

São João Baptista.

Ciskei 1994. 1.05R.

Auke Palmhof. Source: 'Stories of Famous Shipwrecks' by Len Ortzen.

She was built in 1621 in the Dockyard at Goa of Indian teak. The Portuguese built many of their merchant men in India; timber was scarce at home, and teak built vessels were better and longer lasting than oak-built. Building ships in Goa was also cheaper.

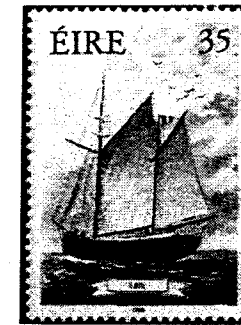
The *São João Baptista* was an Indiaman with broad beam and high poop and forecastle armed with 18 guns, fore and aft. Crew about 150 men commanded by Pedro de Morais with about 150 passengers including women and children, a priest and soldiers. When she left Goa on 1st March 1622 on her maiden voyage she was heavily loaded, probably overloaded, with India stores; spices, saltpetre, silks, cotton, pierce goods, carpets and hardwood, while the deck was piled high as well. She left late from Goa; mostly vessels bound for the homeland left before Christmas to miss the winter storms rounding the SE coast of South Africa and the Cape of Good Hope. When rounding the Cape she sighted two Dutch merchantmen, the *Mauritius* and *Wapen van Rotterdam* bound for Batavia which bore down on the *São João Baptista*, and attacked the heavily loaded vessel. For nine days she fought the two Dutch vessels; many were killed or wounded, her rudder shattered, mainmast and bowsprit shot away, the hull holed in several places below the waterline. The ship was slowly sinking.

The long-fought action carried the three vessels near the Roaring Forties, and the captain of the *São João Baptista* decided to surrender to the two Dutch vessels. Two wealthy merchants were sent across in a boat to the *Mauritius* to negotiate the surrender, but before they returned a severe storm got up, and the two ships became separated. A few days later the drifting *São João Baptista* sighted one of the enemy ships, but quickly lost her again.

After the crew rigged a jury-mast and made two sweeps from pieces of the mast, the vessel made some headway, but the ship was essentially a wreck at the mercy of the sea and currents. Land was sighted on 29th Sept. and the next day the vessel drifted so close to the beach that she could anchor. An officer with 15 men was sent ashore to protect the landing of crew and passengers on this wild coast. It was very difficult to land and one boat capsized and several drowned. They landed between the mouths of the Fish and Kei Rivers (Around what is now East London? Editor.). When they were ashore, shacks were built for shelter, and they stayed here for five weeks. When on the beach the command was taken over by the army officer Francisco Vas d'Almada. All remaining provision and everything of use was removed from the wreck, then the *São João Baptista* was burnt and all iron, nails and copper hidden, when left behind the bartering value of that held by the Portuguese would be reduced. After five weeks the decision was made to march up the coast through unknown country to Delagoa Bay (Lourenco Marques now Mapoeta in Mozambique) a journey of 600 miles. On 6 Nov. 1622, 279 people in 4 groups marched away from the camping place, and after much hardship when most died around August the next year only 31 survivors of the *São João Baptista* reached a safe haven; all the passengers had died.

Ilen.

Ireland. 1999.



In August 1926, long distance sailor Conor O'Brien left Baltimore in West Cork in the 56ft ketch *Ilen*, which had been built there to his design to become a service vessel in the Falkland Islands. A few years earlier the islanders had been impressed with the seaworthiness of his 42ft ketch *Saoirse* when he called during his 1923-25 circumnavigation south of the great capes, and they let it be known that they'd be pleased if the Falklands Islands Co. could provide something similar to carry people, sheep and supplies in their stormy archipelago.

Ilen, named after the river which flows between Skibbereen and Baltimore, served the company well for over 60 years, and then had a further spell as a workboat in private ownership. However, since 1979 her significance had greatly increased, for in that year *Saoirse* was wrecked in a hurricane in Jamaica. *Ilen* became the only surviving tangible maritime link with Conor O'Brien, whose home had been in County Limerick beside the Shannon Estuary. It was a Limerick businessman, Gary MacMahon, who went out to the Falklands in March 1997 to buy the old ketch, and with the support of the remarkable Hunt Museum in Limerick city, and airline magnate Tony Ryan, he was able to purchase *Ilen* and have her shipped to Dublin.

Ilen will have a complete refit at her new home in Limerick but she was temporarily kitted out with a mixture of sails from Galway hookers and so forth in order to sail from Dublin Bay round Ireland's south coast under the command of noted workboat sailor Paddy Barry. The reception she received when she came back to Baltimore after 72 years was rapturous.

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