

The Limpet

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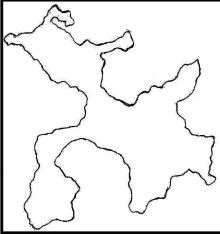
THE LIMPET—SPECIAL EDITION OCTOBER 2009

(note for postal subscribers)

This special edition (52A) of *The Limpet* contains an authoritative account of the rescue of the yacht “Innana”; I decided to publish it now rather than make folk wait four weeks for the November edition of *The Limpet* to appear. The story was also published in my “Island Blog” at <http://claremont.islandblogging.co.uk> where the comments by readers show that the RNLI is still held in high regard.

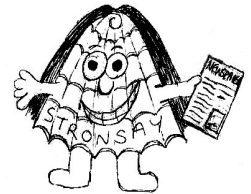
This special edition will not count towards your postal subscription of 12 issues. The November edition (53) of *The Limpet* will be in the post on Tuesday 24 November.

(Bruce Fletcher)



STRONSAY LIMPET

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RESCUE OF YACHT IN MILL BAY OF STRONSAY

As dawn broke on the morning of Thursday, 22nd October, Stronsay residents were surprised to see a yacht anchored in the Mill Bay on the East side of Stronsay. Huge waves were entering the bay from the South East, and there was a wall of broken water all the way across the mouth of the bay. It was obvious that the yacht's sails were in tatters, and there was no sign of any crew on deck.

Concerned for the safety of the crew, a local resident called Shetland Coastguard, who tried to contact the yacht by radio without success, and therefore decided to call out the Kirkwall lifeboat, also directing the Shetland Rescue helicopter to the scene.

On reaching the area, the helicopter crew informed the lifeboat of the severe sea conditions prevailing, and they made a joint decision to abandon an attempt by the lifeboat to reach the yacht. Instead, the helicopter hovered over the yacht until a member of the crew came on deck and then contact was made by radio. The skipper of the yacht informed the helicopter crew that they were quite happy riding out the storm at anchor, and they were waiting for a break in the weather before proceeding on their journey.

The yacht remained at anchor until the early hours of Sunday morning when at 2 am, there was a loud crashing sound, and the crew discovered that the increasing wind had gone more into the East, and the force of the sea had ripped the windlass off its mounting on the bow of the yacht taking the anchor chain over the side. The crew immediately dropped their second anchor, but were forced to let that go too. Without an anchor, they were forced to motor back and forth in the bay, and decided to send out a Mayday signal.

Kirkwall lifeboat under the command of Second Coxwain Stewart Ryrie left Kirkwall with four crew members, and the rescue helicopter left from Shetland.

Shortly after passing the Holm of Huip, the lifeboat suddenly dropped into the trough of a huge wave, and although the crew were strapped in their padded and well-sprung seats, one of the crew, Ian Seatter received a terrific jolt when the lifeboat hit the bottom of the trough, and suffered an injury to his back, resulting in severe pain and restricted mobility.

Coxwain Ryrie immediately decided to head straight for the Stronsay pier to get a doctor to examine his crewman. At about the same time, the helicopter was approaching the area of the stricken yacht, and after the crewman was examined by the local doctor, Doctor George McKay, a decision was made to call the helicopter to airlift Mr Seatter to the Balfour Hospital.

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At about 2.30 am, I was awakened by the noise of the helicopter passing low over my house, and on going to investigate, saw the lifeboat at the pier, with the helicopter approaching the vicinity. I immediately drove to the pier where the Harbour Master, Leslie Miller, informed me of the situation, and together we assisted in bringing the winch-man down onto the pier from the helicopter. The wind was so strong that at one stage, the winch guide line was blowing dangerously close to the helicopter's rear prop, and we were concerned that it would get caught up in the prop with dire consequences for the helicopter itself, or for the winchman.

With some difficulty, the doctor and crew managed to get Mr Seatter onto a spinal board, and he was then winched up into the helicopter and transferred to Kirkwall.

This then left the lifeboat minus a crew member, and on being asked by Stewart Ryrie if I was willing to go with them, I immediately agreed to go along.

The trip around the East side of Papa Stronsay and leading up to the Mill Bay was quite uneventful, with a heavy sea running and an occasional large wave, but with Stewart's expert handling, and travelling at six or seven knots, we made a reasonably comfortable passage.

On reaching the mouth of the bay, Stewart turned to starboard heading more or less in a Westerly direction. Visibility was zero and it was impossible to see what was following on behind. Suddenly, we got hit by what must have been a massive following wave, which spun the lifeboat completely around until we were heading in the opposite direction. In fact the lifeboat broached twice as we entered the bay.

On reaching the area where the yacht was motoring back and forth, they shone a light for us to locate them, and we eventually got near enough to attach a line. Stewart decided that for reasons of safety, we would drop anchor and wait for daylight, and this we did, with the yacht safely secured to the stern of the lifeboat.

At first light, we weighed anchor, and it was agreed with the yacht crew that they would follow the lifeboat back to Stronsay Harbour under their own power. As we reached the mouth of the bay we found a gap of about one hundred yards of clear water with broken water on either side, and on heading our through this gap, we encountered a very heavy swell with waves estimated at around fifteen metres. We continued heading out to the North East until we were far enough out to get a clean run before the waves, down past the Papa lighthouse and around to the safety of the Stronsay Harbour where we arrived shortly after 9 am. On the return journey, both Stewart and I were extremely impressed by the seamanship of the yacht skipper, who handled the boat extremely well under the severe conditions.

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The yacht was the Inanna, a 49 feet Bavaria class, registered in Kingstown, St Vincent (for tax reasons) but out of Grenada. The owner/skipper was 43 year old father of three, Jason Evans Baldwin from Grenada, accompanied by Alex Jones, a 36 year old father of six, also from Grenada, and Zak Harcombe, a 30 year old single man from Litchfield, Staffordshire, who had flown up to Norway last week to join the crew at Stavanger.

They told me how they had set off from Stavanger last Wednesday intending to sail up to Denmark and meet Jason's seventeen year old son, but after sailing for about 100 nautical miles, they had encountered a force nine gale and all their sails had been ripped to shreds. leaving them no option but to run before the gale, eventually arriving off Stronsay at 2 am on Thursday morning.

By this time, their fuel guage was showing that they were very low on fuel, and their G.P.S. linked to their computer charts, was experiencing problems with the battery very low, and only four minutes of power left. They were in the middle of seriously large waves which on one occasion just off the mouth of the Mill Bay, laid the yacht right over on its port side.

They felt that if the G.P.S. ran ut of power, they would be helpless in the huge seas, and decided to turn into Mill Bay and seek shelter, rather than run on in the hope of gaining the safety of Stronsay Harbour. This they did, and once in the comparatively calmer waters of the bay, dropped anchor for the night.

The next morning, they made phone calls to order new sails from a firm in Fort William, and finding that the anchorage appeared quite safe, and also finding out that their fuel guage was faulty, and in fact they had plenty of fuel, decided to sit it out until they could get a break in the weather before heading off for Fort William.

When the helicopter appeared hovering above them on Thursday, they were surprised by this, but pleased that someone was concerned enough for their safety, as to cause the Coastguards to be informed. However at this stage, they stated that they were feeling quite safe at anchor and required no further assistance, and the helicopter withdrew.

Although they lay for three days in a heavy swell, the anchor held fine, and they were not concerned about the situation. However, the skipper, who stated that he always looked ahead, and made contingency plans, discussed every possible scenario with the crew and they decided that if the anchor did drag, they would drop a second anchor which he was sure would hold them safely.

At 2 am on Sunday morning, unbeknown to the crew, the wind had gone further into the East, and huge waves were coming straight into the bay, when suddenly there was a terrific crashing sound, and the sound of chains ripping over the bow of the yacht. On investigating this noise, they discovered that the windlass had been completely ripped off its mounting and had fallen down into the windlass locker in the bow of the yacht - the anchor chain had unwound from the windlass, and the anchor and chain were lost over the side.

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They immediately put their contingency plan into operation, dropping their other anchor, but this would not hold, and eventually they had to let that go also. They then broadcast a "mayday" to Shetland Coastguards and awaited the arrival of the rescue services, fearing that to attempt to leave the bay in the dark, and under these stormy conditions would be possibly fatal. And so they waited for the arrival of the lifeboat.



Top: Lifeboat and Innana enter harbour

Left: Innana alongside Stronsay pier

Above: Crew of Innana

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The skipper and crew have asked me to convey their sincere thanks and gratitude to the crew of the Rescue helicopter, the officers of Shetland Coastguard, and in particular to the Coxwain and crew of the Kirkwall lifeboat who they described as the "heroes of the day".

They made particular mention of the expertise of Coxwain Stewart Rylie in the way he lead them safely out though the breakers and in to the safety of Stronsay Harbour. In addition, they expressed their concern for the welfare of crewman Ian Seatter, wishing him a speedy recovery, and they asked me to thank him for his part in their rescue. Ian was detained in Balfour Hospital until Monday afternoon, when he was released, and it is thought and hoped that he will make a full recovery soon.

I would also wish to express my admiration for the cool, calm and professional manner in which Stewart handled the lifeboat, and also for the professionalism and dedication of the crew members who did an excellent job in extremely difficult circumstances. When you witness something like this at first hand as I did, it makes you proud to be associated with such men and this excellent institution.

Jason and his crew intend to stay in Stronsay for several days until they can make a safe passage to Fort William to collect their new sails, and after that - watch this space !

Bill Miller,
Glenmanna,
Stronsay.