

Why would you call a hotel after a saint?

Well, you probably wouldn't do it directly. Even stranger still might be to call a hotel after a boat! But that's what we have right here in Fethard.

In the early days of Bord Iascaigh Mhara when it commissioned fishing boats and provided them to fishermen it was usual for a number of boats to be built to the same design or class. Usually these were given similar names to denote their classes and were of course often in Irish. Some of these boats are still afloat with names like the Ros series: Ros Aoibhinn, Ros Beithe, Ros Cam and so on. Another popular naming system was after a saint and so we find Naomh Bríd, Naomh Ciaran, Naomh Éanna still around.

Naomh Seosamh Dublin

In 1940 Comhlachas Iascaigh Mhara na h-Éireann Teoranta of 45 Kildare Street, Dublin was registered as owning all sixty four shares in a 35' motor and sail fishing vessel built of wood by John Tyrell & Sons of Arklow. Her name was the Naomh Seosamh and she had a capacity of 11³⁰/₁₀₀ tons. She was fitted with a 44 bhp twin cylinder Kelvin engine that gave her an estimated speed of 7½ knots. Title to this ship changed in 1945 to an Arklow fisherman and then at noon on the 28th July 1950 the connection of the name Naomh Seosamh with Fethard began when Charles Hearne of The Quay was registered as owning all sixty four shares. She was fished by his son John and others until they were lost at the Hook on the 25th February 1957.

After that, John's sister Eileen decided to call the hotel she had opened in the village after that boat, Naomh Seosamh.

RNLB Claude Cecil Staniforth London

Also back in 1957 a gentleman from the south of England left a considerable sum of money to the RNLI. This bequest was used to fund the building of a 52' Barnett class motor lifeboat at the Groves & Guttridge yard on Clarence Road in East Cowes on the Isle of Wight. She was delivered to her station in Lerwick on Shetland in the summer of 1958 and she served there until 1978. After Lerwick, she spent some time at Arranmore in Co. Donegal and later did some relief duty until she was sold out of service in 1985 to a private buyer. She spent some time in Cork and then Howth until I purchased her in 2000. She was called after the donor who left the bequest but her name was quite a mouthful and I wanted a name that everyone could remember and use.

Naomh Seosamh Cork

I consulted John's sister Eileen and brother Declan about my idea and while they took some convincing they both agreed that I should use the name Naomh Seosamh. She was registered in the port of Cork on 27th May 2002 when I eventually completed the

registration process including getting Department approval for the name change, measurement survey and lots more.

Our second trip in her was from Fenit to Kilrush where we brought her to be lifted out for survey before purchase. We left Fenit one frosty January morning with snow and ice on the pontoons and had the first taste of manoeuvring a boat that has her propellers in tunnels, more than six feet ahead of the rudder. The idling speed was set just a little too low on the port engine and while it was cold it stalled. At the time I hadn't yet worked out that the handling was the opposite of what one might expect. With a twin screw boat you would normally go ahead on the port engine and astern on the starboard engine to turn to starboard but because the propellers are protected in tunnels with a very significant area of deadwood between them it just doesn't work like this on this type of boat. We ended up not being able to turn to port at all. I found that with the helm hard to starboard that we could turn to starboard while going ahead on the starboard engine. Eventually I worked it out and got the hang of it and haven't made any such large circles since.

We got to Kilrush and hauled out but then Kilrush got a hold on us and we didn't get away at all that year except for sea trials in the Shannon estuary. The marina and yard there are a fabulous facility that is much lacking close to home. In the spring of 2001 we got away and finally got her home to the bay via a few stops. We spent the first night in Valentia where the following morning saw the older crew of an earlier lifeboat eager to see the boat and learn about her history. On the quay in Valentia lies an almost identical boat just one year older that served there for over twenty years. A group there hopes to keep her in reasonable condition for display. I got to see over her as well and it was a great help to find out from the men that used these boats what each storage bin or holder was for.

From there we did another hop to Castletownbere and we left the boat at Bere Island for a fortnight while we caught up on work. Another weekend took us to East Ferry on the Great Island in Cork Harbour.

One last eight hour leap got us home to the more familiar bay of Fethard. The first winter I took her to the sheltered Castlehaven marina in Kinsale and since then she winters in Waterford marina. Since the boat weighs nearly thirty tonnes it is simply not an option to lift her out at Fethard quay in the normal way. There is no chance of keeping her out in the haggard for the winter!

The summers are spent messing about, catching whatever we can and going on occasional overnight trips to the likes of the Spraoi festival in Waterford.

The hull and deck is built of double diagonal mahogany planking. Each plank is only about ½" thick making the hull 1" thick. However with strength in two directions it makes it very stiff for its weight and there is no working or movement of the hull at all. The superstructure is aluminium so it is very light and with iron in her keel, her centre of gravity is very low which gives her excellent stability. However this large righting moment that means that she is very quick to recover from a list also means that she rolls very quickly. It took some time to get used to the fast roll. Like other boats of her class she could have been slipway launched and her rudder blade could originally be lifted up for recovering onto a slipway. She still has her original two

Gardner 6LW engines, each rated at 72 bhp at 1200 rpm. These drive Gardner 2UC reversing gearboxes which in turn drive the 32" propellers through Gardner 2:1 reduction gearboxes. The torque curves for the engines are almost flat, peaking at about 350 ftlb. They idle at just under 400 rpm at which the boat does about 3 knots. Full speed is just over 9 knots with the engines at a full 1200 rpm and a clean bottom and shiny propellers are needed for this. At 900 rpm she does 8 knots and we normally go everywhere at this very comfortable speed, burning just over one gallon of diesel per hour per engine. The engines and propellers are handed: that means they rotate in opposite directions. The engines were delivered by Gardners as a handed pair with consecutive serial numbers and they are still running sweetly after forty nine years.

The boat was modified with the RNLI airbag system for self-righting in 1968. This is a system that inflates a large airbag off the centre line when the boat is capsized that will rotate her back upright. The system was tested with a controlled capsize after installation but she never capsized in service although she did come very close one terrible stormy night on a service to the south of Shetland.

It is the technical design of the boat together with her beautiful sheer line that attracted me to this class of boat. When she is doing her hull speed her sheerline is almost parallel with the waterline and she just looks so just right. In engineering terms she is designed in nearly every respect with a system and a backup. There are two separate independent ways of doing nearly everything which means that you can carry on under most conditions. After all, she was built to go to sea when every other boat is coming in from the weather.

People often ask me what I use her for and to me that's a strange question. You don't have to have a reason just to be messing about in boats. To me it is quite alright not to use her for any specific reason. In the summertime we go to sea to catch fish. While we're out we might stop in Baginbun for dinner and maybe some swimming and snorkelling. The first class passengers have their own special area on the after sun deck where they can top up their sun tans out of the breeze. When we get stuck into a shoal of mackerel we set up a production line on the way home so that all we bring ashore are the bags of fillets, ready for pan or freezer. Everyone plays their part and it becomes very much a team effort where everyone can be busy if they want or just watch the busy ones if that's what they want.

Above all, after a day at sea we come ashore having had a break from the normal daily troubles. Isn't that a good enough reason to be messing about in boats?