

Newsletter

2022



For most of 2022 OHBS volunteers were restricted on what work they could undertake because of a shortage of safe working space. Almost all of the available OHBS space was occupied with stored boats and equipment, which left virtually no safe space for volunteers to work on restorations. Despite the space problems, some progress was made on a couple of the smaller boats, and the clean-up of Nellie continued.

The OHBS week in the Blue Door charity shop in February was very successful in helping to raise much needed funds.

The summer months were notably quiet with most volunteers busy with other activities. The arrival of autumn saw a return to OHBS work which coincided with the Old Herring Factory becoming available to OHBS. After almost a year of waiting for necessary building changes to be completed on the Old Herring Factory, in October we finally signed a 10-year lease with the council. Several of the smaller OHBS boats have now been moved to the Old Herring Factory.

Work on a lease for the Old Buoy Store in Stromness, for repurposing as an Orkney Historic Boat Haven, is continuing and we hope to have a decision from the council early in the new year. There is, however, still a long way to go before the boat haven becomes a reality.

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

Matthew Vaughton

OHBS AGM 2022

At this year's Annual General Meeting in September the current in-post officers remained unchanged. The OHBS chair is Michael McLaughlin, the vice-chair is Jimmy Clouston, the treasurer is Harky Hutchison. Sue Paice remains Minutes Secretary. Matthew Vaughton continues looking after Membership, Media and Communications. Two additional trustees were appointed to bring the committee to full strength.



The Old Herring Factory

This time last year we started to work with Orkney Islands Council to acquire some space in the old Herring Factory in Stromness which had been standing empty for 10 years. The council decided to redesignate the building as a charity hub and the building is now occupied by The Orkney Men's Shed, Stromness Drama Club and Orkney Historic Boat Society. Each charity has its own area with shared access to toilets. Running costs will be shared between the three charities.

The process needed to get us to a point where we could sign a 10 year lease took longer than originally anticipated largely because of building modifications required for the 'change of use' build warrant. We finally signed the lease in October 2022 and could then start making the changes we needed to do before moving some of our smaller boats into the new facility.

Although we now have access to the new facility, we still have to install a large boat door in one end of the building to allow us to move the larger boats into the storage space. Small boats can be moved into the facility through an existing loading bay door albeit we then have to lift the boat (and in some cases also its trailer) over a 30cm concrete floor sill. We plan to remove this old sill but it's not the highest priority work item just now.



The Old Herring Factory, Stromness

The first piece of work undertaken was to remove some internal walls inside an old cold chill room. The removal of these internal walls meant that we could then move the smaller boats directly into the main storage area from the lorry loading bay. Much of the Old Herring Factory was designed to operate as a cold chilled environment so most of the walling is thickly insulated, but it is fortunately light weight and fairly easily removed.

Other work undertaken has been the removal of several non-usable industrial sinks and piping, updating of emergency exit signage, replacement of seized storage room locks, fixing of various wall mountings, moving of shelves and general cleaning and making functional a mess area. An equipment and tool area has been set up in a side space using shelving re-purposed from our Blue Door event held earlier in the year. We also now have a special hazardous substances cabinet in which we can safely store our paints, thinners, cleaners and any other hazardous materials.

So far 8 of the smaller boats have been moved into the new facility together with a number of pallets of heavy equipment. There are still a lot of boats and equipment to be moved but steady progress is being made.

A more detailed record of volunteer activities can be found on the OHBS Workgroup blog here: <https://ohbsworkgroup.blogspot.com/>



Some of the smaller boats in the new facility

Orkney Historic Boat Haven

In the previous Newsletter we reported that we were also working with Orkney Islands Council to secure a location for an Orkney Historic Boat Haven. The location currently under consideration is the old Northern Lighthouse Board Buoy Store at Pole Star Pier in Stromness.

While the Old Herring Factory provides storage and workshop space it is not suitable as a location for the public to visit. There are also a number of Orkney historic boats, currently in the care of Orkney Islands Council in storage at Lyness on Hoy, which will be required to be rehomed in the next couple of years. To rehome these boats additional space is required. This project therefore benefits both OHBS, which requires display space, and Orkney Islands Council which can re-home the historic boats currently in its care and have them looked after by skilled OHBS volunteers.

We are currently in the process of formally requesting a lease on the premises and hope to have a response from the council early in the new year. If successful with the request there will still be many hurdles to be overcome as the building will require a 'change of use' planning application, a build warrant and then to be fitted out as a public location.



The Old Buoy Store

Blue Door Success

The Blue Door shop in Kirkwall is a charity shop which allocates the income from each week to a different Orkney based charity. With Covid interrupting the normal schedule, OHBS had to wait several years to obtain a week in early February 2022.

The Covid delay did give OHBS more time to collect items for sale during our week in the Blue Door shop. Members and friends contributed so many items that we had to find additional storage space. Orkney Sailing Club kindly allowed OHBS to store items in the basement of the Girnel in Kirkwall.



OHBS volunteer George Burgher put together an excellent range of raffle prizes donated by members and local businesses.

A total of £2,823 was raised during the week. This sum very kindly double matched by a donation of £5,646 from The Robertson Trust which resulted in a grand total for the week of £8,469. This money will help OHBS setup the new facilities needed at the Old Herring Factory and work towards an Orkney Historic Boat Haven.



Our grateful thanks to both the Blue Door and The Robertson Trust.

For more information about The Robertson Trust see: <https://www.therobertsontrust.org.uk/>



Some of the items in the Blue Door Raffle

George Mackay Brown - Art collaboration 2022

In late 2021, Orkney writer Gabrielle Barnby and central Scotland artist Orla Stevens were jointly appointed by Orkney Islands Council to take forward a public art project based in Stromness to celebrate the life, work and character of much-loved Orkney writer George Mackay Brown.

Commissioned and funded by Orkney Islands Council's Arts Development service, the project is part of the overall GMB100 activities marking 100 years since the writer's birth in October 1921.

In the development stage of the project, Gabrielle and Orla approached OHBS and asked if we would be willing collaborate with them in bringing a maritime heritage aspect to their work, and we were very happy to do so.

As the creative duo explained;

"The maritime history of Stromness is a frequent element in many of the characters and narratives in George Mackay Brown's work - this led us to explore the current restoration work being carried out by the Orkney Historic Boat Society.



Observing their practice and hearing the stories of the vessels they have been working on has been central to our inspiration as to the form of the artwork and to the focus on heritage materials – we can't thank them enough for their support and generosity."

The completed artwork was installed in the George Mackay Brown Community Garden in Stromness in June 2022. Taking the form of a bench, the installation is designed to offer a place where people can sit and reflect on GMB – in a scenic spot he was known to enjoy himself.

As part of her work on the project, Gabrielle produced several pieces of poetry, including two inspired by her time with OHBS, and she has given us copies of those. Here is one:

Forget

Become a layer of paint today
Between sea-blue, sky-blue and bottle-green.
In time, all covered by another layer,
Applied to the wounded gunwale
Compressed, exposed and covered again.
Become sediment
Fodder for time spent scraping and yapping
And keeping old stories alive.

Gabrielle Barnby
November 2021



Orla and Gabrielle with their GMB artwork at Stromness

Yellow Peril

Knowing that we would need to improve the storage of our paints, thinners, cleaners and numerous other hazardous materials when we moved into the Old Herring Factory, OHBS applied to Stromness Community Council for a grant to cover the purchase of a hazardous substance cabinet. This application was successful and OHBS was then able to buy a new Steel Lockable Hazardous Substance Cabinet.

This new cabinet is now installed in the Old Herring Factory and holds numerous substances which require careful storage.

OHBS is grateful to the Stromness Community Council for their support.



Nellie

Nellie is a 25' long, 6' beam and 2' 6" draught boat, constructed of carvel mahogany. The vessel is believed to be a First World War era naval vessel, probably German, and was sold at a public auction in Stromness in 1920. Her owner from the late 1960s was engineer Johnnie Meil who was a steam engine enthusiast. Johnnie believed that she was most likely to have been a steam driven boat, so he replaced the fitted petrol engine with an old White Steam Car engine made in USA before 1910. He also fitted the boat with a cabin.

For our conservation plan we decided to retain the cabin at this time, as the construction did not compromise the original lines of the boat and could easily be removed at a later time. The first part of our programme undertaken during 2021 and 2022 has been to strip her out and remove the accumulated oil and grease, mixed with a significant amount of coal dust. The cleaned interior was then repainted in early 2022. There is still a lot more to be done.

Nellie has some interesting features; one such feature of Nellie are her rowlocks. These rowlocks stow neatly away on the inside of the coaming when not required. When needed the rowlocks can be quickly raised, twisted and locked in position.

To find out more about the story of Nellie see the OHBS website:
<https://www.ohbs.net/preserved-boats/nellie/>

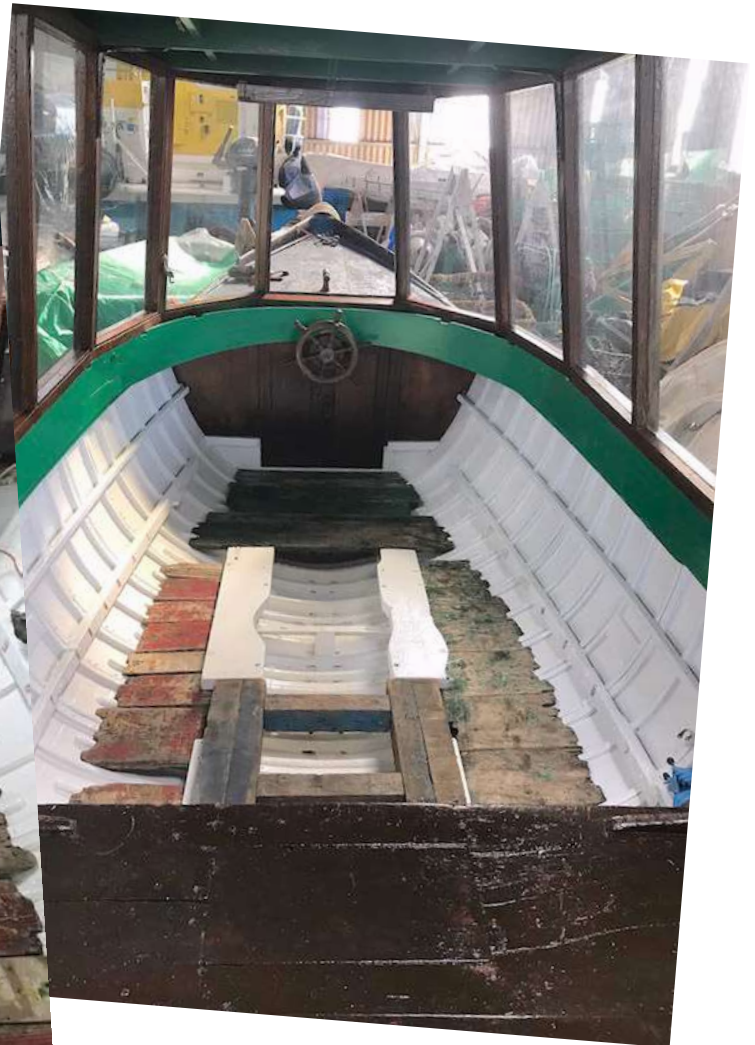
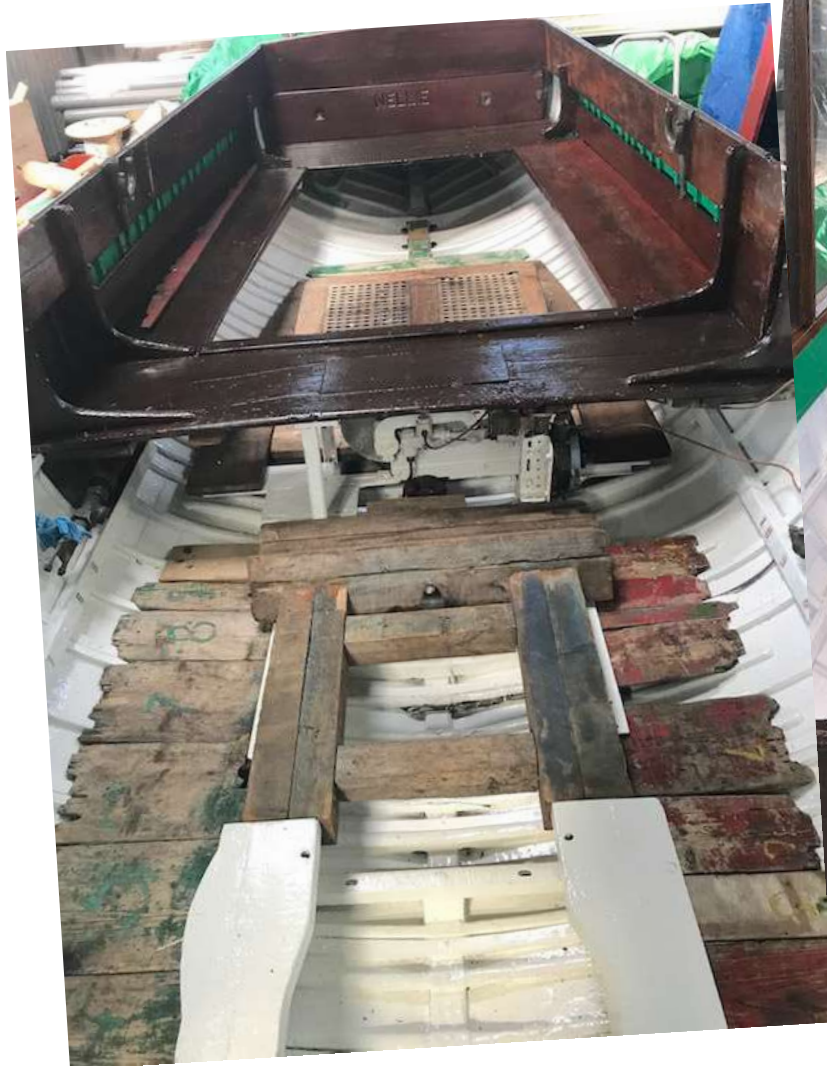




July 2020



Apr 2022



WINSOME - Margaret Flaws (James Clouston)

The hull was built at the Duncan's Boatyard in Burray, Orkney. This was certainly in the 1930s, and probably late 1930s. She was intended as a replacement for the South Ronaldsay mail boat¹ but war broke out before she went into service. During the war, and as a result of the sinking of HMS Royal Oak, Churchill decided to strengthen the defences of Scapa Flow by blocking the entrances from the North Sea. This was done by building the barriers between Holm, Lambs holm, Glimps Holm, Burray and South Ronaldsay. This made the mail boat redundant, of course, so the hull was no longer needed.

My father, George T. Arthur, bought the hull towards the end of the war from the Duncan's Boatyard. He put it to Maxwell's Shipyard in Kirkwall to have the superstructure put on which was all made of teak as far as I remember. Duncan's Boatyard is still in the same place, but Maxwell's has gone. The Maxwell building and yard were first sold to Scarth engineering and were used for tractor sales and repairs. It is still Scarth's, but now it is car hires.

I do not know what my father paid for the hull, but I remember the family row when it came to paying Maxwell's. It cost over one thousand pounds in, I think, 1946. (I am

SEA FISHING BOATS. 100

Port _____

Name of Boat WINSOME

| Boat No. | Year Built | Builder | Engine | Length | Breadth | Depth | Tonnage | Number of Crew |
|----------|------------|------------------|--------------------|--------|---------|-------|---------|----------------|
| 616. | 1935 | Kirkwall Burray. | Aux. motor Sail | 27.5 | 9 | 3 | 4.90 | 2 |

George T. Arthur
2. James Close
Kirkwall
James Clouston
Kirkwall

George Thomas
15. Kirkwall
Kirkwall

Change of Ownership
M.O.T. certificate
file no. 11 15 1946/1948
£200 to R.G.

Repairing
£200 to R.G.



within a year each side with that date.) At that time, you could build a bungalow for five hundred pounds, so you can see what I mean by row. My mother, who always did the family accounts, refused to write the cheque. She had no objections to paying for a boat - just to being ripped off by Maxwell's which I think was true. So, my father wrote the cheque, a very unusual event. So unusual, in fact, that a beady-eyed bank clerk assumed it was a forgery and took it straight through to the bank

manager. He was a friend of my father's and replied that although he had not seen that signature for years, he could vouch for it as being genuine.

When she was finished, she had a square stem [stern? Ed] with a well with seats round it. A double door led inside. On the right side there was first a galley and then a larder. On the left side there was first a W.C. and then a wet locker, I think. Then the cabin had a table in the middle with two folding leaves. Above there was a hatch to let my father

¹ Before the construction of the Churchill barriers all transport to/from and between the south isles was by water. The Churchill barriers, which provide a road connection between Orkney Mainland and South Ronaldsay, were constructed between 1940 and 1944.

stand upright! He was 6 foot 2. There was a seat/bunk on each side with folding bunks above. These however were so near the deck that you had to be a skinny eight-year-old to sleep in them.

Then there was a step up into the wheelhouse which two could stand in side by side comfortably. Then there was a step down into the engine room which had a Kelvin Ricardo engine. My father said it was an engine built for ham-fisted fishermen and therefore reliable. It was petrol/paraffin and had to have some special kind of sparkplugs otherwise it would not go. In front of the engine there were two narrow triangular bunks up to the nose. These doubled as sail lockers and chain lockers, I think.

There was a mast on the deck, and it could be rigged with a sail, but this was just a safety precaution in case the engine broke down. I cannot remember it being used but it may have been, as I do remember lots of swear words directed at the engine. The Winsome could only do about 6 knots, I think, flat out. It took us about an hour to travel 8 miles or so. I have a sneaky feeling that she was registered as a fishing boat at one point. The reason for this was that during the war, and just after, you could not get fuel for pleasure boats and therefore every boat in Orkney was registered as fishing. I am not sure if I am completely



accurate about the Winsome, as she was only in the water after the war, but I do know my father had a yacht(!) registered as a fishing boat so I cannot see him missing out on that if necessary.

The Winsome usually went only to the Inner Isles in Orkney, that is Rousay, Eynhallow, Egilsay, Wyre, Gairsay and Shapinsay. It was far enough at her speed I suppose for a day trip. I do remember my father and my uncle taking her on a sort of grand tour of the North Isles for a fortnight or so. But if we lived aboard, it was only for a night or so at most. Otherwise just day trips. We towed a small dinghy behind (here called a pram) for landing as most places we went had no pier and she had to be moored off. My mother struggled manfully with the galley and a primus stove for the kettle. This was fine at anchor or in calm weather but a bit hazardous in rough weather or when she swung at anchor.

My father was a keen ornithologist and many 'birdie' friends used to come up in the summer. They sometimes used the boat. Mainly I think my father had the boat simply because it was also a consuming interest of his - boats! Strange to say his profession was totally different; he was a master baker.

A true story: though you may not believe this:-

Somewhere around 1949 a lady living in England died and was cremated. Her husband had been lost in Scapa Flow and she said in her will that she wanted her ashes scattered over Scapa Flow. The minister of the Cathedral in Kirkwall was contacted and asked to organise this. He tried in vain to find a boat in Scapa Flow to do this, with no luck as fishermen will not carry a corpse or a minister on board - so he was defeated on both counts you might say. Finally, he came to my father and asked him if he would do it. My father refused to go round to Scapa Flow (in fact I suspect it would have taken the Winsome about a week to get there!) but said he would go out to the String (between Shapinsay and the Mainland) and he thought the current would probably take the ashes round in the general direction.

The minister agreed, arranged the service on board taking a choir member to sing and my father, mother and the odd crew member as congregation. They reached the String which has a very strong tide running through it and tried to stay still without dropping anchor. The result was she heaved up and down a lot, but the minister valiantly got on with the service and the choir lady sang, the minister was getting a bit green and cut short his sermon to get to the important bit. He heaved the ashes over the side. He was a true landlubber, and nobody had told him about wind direction so the whole lot came back on board over the assembled company and deck.

We swept ashes off the deck for weeks. My father picked bits of 'old Mrs. - ' off his jacket for ages.



In 1951 we had a hurricane in Orkney with winds over 200 mph. In the middle of this screaming mayhem, which was during the night, my father decided that he had to see if the Winsome was all right. We lived about 100 yards up Bridge Street from the harbour, so he ventured out. He managed to get down to the end of the street but on Shore Street huge oil drums were whizzing past plus various bits of debris, so he went no further. However, he did make out that the wind was so strong that it had blown the sea flat, and all the boats were fine.

My father died in 1952 and there was no-one to look after his boats, so my mother sold them. The Winsome was sold for £300, a huge loss, and I think the man's name was Anderson, but my husband cannot remember that, and he knows more about boats than me. She went to Stromness first and the cruiser stem was put on there. My husband thinks it was at Sinclair's yard. About three years later the new owner went to Invergordon and took the Winsome with him and we lost track of her.

I have found some photographs which may be of interest to you. They show the mast in place and the square stem [stern? Ed] of course. If you look on the mast in some of them, you can see the bell which we still have.

Margaret Flaws

Post Script – After George Arthur died the Winsome was bought by Jimmy Bruce, a Shetlander, who came to live in Stromness and then moved to Evanton, Easter Ross in the late 1950's. He kept the boat moored at Invergordon, but hardly ever used her. Unfortunately, Jimmy met with an accident in Shetland and died shortly after this. She then became the Harbour Masters boat in Inverness. The naturalist Adrian Shine purchased her in 1989 from another owner and renovated her as she had sunk on a couple of tides after sitting on a rock. After that, she served the Loch Ness Project for scientific sampling in the 1990s.

Ultimately, after flooding in harbour she was brought to the Loch Ness Centre on a cradle. The topsides are now dilapidating due to a lack of skilled staff. She has been offered to OHBS, but we are reluctant to take her on due to the costs involved in getting her back to Orkney.



A recent photograph of Winsome at Loch Ness



A request for information about Islands transport

Jane Harris:

Hello, I wonder if you can help. I'm doing a presentation for the Genealogy Show looking at mortality/death in North Walls and Brims in the first twenty years after civil registration of births, marriages and death, so 1855-1875. Very few deaths were certified by a doctor as for most of the time there was no doctor in Walls. It was doctors from Kirkwall, Stromness or the Hope who certified a very few. How would those doctors have travelled to Walls - yole? steam boat (I have seen a few mentions of the "Walls packet")? Just wondering if you have seen anything on travelling doctors? Names I have are William Ballenden, Adam Gordon, James SS Logie, William Stewart and William Traill. Given that a sail from Stromness would have taken 2-3 hours (bit less from the Hope?) calling the doctor out must have been gey expensive. Many thanks, Jane Harris

Jimmy Clouston:

Hi,

Unfortunately, I can't give you any information about the various doctors you mention, but perhaps I can offer an opinion on how these doctors would have travelled to Walls.

There is no definitive answer as to how they travelled, as it could have been by various routes and sizes of boat.

All of the larger islands in Orkney were served by Packet boats. During the time period you are interested in the Walls Packet boat was a sailing craft. The Sanday Packet for instance was large enough to carry 20 – 30 Tons of cargo and 30 – 40 passengers and would have had a small boat on the deck. However, I believe the Walls Packet, Elizabeth Buchan, was a smaller sailing vessel.

A regular Steamer service didn't begin until 1893 when the Steamer 'Saga', built at Coplands Yard in Stromness served all the western South isles and took over the mail run to Longhope.

Up to the 1870's the mails for Walls were transported from Orphir. In November 1872 the Walls mailboat capsized just after leaving Orphir and the members of her crew, two brothers named Mowat (20 and 24 years of age) lost their lives. This boat would more than likely have been a sailing dinghy or Yole.

It is likely that the doctors would have used the regular Packet boat service to come to the island but in an emergency, they could well have called on the services of a boatman with either a small sailing boat such as a yole or big dinghy or possibly a rowing boat. The mail boats for Burray and South Ronaldsay were four oared rowing boats.

Jane Harris:

Many thanks for your detailed reply. I'm currently in Canna with limited signal or I would have replied sooner. The drowning of the Mowat brothers was among the deaths I looked at but they were South Walls rather North. I can send details if you are interested. I'm interested to know the Walls packet was sail. Donald Ross was part of the crew at one time (1870s I think). His father James, merchant and ship chandler at North Walls, was a brother of my great great grandfather. Happy to help with genealogical information for North Walls and Brims if needed.

Jimmy Clouston:

Thank you for your reply. I would appreciate if you could send more details of the drowning of the Mowat brothers.

Jane Harris:

Hello, I'm now attaching the death records for John and Robert Mowat. Their deaths were registered in both Orphir and Walls. From the Orphir record, they died 4 November 1872 "between 11 o'clock forenoon and 12 Noon in Swanbister Bay, Scapa Flow ex adverso of the parish of Orphir, Orkney", "accidentally drowned by the sinking or upsetting of a boat, no medical attendant". John was 23 and Robert 20. The deaths were registered on 17 November on the information of John Macrae, Procurator-Fiscal. As a sudden or accidental death, there would have been a report to the procurator-fiscal. Their occupations, marital status and parents' names were scored out (the clerical errors referred to in the margin I think). The Walls death registration, 12 November, has slightly different information: time was noon; cause was "Unfortunately drowned while carrying the Mails to Longhope". The parents' names are James Mowat, Farmer, and Isabella Mowat, maiden surname Shearer (same as the scored out names in the Orphir record). The informant was Alexander Johnston, uncle-in-law, Brims. (I've not researched it fully but Alexander was very likely the husband of their mother's sister Christina.) Unfortunately this record does not include their profession or occupation (the Walls registers are rather patchy at this period) but the scored out "fisherman" in the Orphir record is probably correct. The Orphir record is the official one, I think; the Walls one was jumping the gun slightly but I will check that out. The Mowat family was recorded at the Wing, South Walls, in the 1851-1871 Censuses, with father James described as Farmer and carrier of HM Mails in 1871. I have a note about a presentation to the family and will try and find it. Hope this is useful. Jane

Here is the presentation information that I got from John Budge in Longhope a few months ago: "Others that lost their lives were a Father and Son ? From The Wyng Waas'. This Mowat had the contract to take The Mail fae Waas' Tae Orphir. A squal struck the Yole over at the shore on the Orphir side both were drowned . Hattie Mowat who I mind had a plaque and a letter from The Post Office presented to the Family following the tragedy. I have tried to find this as I saw it some time ago at a small show of Local Artifacts held by local folk. Moira Groat brought along the plaque as she and Jim Groat bought The Wyng House where the Mowats lived."

Jimmy Clouston:

Hi, Thank you very much for your thorough account of this tragedy. As a further note to the story, I believe the mails were recovered.

Interesting to note that they went to Swanbister bay rather than Houton. I suppose the connections to Kirkwall would have been easier and there would have been a good jetty as well.

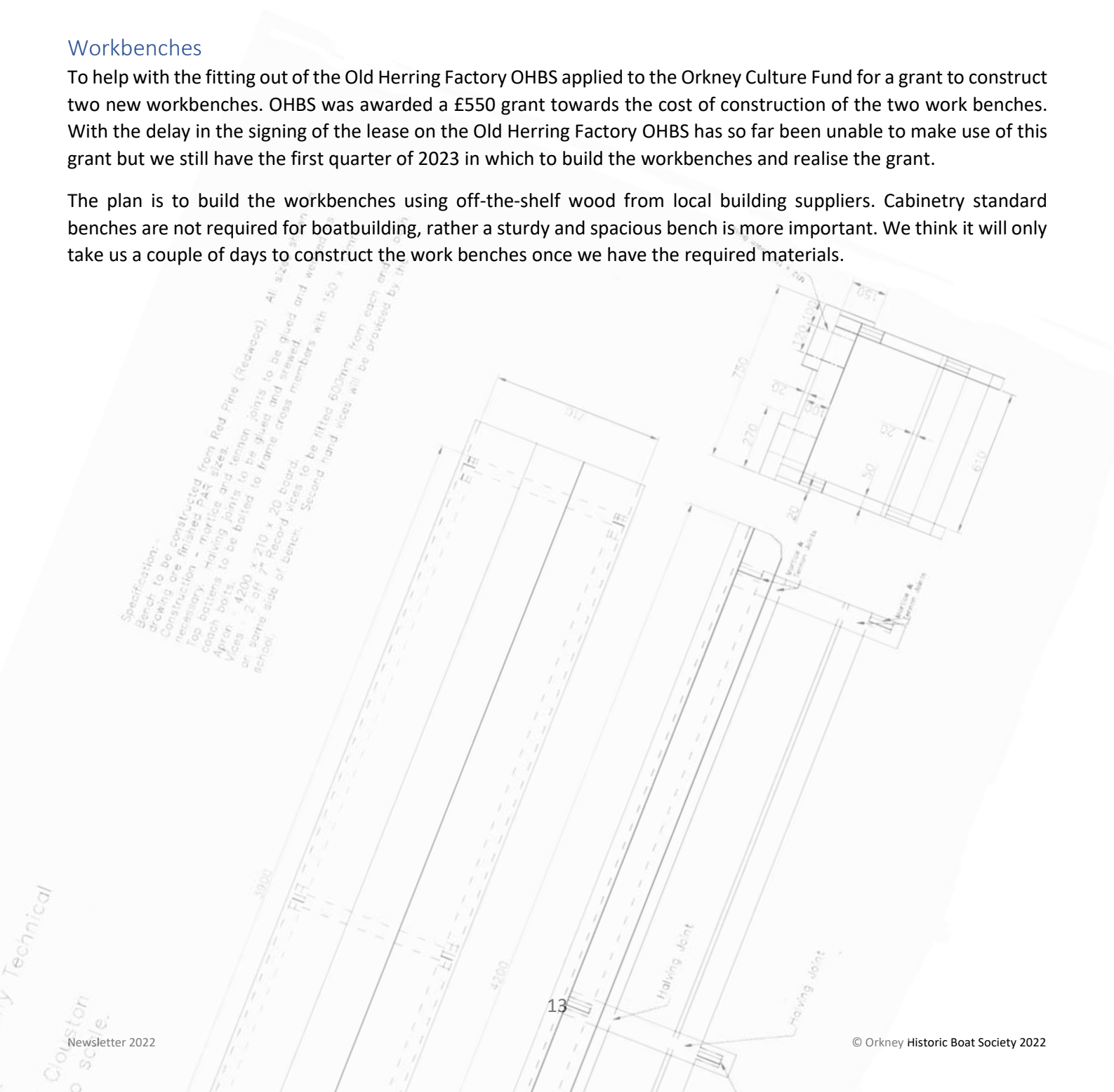
Jane Harris:

Quite amazing that the mails were recovered. If I find any more, I'll let you know.

Workbenches

To help with the fitting out of the Old Herring Factory OHBS applied to the Orkney Culture Fund for a grant to construct two new workbenches. OHBS was awarded a £550 grant towards the cost of construction of the two work benches. With the delay in the signing of the lease on the Old Herring Factory OHBS has so far been unable to make use of this grant but we still have the first quarter of 2023 in which to build the workbenches and realise the grant.

The plan is to build the workbenches using off-the-shelf wood from local building suppliers. Cabinetry standard benches are not required for boatbuilding, rather a sturdy and spacious bench is more important. We think it will only take us a couple of days to construct the work benches once we have the required materials.



Waterwitch is very nearly 100

Waterwitch is a fully restored Orkney South Isles Yole found in a ruinous state in Helmsdale, Caithness in 2009.

She was built at Longhope, Hoy and originally named the 'Azalea' by Edward Jamieson of Heckness, Longhope. She was launched in May 1923 and registered for line and creel fishing as K314. She remained registered for fishing until 1988 and left Orkney in the early 1990's. When found she was missing her garboards (bottom or first plank) and was heading for a bonfire.



As Azalea, on the beach at Helmsdale, Caithness in 2009

She was saved from a bonfire by OHBS member Rod Daniel and after an extensive restoration taking several years was returned to the water in Orkney in 2015. When Rod moved south and away from Orkney in 2020, he kindly gifted Waterwitch to OHBS so that she could remain in Orkney.



During restoration

To find out more about the story of Waterwitch see the OHBS website: <https://www.ohbs.net/preserved-boats/waterwitch/>



Rod with an immaculate Waterwitch

The “Sheena” a recent acquisition – Michael McLaughlin

In 1947 the fine motor boat Sheena, built for Mr William Nicolson, Balfour Village, Shapinsay, left the stocks of Kirkwall boatbuilders, James Maxwell & Sons. Strongly built, and of graceful lines, the Sheena had an overall length of twenty-six feet three inches, and approximate draught of three feet. She was clinker-built in larch, with wrought oak timbers, and all copper fastened.

All the fittings were of heavy brass, and she was fitted with a wheelhouse, and had accommodation for twelve passengers. The engine was a 15hp Ricardo Kelvin petrol-paraffin, which gave her a speed of about seven knots. She also was rigged to carry a mast and lug sail.



The founder of the Maxwell firm, James Maxwell senior, was a Shapinsay man who came to Kirkwall in 1880 to set up his boatbuilding business. He had served his time as a shipwright with Tom Stevenson, of Balfour Village, Shapinsay. Stevenson's firm built many small boats, herring boats and shop boats in those days. James Maxwell's eldest son, also named James, served his time with his father, before taking over running the business round about 1909.

Sheena was used for hires to and from the North Isles before the days of planes and regular ferries. Passengers included locals and workmen - and lots of hospital cases. She was also used to relieve lighthouse keepers from Auskerry and Helliær Holm.

In the late 1940s / early 1950s, the boat was lengthened in the head by 5ft, following some damage, and this made her a much better sea boat.

During these times the boat was skippered by William Nicolson, then later his son Alfie. After Alfie retired, the boat was used as a pleasure craft, currently being in the ownership of William's grandson, Kenny, and remains in seaworthy condition.

Kenny offered to donate Sheena to the OHBS, and the trustees agreed to accept her into the OHBS collection earlier this year. However, Kenny will kindly continue to look after her until such time as we have storage space available.



Sheena alongside the Corn Slip, Kirkwall in April 2022

Tern - The story of a Stroma yole – Michael McLaughlin

During this last year we received a communication from Laura Clarke who discovered from her late father's papers that she is connected to the Stroma yole Tern, being a descendant, through her father's side of the family, of a daughter of the Stroma fisherman David Manson. OHBS was delighted to hear from Laura and to be able to confirm that Tern is now in our care. Due to our lack of workshop space, we have not yet started on any conservation management plan for the boat, but, with our recent move into premises at the Old Herring Factory in Stromness, we hope we can do so in the not too distant future.

Tern is a Stroma yole built in Stroma in 1886, possibly by either Donald Banks or George Simpson. She is a typical small Stroma yole with keel of 12.6ft, length just over 18ft, and beam slightly over 7ft. Originally she was rigged with two sprit sails, as was the normal arrangement for Stroma yoles of this length, and would have been an undecked open boat. She also displays the classic Stroma stern bracket to prevent lines fouling the rudder, and later the propeller.

Stroma yoles are often regarded as a 'cousin' of Orkney South Isles yoles, being similar in both construction and rig, but are heavier built and fuller, particularly in the stern, in order to cope with the savage weather and ferociously strong tides of the Pentland Firth. Most of the islanders were fishermen and crofters, and some also worked as maritime pilots to guide vessels through the challenging tides and whirlpools of the Pentland Firth.

Tern was almost an 'accidental' acquisition for OHBS. We were alerted to the fact that she had been lying unused for a good many years in a place where planned building work would almost certainly result in her being consumed by fire – in other words, she would be the base of a bonfire! Knowing very little of the history of the boat, but also knowing that we didn't have a Stroma yole in our collection, we decided to take the chance and uplifted her. The happy outcome was that she turned out to be a very old boat with an interesting history.



Recovering the Tern in 2016

WK371

Tern was not registered to be used in fishing for profit until 1912, when she was registered for fishing using 'lines' by David Manson of West Side, Stroma. The registration, however, confirms her build date as 1886. It is believed that the boat may originally have been built for the school teacher, or possibly for the local Rosie family.

It is interesting to note that small petrol/paraffin Kelvin Poppet engines were first introduced into Stroma yoles in 1912. Retired Stromness ex-boatbuilder James Mason believes that Tern may have had one installed soon after this.

Whether or not she had an additional stroke, or any decking, added about this time, as was common when the weight of an engine was added to a boat, is unknown.

Her registration continued with regular updates until 1938 and closed in 1941 with the note “no longer used in fishing for profit”. This was shortly before David's death in 1943, at the age of 84.

WK8

At about this time, it is believed that the boat underwent a major re-build before being re-registered in 1944 for fishing using ‘lines’ and creels by David's son, George Manson of Garrishow, Stroma.

The registration shows that she now had an auxiliary motor and was rigged for lug sails. As was typical of yoles with fitted engines, and used for creeling, she would probably have been at least partially decked at this time, and would probably have had an additional stroke added, if this hadn't been done earlier.

She was used regularly for fishing, with her registration being updated annually until 1956. At this time, following George's death in 1955, aged 67, ownership then passed to George's son-in-law, Joseph McCaughey, a fisherman of East Side, Stroma.

By the late 1950s, however, the population of Stroma had declined to the extent that life could no longer be sustained on the island. In 1957 only three families, numbering 16 people in total, remained. Many of the former islanders continued a life of fishing from the shores of Caithness on the Scottish mainland, often using their same traditional fishing grounds. The McCaughey family moved to live in Wick and continued in the fishing industry.

K164

Tern was sold in 1956 to John McPhail Sinclair, originally from Caithness, having been born in Thurso in 1902, who was now the harbourmaster in Kirkwall, Orkney, and her registration was transferred from Wick. She then changed owners several times, being based in Stromness under the ownership of Colin J Marwick (1958), Robert Greig (1959) and Norman S Mowat (1968 -1978), before her registration was again cancelled.

K379

In 1979, Mike Holgate of Stronsay purchased Tern, and Shapinsay boatbuilder, Ivan Hourston, undertook some major repairs including replacing the deck, moving the engine forward, and fitting a creel hauler, as well as repairs to some boards and the stem/stern posts. In 1984, Mike registered her once again for fishing. Some 15 years later, after a 'bump' with some rocks on Aukerry, she was back to Shapinsay for a replacement garboard.

In the mid-1990s, when Mike and his wife moved to Kirkwall, the Tern was sold to a Nelson Rorie who didn't do a lot with the boat which then passed to his nephew Stuart Dunnet. She then lay for many years, suffering significant deterioration before being gifted to OHBS in 2016.

It is interesting to note that Joe McCaughey's son, George, continued the family involvement in fishing, based in Wick, after leaving Stroma. In 1969, along with a David Bennett, he commissioned the renowned Stromness boatbuilder James (Pia) Anderson to build a 33.4ft square-sterned fishing boat, naming her Tern (WK43). He then later ordered another new boat from Anderson, which he named Stroma Isle (WK408)), and thus continued his family connection with both fishing and the island of Stroma.



References:

Alistair Walker "Stroma Yoles" Pub: The Orcadian (2004) ISBN 1-902957-22-9

Donald Young "Stroma" Pub: North of Scotland Newspapers (1992) ISBN 1-871704 07 3

James Mason - retired ex-boatbuilder in Stromness, who did repairs on Tern in the 1960s.

Mike Holgate – Tern owner 1979 – mid 1990s.

North Highland Archive, Wick

Orkney Library and Archive, Kirkwall

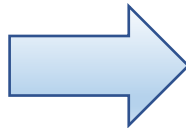
Linda

Linda is a 12 ft 4in Orkney dinghy, built by R & W Mackays, Finstown, in 1938 for Johnnie Meil's father, Andrew Meil. The boat became Johnnie's from the age of 14, and he used her, with an Admiralty permit, for fishing in Scapa Flow during WW2. In later life, Linda was used as a tender to the Nellie. Restoration work undertaken by OHBS in the last year included replacing the forward thaft and knees, which were very badly rotted, and a total strip & repaint.

To find out more about the story of Linda see the OHBS website: <https://www.ohbs.net/preserved-boats/linda/>



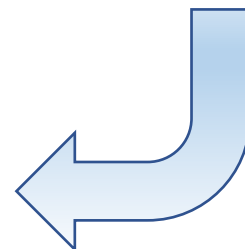
Nov 2019



Feb 2022



Apr 2022



Merchandise

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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.site.hw.ac.uk/virtual-museum/>

Contact: 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.

