

Deilginis - From Portrush to Ballydehob via Howth

by W M Nixon

It's a long way from exquisite teak-laid decks that the ancient Howth 17s were reared. But when a class has been going for 114 years, a little teak treat and some intensive TLC is well earned. Not that the original timber used was suspect. Although basic stuff, it was of good quality. But in those days in the 1890s it was expected that one design classes would be replaced by newer designs at regular intervals, and some boat types reputedly had it written into their rules that their one design class association would be automatically wound up at the end of seven years.

So the notion of the boats lasting well beyond the century wasn't on the agenda at all. But thanks to a mixture of an attractive design and the boat's main association being with a very particular port in a very peculiar place (let's face it, Howth is odd), the Seventeens have been kept going well beyond their natural life span. And every so often, one of them gets smothered with an almost unhealthy amount of cosseting.

The latest one to be reborn is Deilginis, Number 11, delivered back to Howth on Thursday from master shipwright Rui Ferreira's workshop in Ballydehob in West Cork, sporting an exquisite new teak laid deck, and with much hidden but necessary work done down around the garboards and the keelbolts.

Deilginis is one of the seven boats to the design built for members of Dublin Bay Sailing Club in 1907 by James Kelly of Portrush.



**The new teak deck is fitted to the 105-year-old Deilginis in Rui Ferreira's workshop in Ballydehob.
Photo: Anke Ferreira**

In those days of joined-up railway systems, they were delivered efficiently all the way by rail from the harbourside station in Portrush to the harbourside station in what was then Kingstown.

Although the class had originated with the first five boats in Howth racing from May 1898 onwards, in letting DBSC use their design the sailors from the little Howth SC were letting a cuckoo into their nest. The class was known on the Southside as the Dublin Bay 17, and for a while its Northside (or more accurately Eastside) origins were airbrushed almost completely out of world sailing knowledge. But the Eastsiders bided their time (after all, Howth is geologically twice as old as nearby Ireland), and as the fickle Dublin Bay types began to turn to fancy Bermudan rigged boats in the 1960s, the Howth men reclaimed their own.



Happy customer - Nick Massey (left) of the Deilginis syndicate with Rui Ferreira. Nick has been actively involved with the Howth 17s for more than forty years. Photo: W M Nixon

One who played a leading role in this was Nick Massey. Around 1970 he realised that no-one could account for Deilginis, despite the fact she'd originally been built for the family of the Commodore of DBSC. Nick found her in a sorry state in a yard in Dolphin's Barn - the former Commodorial yacht had become a sort of little fishing cruiser, and was no stranger to the copious use of tar. His wife Liz, as keen on the Seventeens as her husband, quickly bought the boat, and they got her back to Howth and into commission for the class's 75th Anniversary in 1972, when all the boats had become Howth based.

Over the years, Deilginis went through a number of ownership permutations, but in 1993 Nick

found himself involved again with a syndicate, and that's the way the boat has been kept going since, with a rolling syndicate involving changing membership drawn from several families. As the 2012 season went on with continued hard sailing, the syndicate agreed that the old boat needed several jobs done with varying degrees of urgency, so they looked around for a craftsman who could undertake the job, and give some promise of it being finished within a reasonable time scale.



**Looking only gorgeous - Deilginis with her new deck back in Howth
on Thursday December 13th
Photo: W M Nixon**

Schull's sailing supremo Davy Harte was visiting in Howth, and Nick sought his advice. Harty suggested Rui Ferreira, who is gaining a formidable reputation down Ballydehob way for quality work on classic boats. Rui was up within days to assess the job, by September the Howth 17 was in the Ferreira workshop (it took a bit of shoe-horning to get her in), and after an intensive period of immaculate and very focused work, three months later Deilginis was back in Howth nicely on time for Christmas, the essential hidden work skillfully done, and the new deck looking only gorgeous.