

A wee bit of maritime history... 32

FREE



Ruffian - a "short and glorious life"

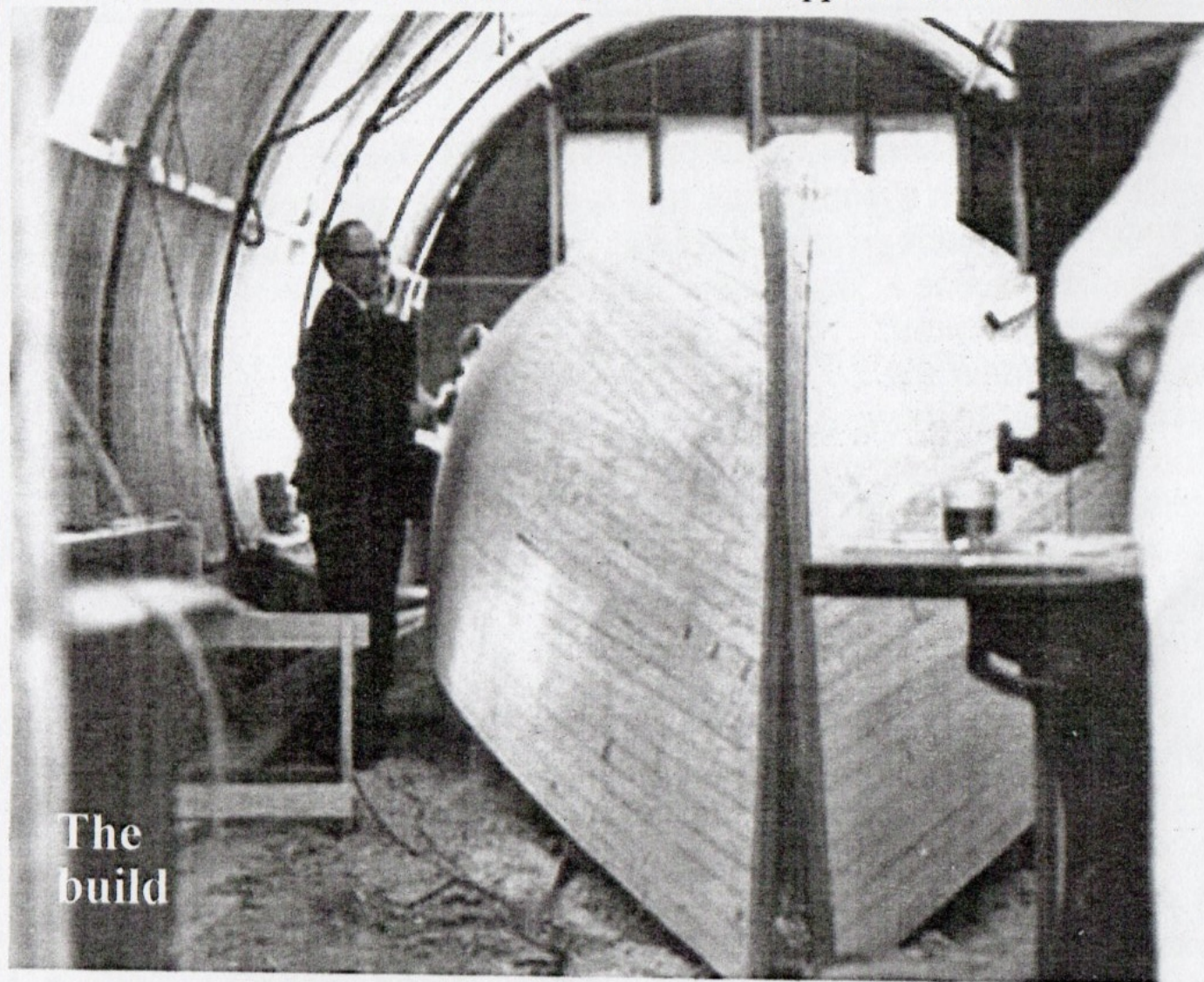
The Brown brothers of Portaferry, Billy and Dickie, had built small boats from a young age and were also experienced sailors. In 1969, while racing with a friend at Cowes Week and subsequently in the Fastnet Race in a 'one-tonner' (not simply a measure of weight - there were different ton ratings under the International Offshore Rule developed in an attempt to enable even competition) they thought they could build a better boat.

Billy, a university lecturer in maths and physics with a talent for creative technical design, spent many hours developing the concept on paper, while Dickie had an intuitive sense of what would work and was the more practical one when it came to boat-building.



In her element

After a number of redrawings that took account of successful developments internationally, Dickie began the construction of a 35-foot, three-skin, glued timber hull in a Nissen hut, known as "The Piggery", at the bottom of his garden at Bankmore over the winter of 1970-71. She began to take shape. The hull shell was built upside down. Ten transverse building templates were set up and the final laminated stem (bow) and keel attached. This was followed by the application of laths over the templates and polythene was then laid over the whole structure. Five separately glued layers of alternating diagonal mahogany strips were then applied over this frame.



The shell was turned over and the building templates replaced with permanent laminated ribs. A laminated keelson was then laid over them which, with the ribs, added substantially to the strength of the whole structure. Then followed the deck and the engine.

Deck fittings (Montague Smith), rigging (Spencers) and mast and spars (Proctors) were ordered from Cowes.

Throughout the build there had been much discussion about a name. Eventually, Dickie suggested *Ruffian* and this was agreed by all.



Launch day

She was launched in the first week of May 1971 and had her first sail that evening. In "The Story of Ruffian" Billy expressed his delight, saying "Coming back from about Chapel Island to the Narrows against the flood tide on a very close reach she burst the Walter Rock with an ease that amazed me. She was magic."

They campaigned her in the Round the Isle of Man Race holding the record for the time round the island for many years afterwards. That year she also won at Holyhead and in the Clyde. She came third in three out of four races in Cowes Week and second in the Channel Race. In the Fastnet Race she had to slow down because of problems at the rudder head, coming in eighth in her class. After Billy queried a measurement in her IOR rating she was re-measured and the rating came down. Had this been known during Cowes week she would have been champion in her class.

They campaigned her particularly successfully in 1972 but were heavily committed to developing and producing a scaled down version of *Ruffian*, the Ruffian 23, and so she was sold. She returned to Strangford Lough a few years later. On 11th July 1976, while participating in a race from Ballyholme to Cork, she ran onto a reef, Moneywaite Bank, off the Wexford coast, south of Courtown. Remarkably, Billy and Dickie were aboard another boat participating in the race and it was able to rescue the crew but the damaged *Ruffian*, while being subsequently towed by Rosslare lifeboat, had to be abandoned. She had led a brief but glorious life.



Reference: The Story of *Ruffian* (2002) by Billy Brown



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