

## **The Further Adventures of Skipper Keith...Crane in Day 17042015**

Now I know what you are all thinking, don't let Skipper Keith near the crane. As unkind, but equally wise as such thoughts are, his presence at the pier was in no way connected to the first calamity of the day. Skipper Keith was in fact the club member probably furthest from the scene of the crime, ensconced inside Ramillies checking, as suggested by both Pop Up Phil and previous owner John G, that all sea cocks were closed in order that Ramillies did not do a Titanic at point of being lowered into the pond.

His attention was drawn to the very loud dull and somewhat sickening thud which came from the other side of the pier where the Forsyth of Denny monster crane was busy raising the first of the 50 or so yachts to be launched on that busy weekend. All this of course in an orderly fashion under the strict and watchful eye of Pop Up Phil. Indeed everyone onsite was appropriately dressed, supplied with high viz jackets and hard hats, the latter being of dubious benefit should a yacht or crane part fall on ones head...from any height. But the Health and Safety needs required this and Eva insisted and had a clipboard in hand to prove it.

Popping topside quickly Skipper Keith realised the crisis appeared to concern the first yacht of the day going in. And it was Fyne Thyme, yes Pop Up Phil's pride. Oh dear he thought, of all the yachts it had to be this one, not a good omen "It wasn't me" Skipper Keith declared quietly to nobody in particular. Now this is not a blame game as plucking out these boats, stacked tightly like standing dominos in a domino stacking competition in Dominoville, is no mean feat and requires real skill. So a slight misjudgement is to be expected and on reflection it could be argued that this was merely an opportunity for the team to get their sights and signals co-ordinated and fine tuned.

Phil, adorned this day in supervisory green, not Nan's favourite colour for him, remained reasonably calm and circumspect much to everyone's relief. It appears that on lift off the cranes

lifting gear wasn't quite over the centre of gravity thus causing it to swing back a few feet luckily, or not so luckily, smashing into the wall mounted rubber water hose on the club workshop. Damage?...yes, the kinetic energy dispersed through the rudder took its toll unfortunately, but on reflection, it couldn't have happened to a better guy. Now I must qualify that statement as it seems unkind by clarifying that Phil's attention to detail and skill meant that there was no damage too big or awkward that Phil couldn't fix seamlessly, or improve on.

As a matter of historical record the last damage to Fyne Thyme was caused by a 17 ft dingy in the hands of an over confident yachtsman which punched a hole in the lower bow. Phil didn't just repair this, he took the opportunity to install side thrusters for goodness sake. So a bit of damage to the rudder is but an opportunity, in fact an excuse, for Phil to tinker with the original design to better it.

In time I am sure I will be reporting the installation of some former top secret nuclear submarine rudder contraption to replace the bent bracket. Yes readers, a clue to Phil's former employment during the cold war when once he had paid employment.

Well, it was a lovely day, weatherwise, despite this slight mishap as evidenced in the photos uploaded on the website should one care to peruse them. The yachts started to go in the water with great efficiency. By mid afternoon it was the turn of Skipper Keith's Ramillies to be lifted into the drink. He secured the fenders with a Clove Hitch knot and what was supposed to be two Half Hitches, taken straight from Eva's Ladybird book of Sailing, a thoroughly recommendable read borrowed the previous season. Skipper Keith looked at the knots he had tied and giving into his OCD tendencies, decided the extra ends of rope were untidy and therefore busily added a few additional half hitches for good measure and tidiness on each of the four large fenders. Working from stern to bow the half hitches increased in pleasing order to Skipper Keith, five, six, seven, eight. As tidy and pleasing to the eye as this was the more experienced yachtsmen will gather that tidiness

and order is not a feature in the purpose of mariner knots, functionality is and there would be consequences...

Anyway despite the five and a half tonne weight, the crane swiftly lifted, swung and deposited Ramillies into the harbour. Quickly nipping below as suggested by Pop Up Phil, Skipper Keith double checked the sea cocks were not leaking...she was afloat; this never having been doubted by John G, her former owner who was on hand to support Skipper Keith take her round to the outward mooring at the Middle Pier. No time to wait, "are you ready to take her away" yelled Phil looking to deposit the next one in. It was the thumbs up from John G who fired up the fifty horses under the bonnet.

Now as it happens Big Alastair B who will hereinafter be referred to as Slim on account of losing four stone in as many months, asked if they needed a hand, "why not, come aboard for a wee shotty" said Skipper Keith with pride.

For those rightly worried about this alarming weight loss; it's okay worry not, it was controlled weight loss for the purpose of fitting into a kilt for his daughters imminent wedding so as not to spoil the photos. A word of warning however, if you meet and ask Slim how he achieved this mighty impressive loss please be prepared to take a seat as Slim whips out his iPhone on which he has recorded each and every single item he has eaten on a daily basis since starting his diet.... Now Slim is a really, really nice guy it has to be said but that attention to detail was even too much for OCD Skipper Keith who had mistakenly asked this very question at a point when he was genuinely interested. By explanation of week three of the diet Skipper Keith had to fake an urgent call received about some critical government business. On the subject of diets it's sad to say, but nevertheless has to be said, that Slim makes trainspotters seem positively interesting....so readers just don't ask as life is way too short.

So here we are Ramillies afloat, its big engine fired up, John G at the helm with Slim on the Bow Sprit contemplating doing his Titanic Kate Winslet moment with arms spread wide, and Skipper Keith ready to push the beast of a yacht away from the

quayside with his impressive pole to protect the paintwork. Despite the narrow channel available to egress the harbour, John G, a slightly formidable looking character on the outside but hiding an altogether more soft and cuddly waddy centre, rammed the gearstick into full forward thrust and took off like Star Ship Enterprise at warp speed. Knockhill hadn't seen such a start.

Skipper Keith had complete faith in John G but when he managed to open his eyes and take his first breath they had not only left the harbour without incident, but were rapidly approaching their mooring. Ramillies could defo canter under power that's for sure. So fast had they travelled that there had been no time to remove the fenders as protocol dictates on sailing matters, so Slim simply pulled them onboard. Skipper Keith sensed a bemused look on Slims face as he glanced towards the fancy knot work readers will recall the Skipper tied earlier. Being such a decent guy he said nothing; simply pulled a face, smiled and shook his head ever so slightly. Skipper Keith wrongly took this as a sign of approval from another potential OCD. John G, however hadn't attended the same school of tact and diplomacy as Slim and happened to have a 'thing' about knot tying and was about to let loose his thoughts on the matter. In his former employment Skipper Keith was in law enforcement and had dealt with his fair share of 'upset' people. So dealing with tension and anticipating its signs displayed through body language was within his training DNA. In this case the signs may have been obvious to those with less training as Skipper Keith. The bulging eyes and neck veins being amongst the more obvious ones and we're visible on John G upon his catching sight of the plethora of half hitches securing the fenders firmly; very firmly to the safety rail. Those having watched the movie The Water Boy may have a better understanding of the kind of expression worn at the time by John G.

Lest there be any doubt as to the cause of his angst John G descended into a little rant which involved some colourful adjectives carefully placed in the sentences for expressive effect. Skipper Keith always looking to learn from life's lessons concluded that his knots were of the correct type but were in

an excessive quantity. To be perfectly fair to John G he did offer a full and colourful explanation of the nature and purpose of the knots.

Another lesson in the Bag.

To add to the onboard tension John G noticed two problems when approaching the mooring buoy.

Problem 1: The small pick up buoy appeared to be wrapped around the main mooring strop and compensator and all were under the large buoy.

Problem 2: Adding fuel to the fire the running line purchased at a great sale price from Jimmy Green Marine ebay shop turned out to be a mooring line; Yes, but a sinking one; No. Thus becoming a hazard not only to Ramillies but to any vessel passing to moor at the Middle pier. That was all of them.....oops!

Now a few additional observations at the juncture in the story.

Observation 1: If Slim, who was on the Bow Sprit with the hook, hadn't lost all that weight .. and thus less of proportionate strength and was still Big Alastair, he would have lifted the whole tangled mess out the water and dumped it on the deck to be picked through later. But no, now like Samson with cut hair, he was now but a mere mortal and incapable of such greatness.

Observations 2: John G began to show some of the body language signs of another colourful sea craft lesson getting fired towards Skipper Keith.

Alas as fate had it, the lesson would have to wait as the breeze had picked up slightly and John G was now in emergency response mode, and Slim was hanging on to his grasp of the non sinking running line not at all designed to hold back five and a half tonnes of bobbing wood. Securing the limp line to the forward post the breeze turned the bow windward and as the musketeers fought to untangle the mooring strop Ramillies'

stern unseen by our heroes turned and headed towards the very worried Skipper of Moonshadow. But a near miss is a miss so counts for nothing; disaster was averted and Skipper Keith given instruction to ensure this didn't become an incident that did count.

As it happened, support to untangle the mooring strop came in the form of a dodgy tender that appeared to have the buoyancy capabilities of the Apollos 11 lunar module. The fact that it actually floated defied the known laws of physics. So someone had to go down to try and free the strop and with John G and Slim wrestling to keep Ramillies attached to the mooring it was down to Skipper Keith who didn't want to let the side down given this was his little pickle he had roped everyone present into.

Having been picked up in the lunar module and begged not to move from dead centre, Skipper Keith was slowly edged towards the spaghetti of ropes and buoys. Having nearly capsized the tender on numerous occasions it was almost farcical fighting against this behemoth yellow monster of a buoy. Eventually and requiring both arms to be completely submerging in the freezing water, the strop was freed and passed to Slim and then to John G to secure on the post. Yet another lesson was to be learned and luckily for him, Skipper Keith was still on the dodgy tender making his way precariously back to the stern to climb back on board when John G identified and declared in his now expected colourful lexicon that 'the bloody strop doesn't fit across the fn post'. Pleading the case for the defence Skipper Keith argued that the strops had been made to measure by the fine chaps at Mainbrace. "Well then it will be me who cannae fit a rope hoop round the post if it's made to measure right enough" declared an exhausted John G with more than a hint of sarcasm present in his tone. Indeed it may have fitted around the post pegs when dry but it definitely didn't when wet - and wet would be its permanent state during the sailing season.