

In Memoriam: Iain Oughtred

All of us who row in St Ayles Skiffs owe a quietly spoken Australian boat designer a big debt of gratitude. In 2008 the Scottish Fisheries Museum approached Iain Oughtred to design a boat for 4 rowers and a cox, to be made from a kit by Alec Jordan.

Iain chose the shape of the Fair Isle Skiff, a traditional Shetland boat used for fishing off Fair Isle in the open Atlantic. This boat has amazing seakeeping qualities, which is just as well since they used to carry stones as ballast and none of the crews could swim.

Iain grew up in Sydney and sailed, built and designed fast sailing dinghies from an early age. He came to the UK and started learning about traditional boats, especially those of Viking/Norse ancestry. Many of us have built designs from his drawing board; they are distinctive and beautiful.

A spell with the Woodenboat Magazine in Maine USA confirmed his status as a leading designer of small sailing and rowing boats.

He introduced thousands of people to the pleasures of building traditional boat designs in clinker construction, but the St Ayles is his most successful design with 400 built so far.

For the last 23 years Iain has lived in Skye. Many of us have met him at St Ayles Skiff World Championships, Ullapool Book Festival, Portsoy Traditional Boat Festival and Toberonochy Small Boat Muster. He was a good chanty singer and fond of poetry as well as a fine draftsman and a superb boatbuilder. His philosophical stance was aligned with the Quakers. Perhaps unexpectedly he was also fond of fast planing dinghies, the wooden Mosquito aircraft and classic cars.

In the evening of 21st February 2024, in Broadford, Skye, he slipped away on his last voyage.

Rest in peace Iain, we will miss you.

