

The new boat passes St Magnus Cathedral on her 'maiden voyage' to Burray.

FIRST ORKNEY-BUILT FIBREGLASS BOAT 'SAILS' THROUGH KIRKWALL

HISTORY was made last week when a 36-ft. lobster boat went astern through Broad Street, Kirkwall on passage to Burray. True, it was on a lorry, and also true that it is by no means the first boat to sail these 'waters'—after all, the Norsemen sailed their longships up almost to the West door of St Magnus Cathedral eight hundred years ago—but it was the first Orkney-built fibre-glass fishing boat to do so.

It was also the first fishing-boat specially designed to be built in fibre glass to be 'launched' in Britain and, of course, it was the first hull to be constructed at the factory of Halmatic (Scotland) Ltd. at Hatston.

It was on its way to the old-established boatbuilding firm of Duncan's in Burray for fitting out and it is expected to take the water proper sometime in December. And by the time it is launched in Burray Mr Pierce Webb, general manager of Halmatic in Orkney estimates that a further two hulls will have been turned out of the moulds at Hatston and a few weeks later these will be followed by the first of their bigger boats, a 54 footer.

Once the moulds have been made — and this is the work which has been engaging the 16-strong work force at Halmatic for the past few months — it takes only about three weeks to build each actual hull such as Kirkwallians saw going past the Cathedral the other day. In cost they compare favourably with boats built of traditional materials but their makers claim for them very much reduced costs in maintenance — they do not need painting, for instance — strength, and ease of carrying out repairs.

mission to sound traditional builders on their readiness to co-operate.

Only the basic hulls and deck-houses are moulded at Halmatic's workshop—the hangar on the former naval air station at Hatston near Kirkwall.

They have to be outfitted by traditional craftsmen to individual specification.

NEW BOAT-BUILDING SHED

The Duncan family and their staff in Burray, of course, are fine examples of these traditional craftsmen — they have been in the boat-building business for generations and today they have a full order book for their normal wooden boats as well as turning their hands to this new craft of fitting out GRP hulls.

Recently, they erected a new boat-building shed which at present has in it the GRP hull from Halmatic now having its deck fitted, and two other wooden 36 footers under construction while outside yet another 36 footer is having the finishing touches put to it before being launched for an owner in the Western Isles.

And when the boats in the shed are finished there are more orders waiting to take their place — again from the Western Isles where Duncan's boats have a high reputation.

36-FT. CRAFT

This first 36-footer which is now being decked, engined and fitted out at Duncan's yard will fish in Orkney waters. She will be owned by Mr William Rendall, Schoolhouse, Holm, who is at present fishing with the 'Flourish.' The boats which will follow her off the moulds are destined for a variety of fishing ports outside Orkney.

The first 54 footer has also already been sold — to an American owner. Although she is, of course, designed as a fishing vessel, her owner is going to have her fitted out as a yacht. Unlike the 36 footers, these bigger boats will be launched from the Hatston slip and will be complete with deck, also moulded out of fibre-glass and with wheelhouse and galley of the same material, already in position.

They will then be either towed to their fitting out yards, or taken there on a bigger vessel, to get their engines and other gear. In actual fact, the first 54 footer will have its deck only in position, the owner intends to instal his own special wheelhouse and fittings suitable for a yacht.

In addition to this sale there is great interest among fishermen generally in these new boats and three others have been virtually sold — one to Shetland and the other two further south.

Already Mr Pierce Webb is looking forward to the day when the Hatston factory will be turning out even bigger fibre-glass boats of the 70-85 foot class.

In addition the firm is also thinking of constructing smaller vessels of about 27 foot overall length for which it is felt there is a considerable demand.

WIDESPREAD INTEREST

Mr Webb told "The Orcadian" that he had been very encouraged by the interest shown by fishermen in these boats. They came from a wide area to see them, not only Orkney but Shetland, the Scottish ports and even from as far away as South Wales.

Not long ago Mr Webb, along with Halmatic's sales director toured the Moray and East Coast ports and building yards on a 'hard sell' mission. They had with them a scale model of their 54-footer which caused a lot of interest.

Mr Webb said that while GRP (Glass Reinforced Plastic, the official name for fibre-glass) construction is widely accepted in the pleasure-boat industry it is only beginning to make an impact on fishermen, understandably cautious about the type of craft in which to entrust their money — and their lives.

A few small GRP hulls are now in service with the fishing fleet, however, although not specifically designed for the purpose as the Orkney ones are, and, as confidence in the material grows, Mr Webb expects the demand to accelerate

That's why he embarked on his

11 - 11 - 1971