

# Newsletter 2021



Much of the first half of 2021 was lost to COVID restrictions so little Orkney Historic Boat Society (OHBS) activity was possible. When the situation in Orkney finally eased the sailing season had begun, so many volunteers were to be found out on the water rather than inside in a shed. Restoration work only recommenced after the sailing season had finished in September.

In April we were asked to reduce the amount of floor space we were occupying with stored boats and equipment at the Ness Shed in Stromness. This was so that a small local company could move into the space we would free up. We managed to reorganise our boats by packing them closely and stacking our tools and materials tightly together. While this made access difficult, we did free up the space required by the owner in a timely manner. To give us enough working space around the boats we wanted to work on, some boats were moved to alternative locations. In particular Saga (a 14' Redwing dinghy) was moved to Ian Richardson's Shed in Stromness for re-decking work (more later).

Since activities resumed in September, work has been focused on progressing Waterlily (c1870 North Isles Yole), Linda (1939, 12' rowing boat), Nellie (25' First World War Naval Launch) and Saga. Early in 2021 OHBS was fortunate to be awarded a £600 grant by the Orkney Islands Council Culture Fund to help with the cost of re-decking Saga.

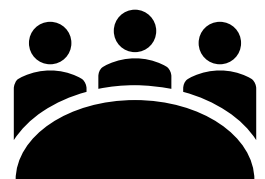
Progress has been made on finding secure long term storage for the OHBS collection of boats and artefacts. OHBS is also continuing to work with Orkney Islands Council on finding a suitable location for a Boat Haven which would be open to the public. This facility would also allow OHBS to take over the care and maintenance of the traditional boats currently in council storage at Lyness.

OHBS remains indebted to the property owners who continue to support us by enabling us to store our boat collection in their sheds, without whose generosity Orkney's maritime heritage would continue to be lost.

*Matthew Vaughton*

## Changes to OHBS Officers

At this year's Annual General Meeting in September the current Chairman, Jimmy Clouston, had to stand down having served the maximum time permitted in the post by the constitution. The then Vice-Chairman, Michael McLaughlin agreed to become the OHBS Chairman and Jimmy Clouston agreed to take on the Vice-Chairman role. Harky Hutchison remains in post as the Treasurer, Susan Paice remains Minutes Secretary. Matthew Vaughton continues looking after Membership, Media and Communications.



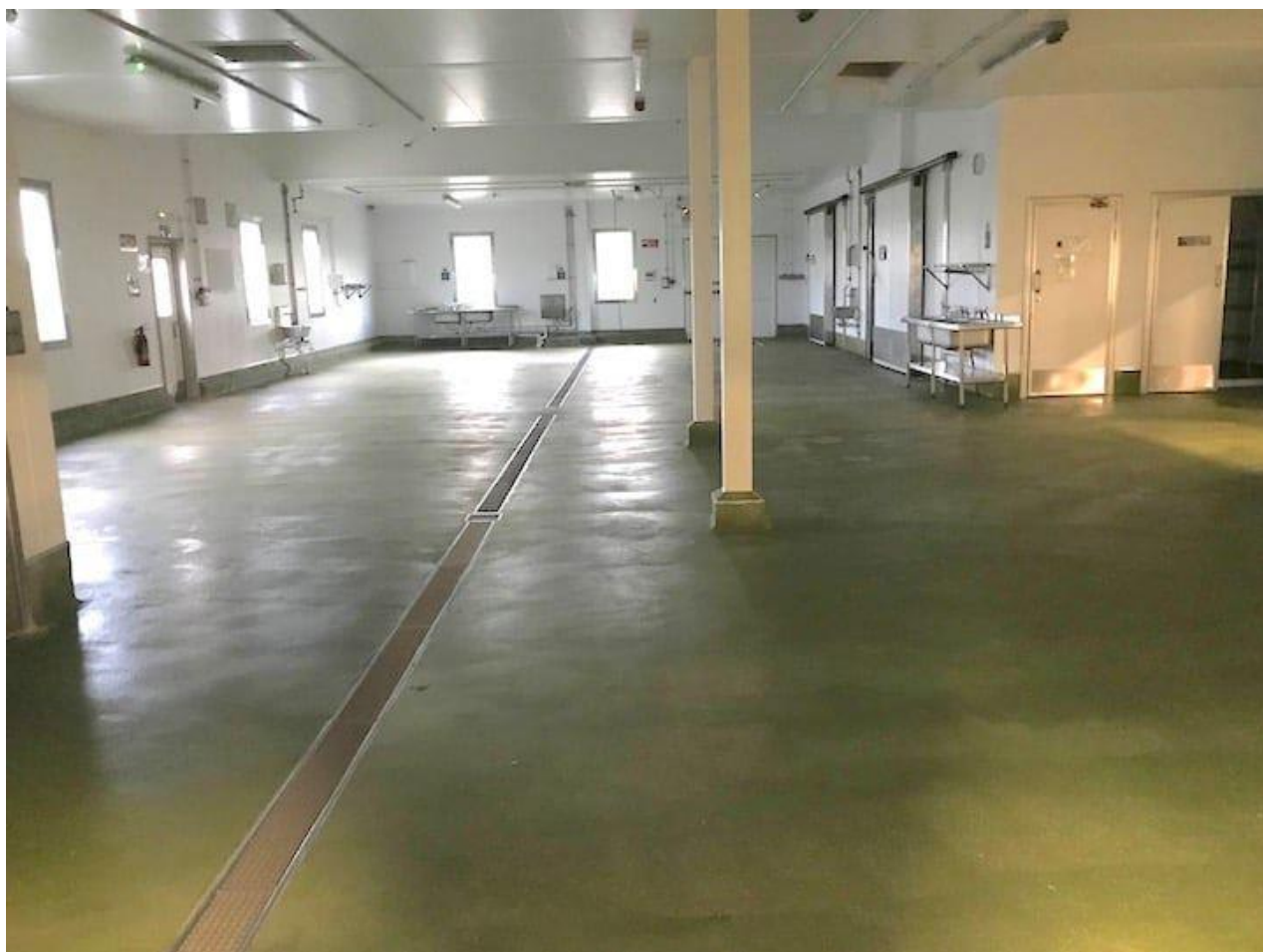
## New Storage Facility - *Matthew Vaughton*

Over the last few months OHBS has been working with Orkney Islands Council to acquire some space in an Old Herring Factory in Stromness. The building was built in 2010 to process herring for the food industry but went into administration in 2012 and has been empty ever since. Orkney Islands Council was looking for a way to reduce its annual costs associated with maintaining an empty factory. The building was designed as a fish processing plant with large chiller/freezer units, lots of insulation, cold stores and special drainage facilities so was not easy adaptable to other uses. Since the council had received no acceptable offers to lease or purchase it decided to offer the property to three Orkney charities at minimal rent. The Orkney Men's Shed, Stromness Drama Club and Orkney Historic Boat Society were all looking for space and were delighted at the offer. The three charities are now working together with the council to finalise the terms of the lease and establish the site as a West Mainland charity hub.

Although providing OHBS with valuable secure covered storage there remains a problem with accessing the internal space. At present the building only has limited access through raised loading bays which are not a suitable access for large boats on road trailers. OHBS is working with the council to install a large boat access door in the side of the building which should allow OHBS to move its largest boats in and out of this storage area.



*The Old Herring Factory, Stromness - Outside*



*The Old Herring Factory, Stromness - Inside*



## Boat Haven - *Matthew Vaughton*

As well as working with Orkney Islands Council over the Old Herring Factory, OHBS is also working with the council on the establishment of a Boat Haven in Stromness which will be open to the public. The space being acquired in the Old Herring Factory is not suitable for a Boat Haven so will be used for storage and behind the scenes restoration activities only. A more suitable location is required for a Boat Haven. Additional space is also required to allow OHBS to take over the care and maintenance of around 14 traditional boats that the council currently has in storage at Lyness.

While discussion with the council is still at an early stage, OHBS is forging a good working relationship with the Culture Team. The site currently under consideration as a Boat Haven is the Old Buoy Store at Pole Star Pier in Stromness. The Pole Star Pier was acquired by the council in 2003 when the Northern Lighthouse Board closed their Stromness depot. Like the Old Herring Factory, the Buoy Store has not attracted sufficient commercial interest to justify keeping it as a commercial property therefore the council is considering making it available to OHBS for the establishment of a Boat Haven.

The Old Buoy Store has a large access door and is a high building which offers the possibility of adding a mezzanine floor in the future.



*The Old Buoy Store*



*Inside the Old Buoy Store*





## James Towers (Pia) Anderson - *Jimmy Clouston*

Pia Anderson established arguably the most famous boat building yard in Orkney.

In the heyday of wooden fishing boat building in Orkney, during the 1950's, 1960's and early 1970's, Pia Anderson designed and built much sought-after fishing boats which were commissioned from and sent to all parts of the UK establishing Orkney as a centre of excellence and a major provider of inshore fishing vessels. His designs were quickly adopted by other boat building yards, not only in Orkney, but also in Caithness and elsewhere.



*Young Pia in discussion with his father Pia Anderson*



*Mayflower being launched in 1964*

Pia's signature designs are still recognised throughout Britain as 'Orkney' boats.

The current James Anderson (young Pia) began boat building alongside his father (who, in his day was also called young Pia) which also set him on a lifelong career in boatbuilding. OHBS are truly fortunate because he has very kindly collated the story of his father, Pia Anderson. The full story can be found on the OHBS website at: <https://www.ohbs.net/.../james-towers-anderson-pia-anderson/>



*Boat Building at the Ness Shed*



*Pia Anderson*



## The Uffa Fox Airborne Lifeboat “Zulu” at Lyness Museum - *Jimmy Clouston*

I’m always amazed at the varied enquiries we get through the OHBS email. This correspondence began with someone trying to trace the boat in the photo which they believed was at Lyness Museum. I was able to confirm it was still at Lyness but had been deemed to be beyond repair consequently would not be restored.

I was not only able to give details about the boats origins but also share the story of how it came to be in Orkney.

*“This was one of a number of surplus airborne lifeboats purchased from RAF Leuchars after the end of WW2 which were converted to sailing boats. St Andrews Sailing Club had four of these - Zulu, Wanderer (now in Irvine Maritime Museum), Conqueror & Borderer. Three of them, including Zulu, were open boats, only one was fitted with a cabin. To convert them into sailing boats about a foot of freeboard was removed, necessitating re-decking, and the hull was skinned over with fibreglass.*



*During one St Andrew's regatta, Walter Mouat, then just a teenager, was sailing the boat in a fierce easterly wind, the dagger board touched a sandbank and sheared off and the boat drifted and capsized in heavy seas. It had become too rough for other boats to reach the crew of three, and they had to be airlifted to safety by an RAF helicopter. A luminous buoy was attached to the boat and she was left to drift, eventually washing ashore some days later, when her back broke and she filled with sand.*

*John Edwards recovered the hull, inadvertently causing a major security alert at RAF Leuchars when he returned the marker buoy; the guard on the gate failed to pass on information about the strange cylindrical object that had been handed in and the bomb squad were called to detonate the 'mystery device'.*

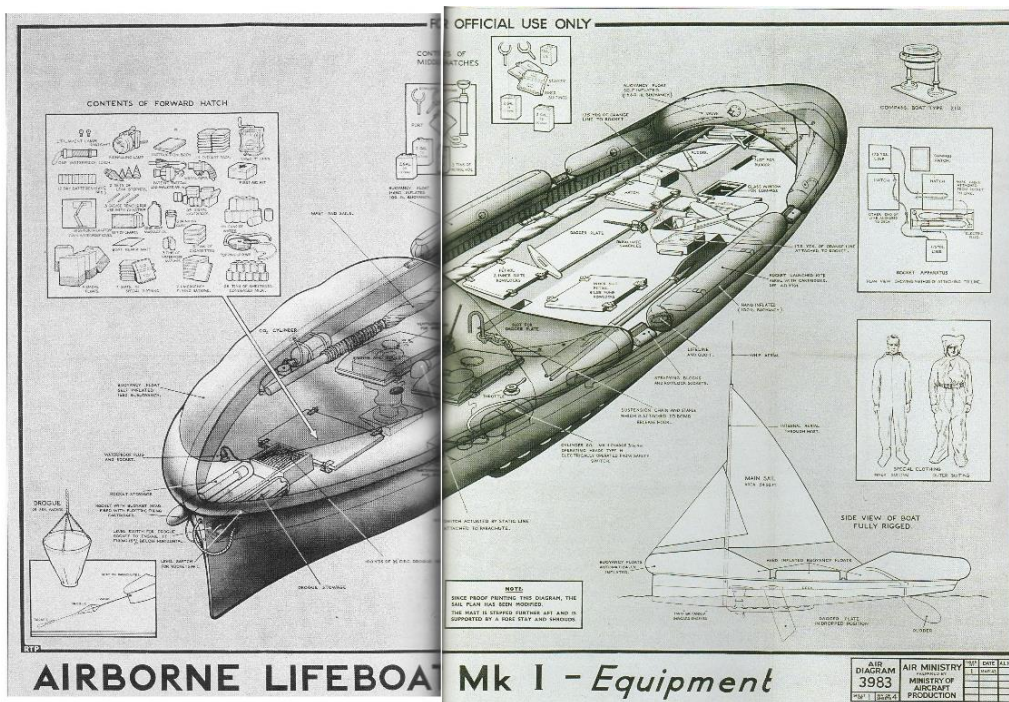
*John considered the boat to be damaged beyond repair and she was eventually bought by an Orkney man. Zulu lay up on the slip in Stromness for many years before coming to the museum.”*

The enquirer then sent further photos, one of another former Airborne Lifeboat in better condition and one of the Britannia ‘Middy’ outboard with which they had been equipped.





## A Brief History of the Uffa Fox Airborne Lifeboat Mk I



The air-dropped lifeboat, a 32-foot wooden canoe-shaped boat designed in 1943 by Uffa Fox. It was dropped by (RAF) Avro Lancaster heavy bombers for the rescue of aircrew downed in the Channel. The lifeboat was dropped from a height of 700 feet, and its descent to the water was slowed by six parachutes. It was balanced so that it would right itself if it overturned. When it hit the water, the parachutes were jettisoned, and rockets launched 300 ft lifelines. Coamings were inflated on the descent to give it self-righting.

Fox's airborne lifeboat weighed 1,700 pounds and included two 4-horsepower Britannia 'Middy' outboard motors—sufficient to make about 6 knots—augmented by a mast and sails along with an instruction book to teach aircrew the rudiments of sailing. The lifeboats were first carried by Lockheed Hudson aircraft in February 1943. Later, Vickers Warwick bombers carried the Mark II lifeboat. The Fox boats successfully saved downed aircrew as well as glider infantrymen dropped in the water during Operation Market-Garden.

The lifeboats carried emergency equipment, a radio, waterproof suits, rations and medical supplies.

The significant reason why these boats were deployed was that downed crew could motor or sail back to friendly territory as opposed to drifting helplessly as they would on a rubber life raft, more than likely onto enemy soil.

### Blue Door

OHBS has a week booked in the Blue Door Charity shop in Kirkwall in early 2022. The Blue Door Charity shop allocates a week to local charities who then receive the income from items sold in the shop during their allocated week (minus the shops overheads). OHBS is currently collecting good quality items for sale during its allocated week in the shop.

If you are Orkney based and have any suitable items you would like to donate to help OHBS during its week in the Blue Door shop please email: [orkneyhistoricboats@gmail.com](mailto:orkneyhistoricboats@gmail.com)





## Saga Re-Decking - *Matthew Vaughton*

Saga is a 14' one-design Redwing racing dinghy designed by Uffa Fox in 1939 for Looe Sailing Club, based in south-east Cornwall. It is a classic Fox hull with a clean run and a waterline stretched to the maximum, but with good freeboard, half-decked and with a substantial breakwater designed to cope with the rough and tumbling seas off the Cornish coast. It also had a 132lb iron drop keel (centreboard) with a 5ft draught, and sail area of 145sq ft.



*Saga in November 2018*

Originally called the Looe Redwing, it was later renamed the West of England Redwing when the design became popular and was adopted as a national class by the RYA. (The class should not be confused with the Bembridge Redwing, designed in 1896 for sailing in the Solent, which is a much larger keeled boat.)

Saga was built by Billy Clouston at Waithe Haven, Stenness in Orkney, in 1949. She was built for a keen local sailor, Willie Groat, who is well-known for being the banker onboard the National Commercial Bank (later the Royal Bank of Scotland) bank boat called Otter Bank, which served the northern Orkney islands as a mobile bank in the 1960s.

Although the hull of Saga is in a reasonable condition with only a small amount of hull planking requiring replacement the deck was in a sorry state of repair. In fact, some rotten decking ripped away in the wind while Saga was being towed between locations. As well as the ply decking needing to be replaced some of the underlying support spars also required replacement or re-fixing.

With good quality ply decking material costs upwards of £175/sheet and we needed two sheets + delivery a source of suitable funding was sought. Fortunately, the Orkney Islands Council Culture Fund was able to support heritage work, so OHBS applied for a grant to cover the cost of re-decking Saga and received £600. While the wood was ordered early in the year, work did not start on the re-decking until September.

The hull of Saga had been largely stripped in early 2020 before we got into the COVID lockdown. Painting of the exterior was undertaken during the summer of 2020 and a waterline added in October 2020. Work was then paused until September 2021 when work started on preparing the interior for painting and repairing of the deck.

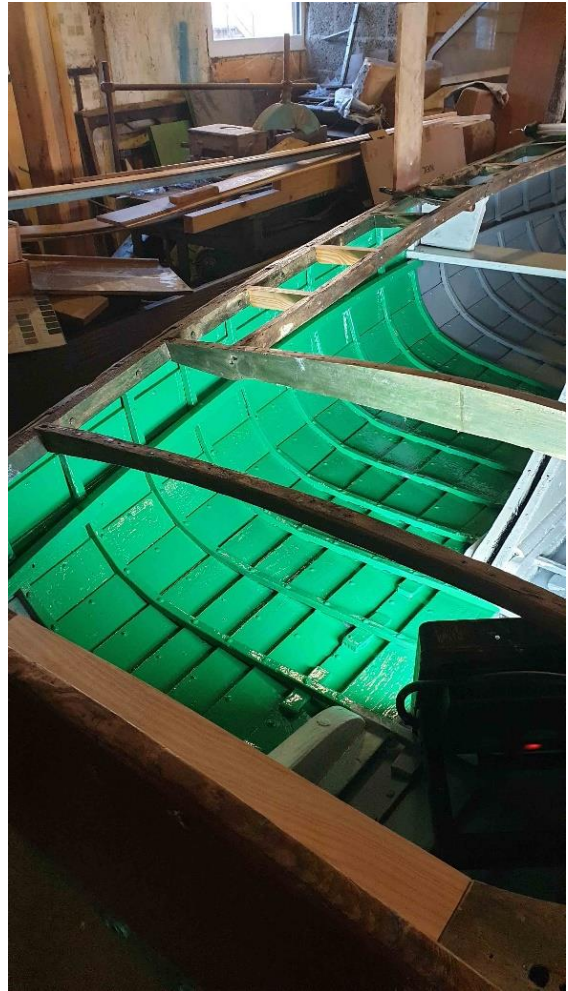
Work on both interior painting and the deck has progressed well over the last few months. After several coats of primer, the final green topcoat is now being applied to the interior. At the same time as the paint team were working on the interior paint work, a wood work crew was working around them replacing and refixing the port and starboard deck spars, the foredeck spars and a missing stern support. We still have some more top coat paint to apply and deck spars to fix before we will be ready to apply the new decking but we hope to have Saga re-decked sometime early next year.

A more weekly progress blog can be found on the OHBS volunteers Blog of weekly activities found here: <https://ohbsworkgroup.blogspot.com/>





*Saga foredeck spar repairs*

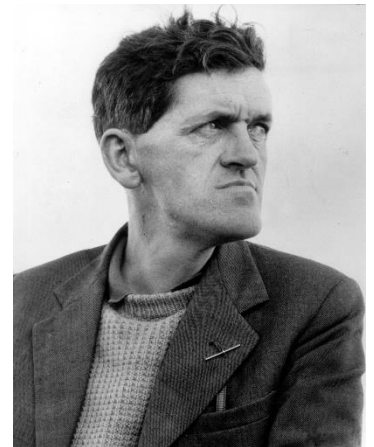


*Saga interior top coat*

### George Mackay Brown

The 17 October 2021 was the centenary of birthday of George Mackay Brown (GMB), the national bard of Orkney. As well as a lot of readings, exhibitions and talks, Orkney Islands Council sponsored a piece of artwork to mark the centenary. A commission was given to local artist Gabrielle Barnby and Scottish artist Orla Stevens.

The theme they wanted to explore was that of Travellers (the title of GMB's final posthumous collection) and images of boats. OHBS worked with both Gabrielle and Orla over several weeks to help them develop their ideas and ended up donating several surplus marine artefacts to help them in their endeavour.



### Linda, Nellie & Waterlily

In addition to restoration work on Saga, 2021 has seen a lot of work undertaken on a number of other boats. Unlike Saga, which is for space reasons being worked on in Ian Richardson's shed, Linda (1939 12' rowing boat), Nellie (25' First World War Naval Launch) & Waterlily (c1870 North Isles Yole) have all been worked on in the Ness shed. Linda has been stripped back and is being repainted with only minor repair work required. Nellie is continuing to be cleaned – it takes a long time to remove decades of coal dust mixed with grease and oil by steam! Waterlily has also been stripped back and is in the process of being repainted. She is now waiting for some minor repairs before the final top coat is applied but is otherwise looking very smart.





*Nellie (top left), Waterlily (middle left) and Linda (middle)*

## Histoire de LE FROG

Last year James Clouston wrote about an enquiry OHBS had received from a French owner of an Orkney built hull.

You can now read the full history of the Frog (in French) here:

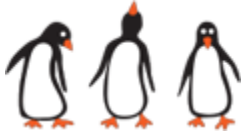
<https://voile-canotage-anjou.over-blog.com/2021/04/histoire-de-le-frog.html>

For those that prefer English, a translation should be available here:

<https://voile--canotage--anjou-over--blog-com.translate.goog/2021/04/histoire-de-le-frog.html? x tr sl=fr& x tr tl=en& x tr hl=en-GB& x tr pto=nui>



## Farming in the Falklands



Andrez Short lives at Swan Inlet Farm, East Falkland.

Earlier this year he acquired an abandoned motor boat as a restoration project. Locals believed that the boat had been used by the navy in survey work around South Georgia. Andrez contacted OHBS in the hope of identifying the boats manufacturer.



OHBS knew of a boat lying in Stromness which was of similar design and appearance. A study of the Maker's Plate

on the boat in Stromness indicated that the boat was built by Norpower Brødr Malo in Kristiansund (North). Andrez now has a lot of photographs to help him with his restoration project.

## A Canadian Flattie - Jimmy Clouston

The following email trail was initiated this summer by Judy, from London, whose family reside in British Columbia, Canada. She had visited Stromness in June 2015.

To the Orkney Historic Boats Society:

*Attached are recent photographs of a skiff that I believe may have been made to an Orkney flat bottomed boat design or by an individual who left the Orkneys in the late 1800's, early 1900's and emigrated to the Gulf Islands of British Columbia, Canada. The boat builder was a Mr Georgeson. The skiff belonged to either my grandfather or his father, then subsequently our family. It spent its life on Gabriola, Galiano and Salt Spring Islands, between the mainland of British Columbia and Vancouver Island, BC. We believe it is the only such boat left on the islands now. It could have been built from 1915 on, perhaps more likely from 1930's.*

*While visiting the Orkney Islands in June 2015 and walking down the main street of Stromness, I happened across the view down a driveway of a wooden flat-bottomed skiff pulled up on the concrete ramp at the shoreline. See photo attached. It looked very considerably like our family skiff, including the interior and exterior colours of paint. The hull is slightly curved. It slipped through the water beautifully.*

*There appeared to be a wood-working workshop beside the driveway; there was another similar skiff overturned with a black painted hull. Our rowboat also has a keel just like the Stromness skiffs.*

*Can you tell me anything about possible connections of this old skiff to Orkney historic boats? Ours is a heavy boat, a beautiful rowing boat, still in decent shape despite living in a garden for the last five+ years. Previously it was always in a boat house and had been well maintained. As a family we are now investigating whether our skiff can be housed in the Galiano Museum, Galiano Island. It would be special to include any possible history of the design or boat builder.*

*Many heritage families came from Scotland, England, Ireland to settle on the Canadian west coast. Several family names are recognisable as from the Orkneys. It must have reminded them of "The Old Country", of home.*



*Our father passed away 2 years ago. He lovingly kept the skiff in good shape. From the look of the photographs, it needs scraping and repainting. There are little bug boreholes in the bow area. Would anyone have an idea of how long it would take to sufficiently restore the boat?*

*I hope you find this story interesting and heart-warming. Any information that can be forwarded would be appreciated.*

*With kind regard*

*Judy*



*Flatt bottomed skiff from the Gulf Islands of British Columbia,*



*Judy recognises a Stromness Flattie*

Reply from the Orkney Historic Boat Society:

*Hi Judy,*

*Thank you for your very interesting email.*

*Your boat certainly looks like, what we call, a Stromness Flattie.*

*These boats were very popular in Stromness and elsewhere in Orkney and were mainly used as tenders, i.e., a small boat which could be used to row out to a larger vessel which would be anchored off. They were small enough and light enough to be hauled up the shore into a boat noust, or in the case of Stromness, a close between houses.*

*There is a theory that they were based on the 'Newfoundland stackable dory' and a counter theory that the Newfoundland Dory was based on the Stromness Flattie.*

*We have, in our collection, a very early model built in the late 1800s, photo attached.*

*There were Georgesons in Orkney and many went to Canada. At one time in the early days 70% of all the Hudson Bay company personnel were Orcadian. They took with them customs, skills and ideas from Orkney so it is very likely that Mr Georgeson would have built a boat he was familiar with. It is very admirable of your family to have looked after your boat so well for so long. Most boats from that era are long gone.*

*As for having your boat restored, they are not complicated, and a competent wooden boat builder would replace the affected boards in a few days.*

*Please keep us informed about whether you have the boat restored or put in a museum, etc.*

*Kind regards*

*Jimmy Clouston*



*Believed to be the first Stromness Flattie. Now in the OHBS collection*

To the Orkney Historic Boats Society:

*Hi Jimmy,*

*I was delighted to read your email this morning. Thank you for the information. It certainly rounds out the story of how such a boat was built on the Gulf Islands.*

*This gives me a chance to ask whether we could have permission from OHBS to use the photograph and also your explanation, with a citation to OHBS and yourself as Chairman, should the skiff be displayed at the Galiano Museum. One of the extended family heads up the museum project; I will be sending this email stream to her.*

*I will be happy to keep you informed and send any photos for your society's interest.*

*Judy*

Reply from the Orkney Historic Boat Society:

*Hi Judy,*

*.....By all means use the photos. I hope you can get your boat displayed at the Galiano Museum.*

*Jimmy*

To the Orkney Historic Boats Society:

*Hi Jimmy,*

*Thanks for sending these. My family on the west coast are fascinated and very grateful to have this unexpected history.*

*I hope it is a good summer season for the Orkney's. We really enjoyed our visit there; only got around the main island but it was a varied and super vacation.*

*All the best,*

*Judy*



## Stromness Shop Window

OHBS continues to keep a small exhibition going in an empty shop in Stromness. As well as helping to make the street through Stromness look less empty it helps advertise OHBS activities and objectives to visitors. Thanks go to Sue Paice who pays for the shop windows to be cleaned periodically.



## Show Your Support For OHBS

Car/Boat Window Sticker - suggested donation £3 (+£1 postage if required)

Black logo on a white background – 10cm diameter - what every all well-dressed car (or boat) should have.



Fridge Magnets – suggested donation £5 (+£1 postage if required)

Black logo on a silver or gold background – 10cm diameter



To order a Car Sticker or a Fridge Magnet please email: [orkneyhistoricboats@gmail.com](mailto:orkneyhistoricboats@gmail.com) and we'll sort out the details.



To shop at AmazonSmile (instead of amazon.co.uk) simply use the URL: **smile.amazon.co.uk** If you don't already have a chosen charity you will need to select your charity before shopping.



Can anyone identify the yachts in the photograph below? Email answers to:

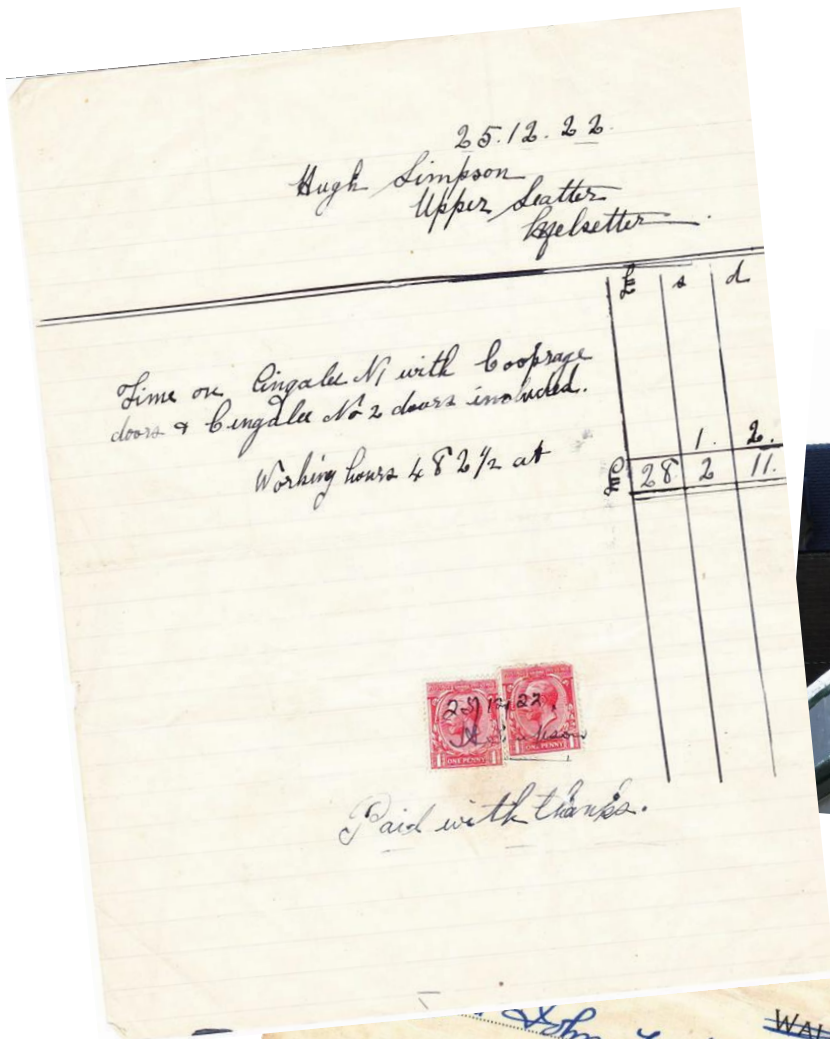
[orkneyhistoricboats@gmail.com](mailto:orkneyhistoricboats@gmail.com)





All Work and no Play...

These invoices were dated 25 December 1922 for work on Cingalee. How many folk spend Christmas Day writing out invoices these days, or was somebody having a joke?



## WHERE YOU CAN FIND INFORMATION ABOUT OHBS

Orkney Historic Boat Society Website and Facebook page

<https://www.ohbs.net/>

<https://www.facebook.com/orkneyhistoricboatsociety/>

Previous OHBS Newsletters

<https://www.ohbs.net/ohbs-newsletters/>

OHBS volunteers Blog (weekly activities)

<https://ohbsworkgroup.blogspot.com/>

National Historic Ships – Shipshape Network

<https://www.nationalhistoricships.org.uk/shipshape-network/region/scotland>

New Connections Across the Northern Isles

<https://irc.hw.ac.uk/new-connections.html>

**Contact:** [orkneyhistoricboats@gmail.com](mailto:orkneyhistoricboats@gmail.com)

Orkney Historic Boat Society is a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO) registered with the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR) with Charity Number SC044884

Our Vision: To preserve the boating history of Orkney for future generations. Our Mission: To preserve historic boats and related traditional boat building skills and crafts. To collect preserve and communicate knowledge relating to boats built in Orkney or having contributed significantly to Orkney life and to further the education and knowledge of the public in relation to historical Orkney Boats, including establishing a boat museum and workshop.

