

# 61M - An Murrough - GCC Canal Boat - Dublin 1929

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## Technical Details

61M on the Nore

Reg Number:

61M

Built By:

Ringsend Dockyard Company

Year:

1929

Construction:

Riveted Steel

Length:

61' 9"

Beam:

13' 2"

Payload:

60 tons

Draft:

4' 5.75"

Weighed:

Killaloe 1929

Engine:

Bolinder E Type, 15 HP

Perkins 6354

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William Macmillan of the Ringsend Dockyard Company built the 61M in 1929. She was then delivered to Killaloe by Harry Moran to be measured and weighed by Dennis Crowe on the 5th of September 1929. She measured 61' 6", Beam 13' 2" the height of her stem and stern was 6' 5". Her draft unloaded and without ballast was 1' 5 ¼" and 4' 6" loaded with tonnes of cargo. The 61M was designed slightly differently from the standard M-boat barge as an experiment. The Grand Canal Company (GCC) in an effort to boost freight profits decided to attempt to carry an extra layer of firkins of Guinness in the hold. Her freeboard is approximately 9" higher than the standard M Boat. Obviously the experiment was not successful, as they did not continue with the alteration to the boats that followed her.

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The 61M started trading for the Grand Canal Company on the 4th of May 1930 with Peter Duggan as her skipper. Her main trade route was on the Shannon, although she made voyages down the Barrow line to Waterford. Some of her other skippers were John Doyle, Red Mick O Donoghue, Bobsie Mann, Eamon Pender, John Kearney and Tom Nolan. In 1950 she was handed over to Coras Iompair Eireann where she continued trading until 1959.

It has been a fascinating and enriching experience cruising the Inland waterways onboard her and meeting people who had sailed on her both in her trading days and in her converted days. I have summarised our conversations since 1992 with some of these people below. I have not been able to properly verify their stories.

The 61M is fortunate to be still with us as she had a narrow escape from sinking near the Tail Race at Ardnachrusha one winters evening with the light fading. She got caught against the rock-sided bank with a heavy stream under her and started to take water. The engine stopped and she had to be towed to refuge by the skipper of another boat who was travelling in her company.

Working conditions were hard for the crews of the M-Boat men and I believe that Mick Kennedy who was her greaser during the thirties went on strike in 1936 in support of the greasers strike for increased wages.

We met Paddy Dunne who lives near Lowtown during one of our voyages as we locked through Lowtown Lock. He told us that he crewed the 61M from 1952 to 1954. His skipper was Red Mick O Donoghue. He had been to Waterford, Limerick and Carrick on Shannon onboard her. He had sailed on the 61M just ahead of the St James and her tow of barges including the 45M across Lough Derg, which later sank off Parkers Point in 1946. He explained that the maximum permitted trading draft was 3' 9" forward and 4' 3" aft, these draft markings were known as the crows foot and checks were made routinely to ensure compliance by inspectors.

In 1995 we met Simon Mc Donald on the Barrow who had worked on her for just under a year, he explained that Bobsie Mann had crewed her and eventually became the skipper. Later in that voyage to the Three Sisters we met Jim Gill at Graiguenemanagh who had also crewed the 61M in the 1950's with Eamon Pender who had skippered her from 1954 to 1959. His brother Willie Pender also crewed her for a time. Larry Daly had also crewed her. In 1949 the salary for a deckhand was three pounds five shillings and seven pence. In 1960 it had increased to eight pounds and ten shillings.

But in 1929, the year she was built a crewman earned thirty shillings and three pence. Little wonder the greasers went on strike.

Willie Flynn who we met on one of our Dublin passages had been Deck Hand on the 61M in 1957 he later became a Canal Maintenance Officer after 1960. He recollected one voyage to Lanesborough with a cargo of cement used to build the Bord na Mona Bridge and on the return passage making the all Ireland football final at Croke Park. As earlier mentioned Eamon Pender from Ticknevin was skipper, Jim Roche from Allenwood was greaser and another deckhand who had crewed her during those years was Jim Balph from Allenwood.

CIE officially closed down for commercial trading in December 1959. However, they had to complete the building of storage sheds in Limerick for holding Guinness. With freight costs at 1/3 of the cost of Road Freight, fourteen boats were returned to service in January 1960. These Boats worked until July 1960 when the canal was finally closed to commercial traffic. She was also used to recover equipment from the disused company depots along the Shannon and Grand Canal. She was crewed by three brothers Tom, Mick and Paddy Nolan (Rathangan). Tom who was her last professional skipper now lives in Killaloe.

Mr. Mc Mullen and Jonathan PT Brooks bought the 61M from C.I.E in late 1960. Some time between then and 1963 she was bought by Myles Digby, who had a plan to convert a number of barges into hired boats. These were to be self-contained barges suitable for anglers on a fishing holiday. However, this idea never materialised and she sank in Shannon harbour. She was then sold to Jim Foley for 12 pounds and six shillings. Jim Foley raised her and converted her using packing cases from the Cork, Ford Car Plant. He used these along the bulkheads and deckheads, some of which are still remaining. Some of the deckhead and a skylight in the Saloon was taken from the Wayfarer. The Wayfarer was one of the Royal Dutch Yachts that cruised the Dutch canals, Friesian Islands and Isjeel Meer before the First World War. It was brought over to Ireland by Major Berty Waller of Belle Isle near Portumna in the 1920s and following almost forty years of service as a houseboat she sunk in Shannon Harbour. The 61M now converted was towed down to Killaloe by the Lady Beverley to a berth outside the Lakeside Hotel where she remained as a home to the Foley family and their pet fox for seven years.

Mike Roberts from Clondragh then bought her in 1970 for 2000 pounds. He started to do some more work on her. This work included a new engine and a wheelhouse. He placed 2000 concrete bricks in to her for ballast that we later removed and replaced with mild steel railway lines. In 1981 an Aer Lingus pilot, Dermot Mowatt, bought her. However, one day going downstream the engine failed upstream of Tarmonbarry Bridge and with no way of stopping, she was made topless. The Wheelhouse has not been replaced since and so she looks more traditional in profile than many of the modern conversions. She has remained with her tiller throughout her life and driving the barge whilst at times can be a little tiring is very rewarding as you are very much exposed to the elements and so fully appreciate the lives of the many people who stood there before you. He fitted her current engine a Perkins 6354 and Newage gearbox with the help of Charlie Bishop from the insurance money claimed from that unfortunate wheelhouse accident. Dermot used her for most of the eighties and then sold her to P.J. Norris on the 26th of February 1990. PJ rarely used her and she had spent quite a few years lying in Shannon Harbour.

Adair and myself then bought her in December 1992. We had been raised beside the Shannon and so we wanted to spend some of our holiday time on it. Both of us have raced the Shannon one Designs (SODs) most of our lives and the combination of the Barge and SOD is ideal for our cruising requirements, not to speak of the party qualities of a barge! We have attended many regattas since we have had her at locations such as North Shannon Yacht Club Regattas; Lough Ree Yacht Club Regattas; Long Distance Race (Athlone to Portumna) Lough Derg Yacht Club Regatta and smaller regattas at Terry Glass (WOLF); Garrykennedy; Gortalougha; Kilgarvan & Mountshannon.

We decided to name the 61M after an ungainly fly, a Murrough. This is the largest of the sedges that can be seen on the Shannon and her lakes throughout the summer months. The Murrough is a large awkward fly, which is unpredictable in flight coloured either dark brown or even as light as sand and we feel it depicts the behaviour of the 61M in her ship handling characteristics!

One of our many crewmembers once announced to some new and naive crewmembers "Welcome onboard the 61M where you will visit the outer reaches of Galactic Barging". In January 1993 we travelled to Dublin with Syd Shine onboard, on our first day the ice was so thick that we had to abort our passage. The following weekend we made good progress and arrived at Hazelhatch and berthed just west of Misneach. It meant a lot for me to have Syd onboard as he had inculcated in me a deep love of barges. He was aware that the 61M had been neglected and his first piece of advice was to spray her with mosco, which we did to clear all the moss off her.

We wintered her in Hazelhatch and enjoyed a number of exciting cruises to the Basin and in to the Liffey upstream of the Halfpenny Bridge. Naas was quite a challenge as the Lock Gates were very tight, but we had a most enjoyable and memorable passage. Later in the year we travelled down on to the Shannon where we cruised Ree and Derg and the North Shannon.

Her condition was not great with numerous leaks above and below decks, using fertiliser bags we managed our leaks down in to the bilges. Being a naval diver I had surveyed the hull and realised that her chimes or bilges were in a poor state with widespread electrolytic action reducing her plate to a strong crust of rust in places ! In late October we were travelling downstream and whilst approaching Athlone Lock there were three barges and a GRP Boat alongside the docks obstructing the entrance to the Lock we ended up hitting the port knuckle on the approach as the stream pulls you to port towards the weir where there was a strong flow as a result of recent heavy rains. We sprung our first rivet so we carried out some first aid and then continued on south and entered Shannon Harbour open graving dock for our first time. Repairs were made to as many of the dosey rivets as possible but we had realised that we needed to re-sheet the bilges, however there was the question of money !

We travelled downstream to Lough Derg where we spent the autumn before heading northwards again to Shannon Harbour and once more to Hazelhatch where I was working in Dublin at the time.

In January 1994 we entered the Graving Dock for the second time and we stayed there for six weeks. Richard and Mary Swaine completed their first ever-underwater welding job on a barge when they totally re-sheeted the Bilges. Richard was apprehensive about taking on the job but we drew out our templates had the plates cut and rolled. I had every confidence in Richards welds as I had seen some work that he had done for Fred Share on the New Forge and I knew that Richard had served his time welding milk churns, so I reckoned if he could keep the milk in the he would certainly keep the water out !

We drew the shaft and replaced the bearings and old bolinder propeller that was well corroded and inefficient, we replaced it with a phosphor bronze prop that we had sourced through Dan Hannevig (previously of Chang-Cha; Eclipse Flower and present owner of the St James.)

To reduce the electrolytic action we placed two sacrificial anodes on her, at the time I was unable to get anymore.

Around this time Paul Proud was living onboard the St James and we commissioned him to paint a small oil of the Murrough lying alongside my parents jetty in Athlone at Abbey House. The idea was that we would have it onboard An Murrough as it was from this site that I gained my deep love of the water, the Shannon, diving, sailing and barging. He called me over one February night to inspect his works and pointed to an oil 40 by 30 inches which has sat over the mantle piece of every house we have lived in since! Thank you Paul (wouldn't have fitted in the saloon though!).

From our previous years experience getting stuck in locks we realised that we required a good winch to pull us out of trouble and allow us anchor on the Shannon. We love to anchor and with very cluttered harbours we often opt for some of the most beautiful and tranquil anchorages on the Shannon in favour of our packed and noisy harbours. Through a hunch that I got from my experience in the Navy I contacted Marine Transport Services in Cobh and asked them if they could help me source a suitable winch. They had three, I managed to load two in to our trailer and towed them up to Shannon Harbour where Richard Swaine fitted one for us and the second was fitted on the Bowler (108B). Andy Roche managed to get the third remaining one for the 35M.

We had a few sinking feelings that year the most memorable one was on New Years eve at Ticknevin Lock where we took in a few tonnes of water through and old repair on her chine. With the assistance of Dick and Declan Kearney we shoved a number of pegs wrapped in cloth to shore up the damage with the remainder of the crew hand bailing with every available utensil, I never realised how many saucepans we had onboard! From this we learned to have a sack of peat, a portable manual pump capable of being used the length of the barge, soft timber plugs for all intakes and discharges and quick setting cement.

We spent the spring of 1994 on the Shannon from Lough Derg to Lough Ree easing ourselves north for the long awaited opening of the Ballinamore â€“Ballyconnel Canal. This of course is now known as the "Shannon Erne Waterway". We had a

very enjoyable cruise north through the old canalised river all the way north to Beleek where we had a pint in Rooney's Pub with our crew and good friends the Rooney's ! It was a great pleasure to travel up the canal in 2007 and see how beautiful the canal has matured with many kingfishers and lots of fauna and flora to be enjoyed.

We then travelled south and returned back up the Grand Canal via Edenderry to Vicarstown where we spent Christmas onboard which was one of the more memorable Christmas's we enjoyed as a young family.

Since we have owned her we have cruised virtually all of the inland waterways of Ireland connected to the Shannon, including the Grand Canal, Lough Derg, Lough Ree, Lough Allen, Lough Key, Bofin, Boderg etc Suck, Camlin, Mountain River, the Three Sisters, Carrick-on-Suir, Innistogie, Inny and the Scariff.

We have refitted the crew's quarters into a four-berth cabin, similar to the original layout, which we called the Creidne cabin after that famous sail training yacht which I had sailed on during my career at sea, one of her old nameplates adorns the bulkhead. We also converted part of the forward part of the saloon in to a two-berth cabin. This cabin is named the Aisling suite after the naval ship LE AISLING, which was my first command while serving in the Navy. Her now obsolete liberty boats name plate adorns her bulkhead.

Her after brass window also has a little history attached as it came from the timber motorboat Cirrus that was fitted by Paul Doran in 1998. The 61M's mast is the original mast of the Shannon-one-Design 33 which was built in 1922 by Walter Levinge of Coosan Lough and owned by Walter Milligan Grandfather and great-grandfather of the present crew of An Murrough and is in fact seven years older than the 61M. She is a successful SOD winning many races over the years and providing great fun for our family up to today.

1995 was spent cruising south to the three sisters. From Vicarstown we cruised south at Easter in very strong flood conditions. We had many crewmembers far too numerous to list in this account, but it was a very challenging adventure. The Barrow was not being used much in those years and as far as I am aware we were the first M Boat to complete the return trip in one year since the waterway closed to commercial trading. We went aground three times on our passage south and by carefully marking these locations on the chartlets we sent them to the OPW who were responsible for the navigation at that time (now Waterways Ireland). They could not have been more helpful as by September when we returned they had dredged these locations. We went aground several times on the return trip where the water level was the lowest recorded in the Navigations history. From our countless groundings over the years we have found that our water ballast tank, which is still in regular use, is very helpful for coming unstuck and with the use of a pump and buckets it does not take long to fill it again. It has allowed us explore our inland waterways to places where others would never dream of reaching. We ended up bow hauling the barge for a number miles to get her through stretches that were so fouled up with weed that we could not use the engine.

It was a beautifully warm summer and we enjoyed a number of cruises to Carrick-on-Suir and Innistogie.

On our return to Shannon Harbour we had a short dry docking and placed 4 more large sacrificial anodes on her. We gave her a coat of antifouling to help keep her clean. We headed south to Salmon Harbour in a southerly gale and safely secured for some winter cruising including the annual WOLF Regatta at Terryglass.

1996 saw us use her as a base for our Annual Mayfly fishing pilgrimage which we enjoy every year. We then travelled north to Belmont where Paul and Gene Doran converted her crew's quarters in keeping with the tradition of a working M-Boat. This year also saw the long awaited re-opening of the Lough Allen Navigation and a cruise off to the Black Pig's Dyke. We spent that summer based north which was an enjoyable change from our home waters in Derg. In August we returned south for the Annual Regattas and lots of cruising with family and friends.

1997 plenty of running maintenance, cruising and attending regattas on Derg.

1998 we headed north once more to Belmont to have a little more refit and refurbishment work done. Since then she has been in constant use on the Shannon with occasional trips to the Grand Canal. When I retired from the Navy until I settled in Galway she was our home for a few months. With our children being active members of Lough Derg Yacht Club they would stay onboard for almost their entire summer holidays. We have always maintained a Log Book since we owned her and I noticed that we have sat out three tails of Hurricanes, Presidential Elections and referendums are noted.

We have always encouraged our crew to make entries in our logbooks, which makes for entertaining and interesting reading from drawings, sketches, poems, songs and tales are all noted in some form or other. For the Millennium we cruised north to my parents house and celebrated it at the Lough Ree Yacht Club.

An Murrough has no electrical lighting, we have used gas lights and candles for light and our heating system works on gravity to operate. In 2005, Teddy Knight (Miranda 36B) fitted a Kabola diesel heater to replace our solid fuel Parkray so we can have regular baths now without stoking the fire!

An Murroughâ€™s Home Port is Salmon Harbour situated in Dromineer Bay and since September 1995 we have spent our time based from there simply "messaging about on the river". 61M's Site

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