sleep. Sometime later a line broke, giving us another hour on deck. At 0500 it stopped, just like that.

0700 St Patrick's Day

Having had much less sleep than expected it was time to leave for Ramsgate. No trace of the night's tempest and all gentleness this morning. Neither of us had crossed the Thames Estuary before and it was a passage I was looking forward to with a little trepidation. Sandbanks, shipping lanes, wind farms and tides coming from all directions. We decided on a conservative route even if it took a little longer. We embraced hopping from one buoy to the next and ticking them off. The visibility was good, we could sail at times and motor-sail the rest of the time, the sun even showed itself. The shipping was less than expected. It's strange to be out of sight of land yet know that just outside the buoyed channel the depth was just a few feet. The windmills in the wind farms are all in perfect alignment of a grid and we found ourselves looking out for the next time they all lined up. By late afternoon we were closing on Ramsgate and the sun was shining. Instructions from the Harbourmaster are to enter the west marina when the traffic light signals allow and take any available berth. As we cruised in it became clear we had a choice of perhaps 200 berths as most boats were in the inner locked marina for the winter. Still 12 pumps an hour under engine and no leaks when the engine was not running. We were both low on sleep and decided to rest up the next morning and make the short hop to Dover with the tide after lunch.

18 March

Ramsgate seeps maritime history and has a nice atmosphere; chandlers, sailmaker, coffee shops mixed with nicknack shops under brick arches beside the inner marina. We purchased an electric bilge pump between coffee and lunch, cleaned up in the top class showers, studied some real classic boats and moored off to Dover under engine. 12 pumps the first hour and the flick of a switch the second hour when we had fitted the new electric bilge pump. Dover is a serious port but they welcome yachts. We called them on VHF and were given the go-ahead to enter the outer harbour and head for the Wick channel. There we had to call again because it's a one way system. We tied up at low tide in the outer marina with a 6m tide. It's a bit like being in a jail cell without a roof. Again most boats were still in the locked, inner marina.

The pleasant seafront which looks out on the harbour has seen a recent upgrade along with the construction of a huge new marina which remains empty (as discussed in Fergus Quinlan's log of 2021). What a shame. I spent a very enjoyable evening in the welcoming Cinque Ports Yacht club with an old friend who lives nearby.

19 March

Easterly winds forecast, happy days! We checked out of Dover at 0800. 'The west entrance can be rough in certain conditions' says the Channel pilot and it was. We were glad to get away from it. Bowling along at top speed under half a rolled jib and the main still undercover. We could have pulled into Eastbourne but in an Easterly 5, we blew on past heading for Brighton. We made it just after nightfall but, with the land lights to starboard and wind farm offshore to port, and twinkling away under the moon, we decided to keep going.

Duncan at the former Smack Boys' Home in Ramsgate. This was home to orphan boys who were trained to work on fishing smacks that worked out of the port



Michael at the helm

By the wee hours we were entering the Solent, an area I sailed extensively in my early years but rarely at night. Those familiar with the area will know everything has to pass between Horse Sands and No Man's Land Forts because a barrier runs from the forts to the shore. Built to keep Napoleon out of Portsmouth and Southampton and handy again to keep the Germans out on a couple of occasions. As we approached this chicane still under sail at about

0400 it seemed everyone wanted in or out at the same time. A large ferry heading for Portsmouth, a container ship going east up the Solent and what looked like a tower block with all the lights on. We just couldn't figure out what it was, or if it was moving, and if so which way? We rounded the fort and moved out of the shipping lane into shallow water but couldn't go too far as there wasn't much water. The tower block seemed to be right on the edge of the shipping channel. We got so close we rolled the jib and fired up the engine, so we could make a speedy course change if required. It slipped by too close for comfort. Only then we realised it was a cruise ship but no navigation light was visible to us, just brilliant illumination. A car transporter passed the far side of it and the Ryde to Portsmouth ferry weaved between them both. It's a busy place and we'd had enough. We put the throttle down and headed for the ship-free yachting Mecca of Cowes. As we approached the 'new' breakwater (it wasn't there when I was last there almost 40 years ago), the engine over heating alarm went off. We shut it down, unrolled the jib and sailed into Cowes landing at the riverside pontoons perfectly under sail. It was 0530 daybreak and not a soul to witness a manoeuvre we were both rather proud of. Two hours later we had convinced ourselves the small amount of debris in the water intake filter was all that caused the engine problem.

BELOW: Quibus alongside in Cowes

RIGHT INSET: Duncan looking thirsty at the Island Sailing Club, Cowes

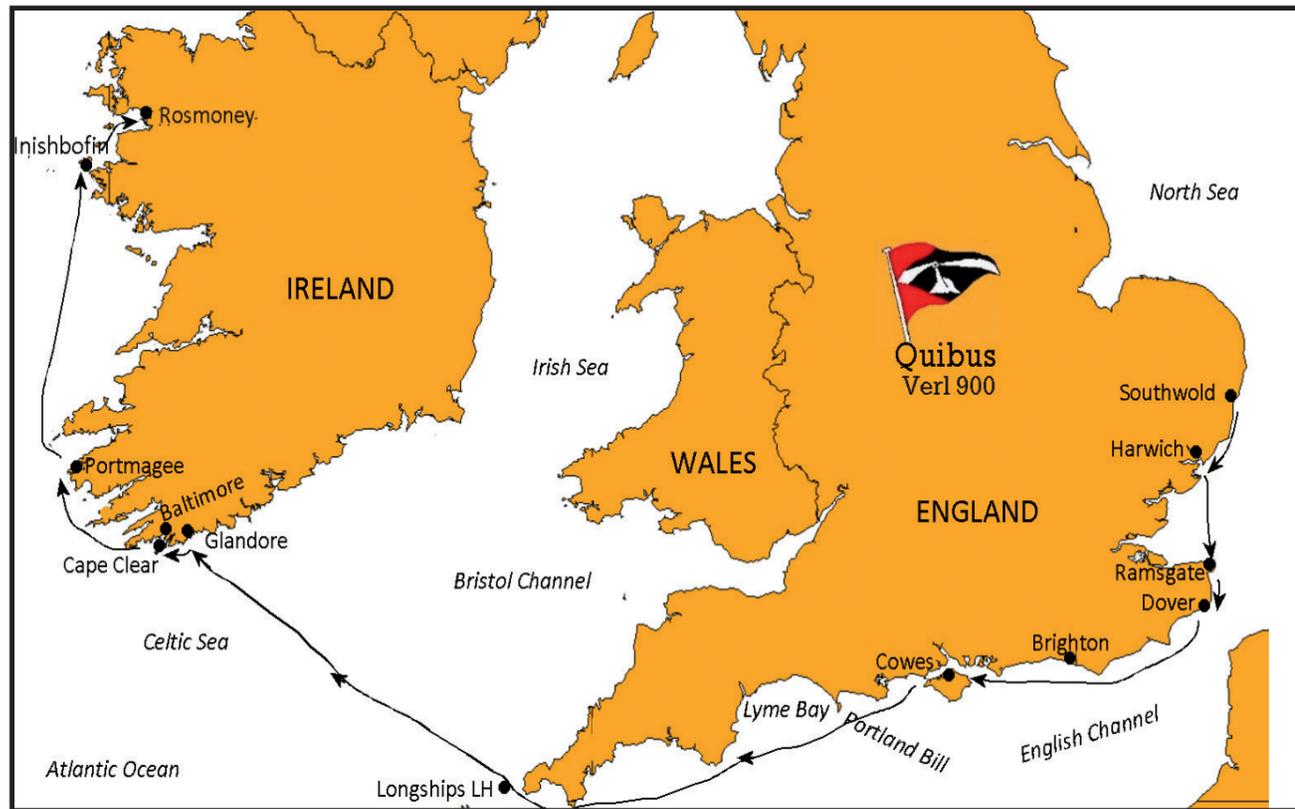


20 March

At breakfast time we moved upstream to a quiet mid river pontoon for rest. At lunchtime we had breakfast and set off to explore Cowes and restock. It's changed since my days of 'hanging out' there. I had heard bad reports that it had sold out to 'corporate pretend yachting.' However, on the early season, sunny day I found it still the friendly small town I remember. The Island Sailing club was closed and I was disappointed not to be able to have a pint in the old watering hole.

21 March

0700. We edged up tight to the island shore to stay out of the still flooding tide and make passage west with rounding Portland Bill in our sights. There were other sailing boats about for the first and last part of this passage. We had a lovely sail in company through the iconic waters past the Needles and on across the bays to Portland. At about 1600 the last of our companions left us and headed for ports east of the Bill. Wind light, we motored to the Bill and swished past on the tide into Lyme bay where the East wind picked up. After dark it was very cold with every stitch of clothing making us look like Michelin men. We found two hours is all we could cope with on deck. Even in daylight with wind behind us and nothing to shelter us it was still cold but no one was complaining and we were making great mileage.



Michael and smiling Johnny

22 March

On we go... Not able to give up the fair wind. By nightfall we were at the Longships, with a good forecast for a crossing to SW Ireland so we kept going. Land's End always seems a tricky sort of place and doesn't make for stress free sailing, especially at night but we fought the tides, dodged the shipping, worried about the rocks and made it clear into the Celtic Sea by the small hours.

23 March

We motored large parts of the day and night.

24 March

0700. We were 20 miles off the Irish coast. We should have been able to see it but it was misty. All should be well. But it wasn't. Michael was not feeling well, he had a migraine coming on. Something was niggling my mind and I decided to check the fuel situation. It wasn't good. We intended to stop somewhere between Cowes and Land's End but got carried away by the good east wind. 'Perhaps we could call the lifeboat' is suggested 'You look s**t Mike but are you going to die?', 'Definitely not', he replied, but he would have to lie down in the dark for an unknown number of hours. It was agreed that we would be better to try sailing before calling the RNL. 1800. Six miles off Glandore Harbour, 11 hours of ghosting along in what the forecasters on VHF kept calling light and variable cyclonic. Michael was beginning to recover and we decide to chance what little fuel we had left. We eased into Glandore past Adam and Eve islands. What relief ... Quick beer then bed.

25 March

Michael was restored to full health, we were in high spirits, home a full week or more ahead of schedule. We set off in search of fuel. Union Hall is a hive of activity. We wove our way between fish trucks and blocks of ice on forklifts to a fuel truck filling a large trawler. Any chance of a few litres? We enquired. 'Not for yachts sorry', then we hear a roar from the fishing boat. 'Ar, the fe*k will ye give the man a bit of fuel'. That's when Michael met smiling Johnny, two men who only see solutions not problems. They immediately got on. Johnny came in from the Porcupine Bank at midnight and he was on a mission to get back out there asap. To protect the innocent we'll leave it at that. At 1100 Johnny, passed us at Adam Island waving and smiling from the bridge. We were bound for Baltimore because Duncan can't pass Bushe's pub without taking refreshment. That done, a meal taken, and essentials on board we visited Cape Clear Island. It was snug with very few people about. Strange to see it like that.

26 March

The weather was fabulous. We sailed and motor-sailed past the big bays of SW Ireland to Portmagee. The tourist boats hadn't started running to the Skellegs yet so we were able to stay overnight on the pontoon. Ashore we got a nice meal in the pub. Michael thinks he will like this cruising lark!

27 March

Early start to catch the tide in Blasket Sound, where we dallied fishing and gazing at this fabulous coastline and then set sail for Bofin. The wind was

on our tail yet again and *Quibus* was flying along rounding Slyne Head ahead of schedule yet again, This was not at all like the passage at the beginning of this log. The headlands slipped past almost unnoticed.

28 March

0300. It was not an unpleasant night but it was black as hell. Coming from Slyne Head we couldn't pick out High Island because it was so dark. We eased west not chancing the sound to the east the direct and our more usual route. I've entered Bofin Harbour so many times it's almost like a home port. I know the leading lights are accurate up until you are just short of Gun Island which has to be passed almost within touching distance. But we couldn't see Gun Island. Twice we came in only to turn out again. On the third attempt having gathered enough information and confidence we eased in... We were back where it all started but not quite home.

Day 14 29 March

A familiar sail back to Rossmoney and Mayo SC for a triumphant homecoming. My own boat and all the Mayo SC fleet were still on the club hardstand in winter lay up. And we had a good passage already completed. It was an exceptionally lucky sail from a weather point and really fun to do so early in the season. It certainly opened my eyes to the benefits of cruising some of the hotspots of the south coast of England and Brittany often ruled out as 'too busy' in high season. Must improve my cold weather sailing gear though.

'Oh' and *Quibus* still electronically pumps 12 an hour under engine...to be rectified next winter ahead.

Duncan just can't pass Bushe's Bar in Baltimore

