

# SAILING full circle



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE SINNOTT FAMILY

**Francesca** under sail, with Robert, his wife Irene, and son Brian on board

**(Below)** Francesca in trial mode on the River Lee in the early '50s, while being converted from a lifeboat to a cruiser, before the masts and finishing touches were added

Among the entrants in the 2004 Shannon Boat Rally, was an impressive wooden craft, which turned quite a few heads during the week. Jim Murray met her owners, Robert and Irene Sinnott, to find out the fascinating story of *Francesca*

**F**rancesca was one of three boats built in Scotland in 1944 as lifeboats for a coaster, which were discarded shortly afterwards because the vessel changed over to aluminium lifeboats for weight/stability reasons. Robert's father, Brian, who worked as general manager of the City of Cork Steam Packet Company, bought her in 1948 and spent the next two years fitting her out as a four-berth clinker-built larch-hulled motor sailor.

The other two purchasers, by the way, were, general manager of the B&I line Douglas Heard and a Cork shipwright colleague of Mr Sinnott in the Steam Packet Company. Douglas was, of course, husband of our own Ruth Heard, and the *Hark* became part of Irish inland waterways folklore.

Brian Sinnott named his new toy after his wife, whom he had met while serving in Italy during the war. They and their young family, including the toddler Robert, sailed/motored happily in Cork Harbour area for the following eight years.



In the 1954 Tostal, the Cork Choral Festival featured an Italian choir, a few of whose members were invited for a short day-cruise on *Francesca* by the Sinnotts. Which father and son entertained everyone and also sang at a Sinnott daughter's first holy communion in the same week? Well, the son's name was Luciano Pavorotti!

When Brian Sinnott's job took him and his family back to the B&I line in 1955/6, he reluctantly disposed of the boat. In 1957/8 she was sold on again

to none other than Dr Norman Furlong, who brought her to Athlone, where she graced every Shannon Rally for the following 40 years.

For some years during the '90s, Robert and Irene Sinnott, together with a group of friends took a number of hire cruisers on an annual Shannon jaunt. In 1995, they happened to arrive in Hodson Bay at the same time as a Shannon Boat Rally. As he ambled along the jetty, he thought he saw something familiar in the middle of all the fibreglass, and clambered out to investigate. And there she was – almost a mirage from his childhood memories.

Asking permission to board, he introduced himself to Norman and Rosemary Furlong, telling them the story of why he was so thrilled to see *Francesca* again. Before taking his leave many reminiscences later, he asked the Furlongs to contact him if ever they were considering selling their beloved craft.

In 2001, the good doctor made contact, and they did an extremely amicable deal. Robert and his brother Charles took over where their father had left off almost half a century earlier. Happily, Mr Sinnott senior is still hale and hearty and greeted his sons' new purchase like a long-lost friend.

*Francesca* now lives on Quigley's Marina, just across from the Furlongs' beautiful harbour and home at Coosan Point. We hope there's plenty more *Thanks for the Memory* for her new skippers in the years to come. ■

Jim Murray is a member of the IWAI Athlone branch.

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## Francesca's owners from 1958 – 2001



PHOTO: MAEVE KELLY

Norman and Rosemary Furlong brought *Francesca* on the very first Shannon Rally in 1961, and indeed on the 'unofficial' rallies in the 1950s, out of which the Shannon Rally evolved. They were both members of the committee in those early years, and Norman was a vice-commodore. For more than 40 years *Francesca* was based in their harbour at Coosan Point on Lough Ree, right beside Harry Rice's house *Dunrovin*. Harry was an uncle of Rosemary's, and the Furlongs were quietly in the background of the meetings that resulted in the foundation of IWAI in 1954. *Francesca* is as much a part of our 50 year's history as is *Dunrovin* itself.