



**THE M/Y HENRIK IBSEN" ON
IRELAND'S GREAT CANALS
SPRING 2015**

Told and photographed by the crew

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Henrik Ibsen on the Green and Silver 2015

We had made preparations almost a year in advance. Funny thing, preparations are exciting, making the trip is a real experience, and one tries to make time to write



On the Old Barrow Line

something for the log every day to recapitulate and have a basis for a story. But writing the story itself is not half as rewarding as planning. Anyway, here's the story.

Story:

The newly refurbished 40 years old "Henrik Ibsen" (Broom-Baystar 36, really 38 feet long) with my wife as co-owner, chef and master of the crew and myself as the skipper, we

left Carrick on Shannon on May 4th 2015 to sail down the Shannon to Banagher, take on the Grand Canal to Dublin, exploring the Royal back and then the Camlin and the Shannon home to Carrick. We had set aside six weeks for the tour, and were to have with us four different crew shifts from Norway plus a few Irish friends along the way.

The weather was changing during the whole trip, as it often is in Ireland. It started relatively cool, on the pictures we see a lot of hats and winter clothes in the first part of the trip, the final part brought the summer clothes on and people were actually sunning themselves on deck for hours. That's what we like to see.



In Lanesborough was the first little drama, because of high water and strong wind, it was not easy to get into the old marina.

"Henrik Ibsen" succeeded, but not without complaints from some fishermen. They were fishing from shore with their lines out, when we passed very close and at full speed. "Full speed" is not as impressive as it may sound. The old Baystar does 5 knots in calm waters without wind and current, but with strong currents and gale, there is not much to spare.

Some Americans had rented a boat and moored along the river. It's easier to moor there, but you get a more restless night because of the mentioned conditions of wind and current. The Americans saw us pass, waved to us and we met them afterwards. They liked Henrik's garden (flower pots on the deck) and we became very friendly with them, when we met them again in Lecarrow for a drink after a day being pinned

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down by the weather.



In Athlone we got the first contingent of Norwegians on board, and we stopped by the monastic center of Clonmacnoise before we bunkered and provisioned in Banagher. The water level was exceptionally high, and it was only thanks to the markers and the satnav that we were able to find the river bed and avoid the fields and their fences, the fences actually being under water.

Heading towards The Grand and entering Shannon Harbour, wind and rain made it unattractive to explore the site. Nice and helpful WI lockkeepers did all the work with the locks. It was only afterwards that we found out that we had passed through without taking any picture of this interesting site. Clumsy of us.



Belmont Bridge (double lock 33) collects a lot of straw and dirt above it, and we drove the propeller full. First diver job was duly photographed. Eventually we learned how to pull the boat through such places. Engine idle, ropes to crew pulling on land and boathooks against banks, we became experts. We'll bring longer boathooks next time.

Next lock was also an experience, a sudden hail storm came quickly upon us and the closed lock gates were blown back open. The lockkeeper on duty plunged into hiding in his cottage, shouting to us to stay below deck for the few minutes the storm lasted. Large hail hammered onto the deck, while we remained calm inside the lock with the engine running. Before long, it was over and the sun was shining again.



Two days after Shannon Harbour we arrived at Tullamore. Tullamore has a service WI plant, they have workshops and drydock, and a good number of people are working for them there. Our contact was on vacation when we arrived, but we met a very nice and helpful foreman. Unfortunately they had neither electricity, water, diesel, pumpout nor shower / toilet

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facilities, something he regretted, could not help, and we did not understand. The canal's biggest town except Dublin, with large marina and WI-center, and no facilities for boaters whatsoever. Why?

We were soon to learn that the Irish always find a way to help their fellow boaters. The WI-people did what they could to help us. We borrowed a generator for charging batteries (our alternator was not working properly, and we were low on the batteries) and even though they did not have water for their own tea, they knew about a fire hose that supposedly would work. That it did, and we filled the water tank and our most urgent needs were met. We talked to a taxi-man who told us that Tullamore actually has a public swimming pool, with showers full of warm water. The world looked brighter again. After a tour with various purchases from Tullamore Dew, we went on towards Daingean. Here we were well received by Marie at the local pub.



Before we met Marie, we hit something else. A man who swam the canal lengthwise caught all the attention of the crew, including the helmsman. Dodging the swimmer, the ship hit a tree on the canal's edge. Poor seamanship on the captain's side. Damage to the fiberglass hull was provisionally sealed with Tec7.

Edenderry was the next stop. Here we changed crew. Because of vandalism, both electricity and water were unavailable here too, but in Edenderry like so many other places there are nice people. One of the neighbors of the marina came over and asked if we needed water. He had a handy tap in his garden, where we could connect our hose. A lady came over and asked if we needed a ride in her car to the big supermarket, if we were to make a large shopping and lacked transportation. Moreover, she recommended moving the boat a little further out in the canal, outside a row of houses where they lived themselves, so they could keep an eye on it. Vandalism and vandals were a known issue as we had already learnt but not really experienced so far.



Continuing eastward we found a team of WI-people with special boats harvesting weeds from the canal in the middle of a new hailstorm. They stopped us and were worried that we would not be able to pass the next kilometers because of the newly cut loose reeds floating around in thick layers now before they had gathered it up. They suggested that one of their boats could pull us through the worst. We gave them the rope, stopped our own engine and

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let them us drag on. Good advice and brilliant service.

Lowtown was an experience. Here they had everything, water, electricity, showers, toilets, pumpout etc that seemed, in short, absolutely top. Apart from that, all the possible moorings were occupied by local boats and were blocking us out and could not be moved. It was said that old contracts and agreements made WI's efforts to move them in vain. We played the "foreigner"-card again, and did not understand the rules nor the consequences. We found one single available space, marked with the "owner's" boat's name and moored there. According to the man next door, this was the space of one who was away for a few days. We realized that WI has lots to work with.

Naas should have been the next stop, but Naas is located on just a branch of the main canal, and the branch was very overgrown. Indeed so overgrown that after the first lock we were stuck in the weeds and could not move, neither forward nor backwards. We had to shout to a jogger on the path to help us put a rope around a



Sallins

tree so we could haul us in. So we eventually pulled ourselves backwards through the lock (N1) and decided to stay the night at the little quay, since it was getting towards evening. The ladies asked the jogger for the nearest store, as we needed some groceries. They found the shop and came back with good food. Since the canal is narrower than the length of the boat, the next day we reversed all the way back to Soldier's Island where we could

turn around and head for Sallins. Arriving in Sallins we needed a new little topping-up on provisions. The ladies walked off and the laughter was loose when it turned out that it was the same store they had visited the night before.

Lucan Bridge is the beginning of the Dublin district's special canal liability. That



means one is not allowed to pass on towards Dublin without special permission and agreement on assistance from Dublin's lockkeepers at each gate. This part of the canal is partially very nice, a new pathway with tarmac, flowerbeds and roadlight followed us for miles. Nearer to town, some of the tunnels are really dark, low and narrow. The Baystar is also 20cm too high to pass under the lowest bridge on the way

into the town, but we still got the permit and wondered how this would develop. It

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turned out that they let out some water to lower the water in Ringsend Basin, so we could pass under bridges. Perfect.

Ringsend Basin by night

In Dublin we stayed for a few days, both to switch to the Irish crew and to wait for the announced opening of Newcomen (“Effin”) Bridge. We had to talk to the Harbour-Master to avoid being reported for hogging. On the 29th of May, we were let out onto the river Liffey and after some cruising on the river; we got the green light from the opposite bank and were let into the Spencer Dock. We were several boats that cruised in company. It came in handy, because at night we were attacked by the infamous gurrriers from Sheriff Street with stone throwing and profanity. The skipper took out his camera, it had an effect, and the neighboring boat called the nearest Garda station, it seemed to work even better, for the rioters vanished like dew before the sun when police arrived.

The following day dawned with sunshine and fine weather. Excited we were waiting as the last boat before us passed under the first low bridge. While WI lowered the



water level in Spencer Dock to get us through, the tide in the Liffey rose where they let the fresh water out. We literally only had minutes to get through before (disastrous!) the water would rise again, Newcomen railway Bridge would have to be lowered to let the trains by, and we might have to wait a month for the

next opportunity.

In such a situation, one finds one’s tools quickly and dismantles the chimney (The Baystar features a fireplace with chimney, if you didn’t know) and then squeezes under with the help of a heavy and stout crew. It was excellent; a little excitement is always good. We also increasingly commend WI and their people for the excellent skills, service, efforts and coordination. We had decided to spend a few days at Ashtown, and stopped there while the rest of the boats from Spencer Dock continued westward. We were to meet several of them along the Royal later in the week.

Ashtown Harbour is a beautiful and idyllic spot, lavish outdoor areas with accumulated park-related environments and there are several great nightspots nearby. Unfortunately the skipper was invited and enticed to a jolly



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evening in the nearest establishment, and when he returned, someone had moved the earth from the dock's flowerbeds onto Henrik's front deck, and loosened the mooring ropes. It was not as dramatic as it may sound, as the previously mentioned massive reeds and other nasties, and lack of current in the canal, prevented the boat from moving. A broom was enough to sweep flowersoil overboard, but when the new crew arrived, we called WI and quickly moved up to Castleknock and The 12th Loch, which is known as a quiet and peaceful place. On the way we passed the biggest traffic machine this country can muster, where the canal runs on a bridge with traffic roads on other bridges above and below us. Amazing.

At the 12th lock we stayed for a few days, making sight-seeing trips by train into Dublin city. Then we found a couple of friendly locals who offered to help us through The Deep Sinking (notorious for mattresses in propellers etc), and we passed without problems of any kind.



Louisa Bridge: the Roman bath was admired,



even though it was dry, but the small waterfall makes no impression on Norwegians. Further to Carton House

Gate, which was a letdown because it's too far to walk from the canal to the Castle, and because it was a wedding there and not particularly inviting for boaters.

Maynooth however, was great. Massive in culture and history, Maynooth was the capital for a period in the late Middle Ages, and memorials after fighting between the



various powers are queued. The sun shone and after the museums we found a nice path restaurant. I'm sorry to say, here

some of the crew enjoyed a cold beer more than the old Castle walls. We were moreover



approached by old friends bringing an

accordion and music in the boat.

By Killcock we were warned that there was an international fishing competition along the canal, so we were asked to wait to proceed until after 17:00. It looked a pleasant spot, we moored and had a picnic in the green. When we



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went on, we realized that the message was a bit wrong, as before the break, we had passed a long row of fishermen who were quite annoyed because they had pull their rods back to let us pass. After the break there was no trace of any event on. We had thus been passing the competition before we were notified.

Enfield is a new very idyllic place, where well-meaning authorities and volunteers have joined forces and created a very nice marina. Unfortunately it happened a few years ago, the decay has now set in, the lawns were still nicely mowed, but everything else was overgrown, and we found only one toilet, no working shower, and there were no signs on the doors. Like in Banagher, this meant that we had to pay with our WI-card on several doors before we found one that worked with a real working toilet behind it. When we asked the local WI representative, we were told that the service block had been broken into a couple of weeks ago, and no one had bothered to mend it afterwards.



In Moyvalley lay a good quantity of boats along the canal, several nice narrowboats and barges, all well kept, but not all seemed to have been moved lately. The one pub we found was very nice with good beer, but the sun shone, and then most things will appear quite positive. Likewise the Hills of Down. Beautiful place, we had ice cream on the deck in the sunset. They had posters up

that they had won the Tidy Towns Award, but there was not a single waste basket to be seen. When we enquired at the pub, we were told to take our rubbish to the next village and leave it there. We were wondering...

Mullingar. Great town, great shopping, nice people and great food and drink. It was also here that we found the most shopping carts in the canal, plus several bikes. WI were afraid of vandalism in the marina, and we got a loan of the key to the padlock so unauthorized persons should not get in. But then came one of the boats we had become



Mullingar harbour

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familiar with in Spencer Dock, and they were also out for the evening. We had only one key between us. What should we do? It turned out that the buddies from Spencer Dock had a similar padlock with several keys, so we replaced WI's padlock with the private one for the evening. The following day, before we had switched back, there arrived a third boat and wanted to get out through the gate. They complained loudly because WI had swapped locking system as their key did not fit anymore. We were unusually quiet until they were gone.

After a last crew change in Mullingar we went further west. Coolahay is obviously much used for walks and outings in the area, they had a large party lawn with barbecue equipment and benches. We bought scones and coffee from the old local cafe hostess in the lockkeeper's house.

Ballinacargy has an even larger marina with canal lock and reservation for ducks. "No shooting allowed!" on big posters. The service block is apparently not widely used, it had a permanent notice that the key could be retrieved at the petrol station at the other end of the village.



Ballinacargy Harbour

Abbyshrule has a wonderful old aquaduct where both the canal and the municipal road crosses the river. A very idyllic and interesting monastery garden was explored, with parts of a dilapidated convent on the site. On the canal bank is a cozy pub with great food. Here too, we enjoyed seeing old folks feeding the appreciative ducks. Like taken right out of an old fairytale.

Ballybrannigan Harbour buildings and warehouses from the time the canal had plenty of traffic, not least taking passengers with horse-drawn taxis from here to Athlone, say a hundred years ago. Athlone is not far to the south from here. According to Waterways Ireland's Guide to the Royal Canal it says it here at the Mullawornia Hill the mountain is very



Ballybrannigan Harbour

steep eastward and almost straight down to the west with stunning views

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of Lough Ree. They must be joking, this is not steep, at least not to Norwegians, the landscape is almost as flat as before on both sides, and although the skipper climbed on top of the wheelhouse with the camera, it was not anything that looked like a lake on the horizon, even though the weather was clear. Idyllic rural district with horses grazing under big trees on open fields, it was stunningly beautiful anyway.

We pass Foigha Bridge and are nearing Bagnagh Bridge. Here the weeds are so dense and impenetrable that we send the first mate ashore with ropes over his shoulder to get some progress in moving the boat. We also met a Waterways Patroller who was sorry for the situation. He had ordered cutting and removing of weeds more than a month ago, but did not get an answer from Dublin.



We moored at a suitable quay while the Patroller blocked off the main road and lifted the bridge so we could pass under. It strikes us that all the hours we have received various services from WI must constitute more than 10 times the amount we paid for the combined year license. We can only wish for more boats on the canal to generate more

government grants, as the tourist industry will pick up.

Soon after we pass another bridge which is specially designed for the narrow gauge railway that transports peat and spreads the red dust as far as the eye can see. Our boat is covered in dust that we bring with us all the way home.



Turfrain crossing the Royal Canal

Cloondara and Richmond Harbour. Here we are greeted by old friends and celebrate the safe return aboard their *clean* boat. There are several other options here, e.g. a trad-music night in one of the pubs. The WI-service block works just great, hot water

in the showers and all, but there are far too many boats here. The marina is filled with long-time-moored boats, boats where there are no sign of life. They probably live in Dublin and leave their boats here for months. The boats are located along the quay where there are taps with water, electricity outlets and pump-outs, so these facilities

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Richmond Harbour

are blocked and becomes unavailable for tourists like us. Very regrettable. The same phenomenon we saw in Shannon Harbour, Hazelhatch and Lowtown. Nevertheless we would love to come back here to Richmond Harbour, it is a great place to stay with the boat, one of the finest and nicest along the Shannon, though it is technically on the Royal, leading down to the Camlin River.

The next day we locked down to the Camlin River and headed north along the Shannon. We filled 143 liters of diesel in Roosky without knowing that station's proprietor was away and that the "clerk" was a passerby who thought it looked like we needed help with the filling. We didn't proceed until the owner arrived and got paid.

No great further adventures on the way to Carrick-on-Shannon, where we arrived June 19th.

Summary: It's went too quickly, we could have spent much more time along the canals and explored the little villages. Tip to ourselves: Read more about these places before you go there, it pays off as you miss less.

With better cutting and cleaning of the floating and growing weeds the trip had been perfect. Otherwise, all honours to WI, they do their best with limited resources.



Richmond Harbour