

AK ILEN *Newsletter*

The Newsletter of the AK Ilen Company *An Irish Maritime Adventure*



Main: Pat Tanner and Fachtna O'Sullivan
Inset: Big Boat Build workshop participant Tom O'Neill

Within the walls and under the roof of an old unassuming corn store, well set into the landscape on the River Ilen, a magnificent world roaming giant is once again gathering strength....

What's inside:

Big Boat Build: An Account of a Workshop Participant

Traditional Wooden Boats & Sustainability

The AK Ilen - A First Report

Baltimore Visitors

The Ilen: A Bit of History

Workshop with Mary Johnny Joe O'Driscoll

The Ketch Ilen

Launch of Traditional Boats of Ireland Book



BIG BOAT BUILD

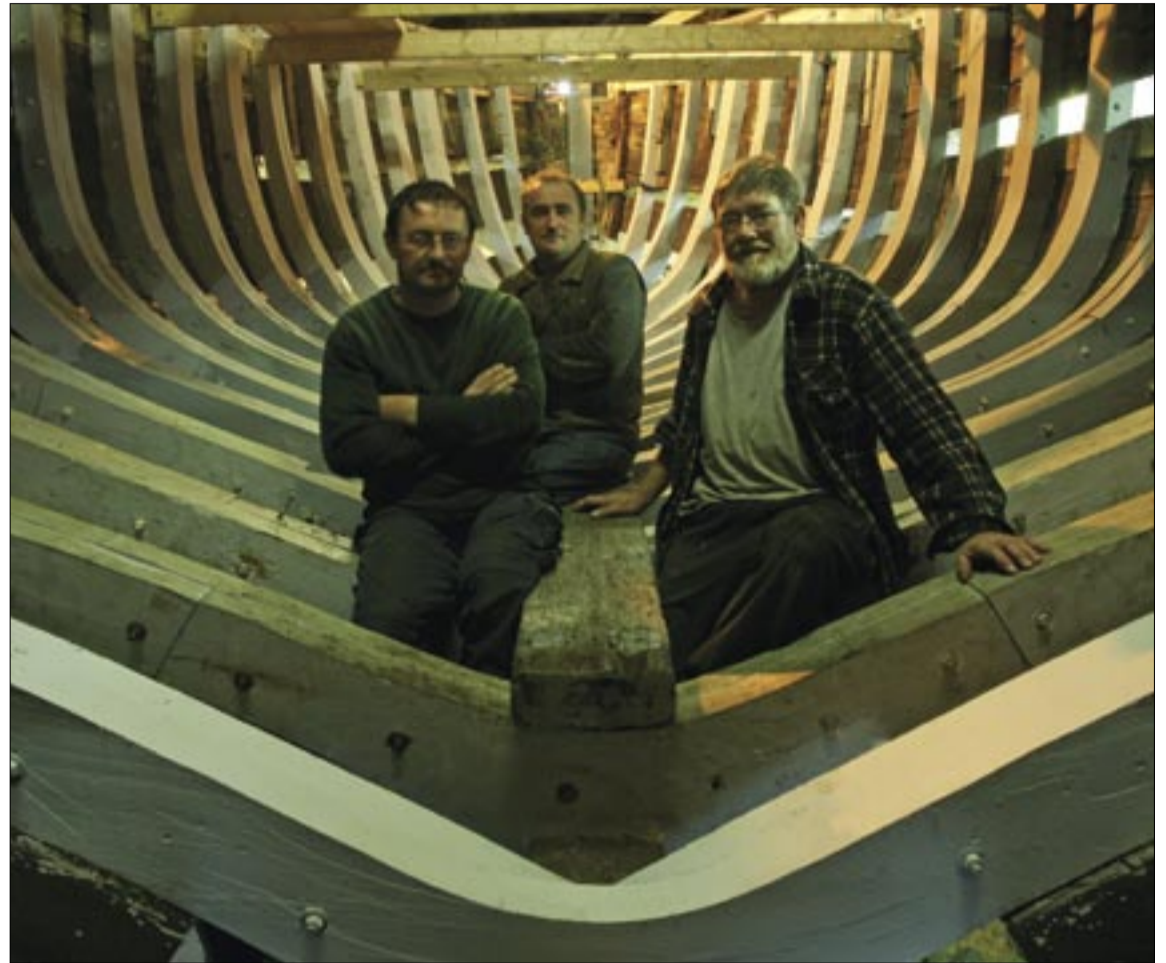
An Account of a Workshop Participant

For workshop information visit
www.BigBoatBuild.com

Eugene Pratt



The road journey to Baltimore is a delight - full of distractions from the foreboding which normally follows my initial euphoria when I sign up for something new in a rush of enthusiasm. The Big Boat Build project is fascinating - an historic Irish ketch, with geographic and biographical links with many parts of Munster and abroad; Ireland's last wooden boatbuilding yard of substance; the opportunity to learn traditional skills; a week in West Cork. But would I fit in with the other participants who would probably be vastly experienced sailing types or master craftsmen broadening their skill-set?



The Old Court Inn, adjacent to the boatyard workshop location, provided a warm welcome to participants as they checked in for the week-long stay. There were, as I feared, some experienced crafts people of varying ages and backgrounds, but also some youthful novices and in the course of that first evening I realised that everyone belonged.

Our reasons for being there varied, but a common thread ran through us all - something to do with sustaining endangered values, represented by the refitting of this traditional vessel. There was a possibility that this noble thought arose from the generous measures of West Cork hospitality, enjoyed during that introductory evening, but I can confirm that by the week's end this view was sustained.

The week's programme promised sessions on wooden boat construction, taking patterns and shaping moulds, marking up and shaping new floor and frame timbers, as well as removing of frames/floors for renewal and fastening refurbished and new frames and floors.

The work was to be done under the supervision of experienced shipwrights from Hegarty's Boatyard and others. The beauty of the informal nature of the workshops was that each participant contributed in whichever way they felt most competent. Specific tasks fell to those who were most willing to take them on, and in this way everyone played their full part - a definition of job satisfaction!

Among the week's highlights for me were Brother Anthony's introductory talk on the characteristics of oak, watching the professional boat-builders patiently talk us through different stages of the refitting, the tea breaks infused with lilting West Cork conversation, the aroma of freshly cut wood and the evenings spent around Old Court and Baltimore enjoying the produce of the Atlantic.

With body and mind exercised and refreshed, the road from Baltimore seems very different now, and why wouldn't it - I'd contributed to its heritage and would surely be back to do so again.

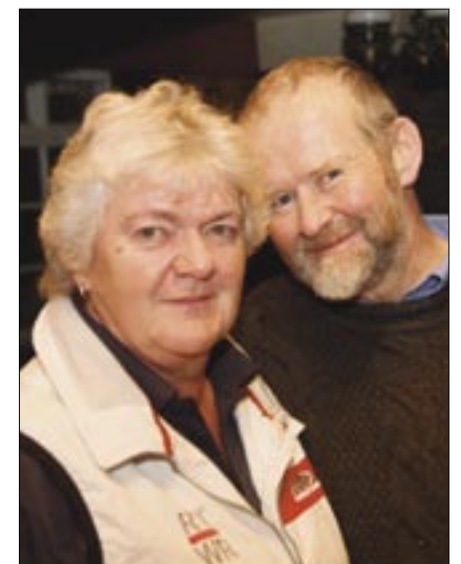
Above Left: Eugene Pratt, Big Boat Build participant Above Right: Liam Hegarty, John Hegarty and Fachtna O'Sullivan, shipwrights of Hegarty's Boatyard, West Cork



First Big Boat Build Workshop Group



AK Ilen sailing towards Baltimore 1998



Mary Ann O'Neill, Oldcourt Inn, with Brother Anthony Keane of Glenstal Abbey

Mary Johnny Joe's Willing Cohorts March Workshop



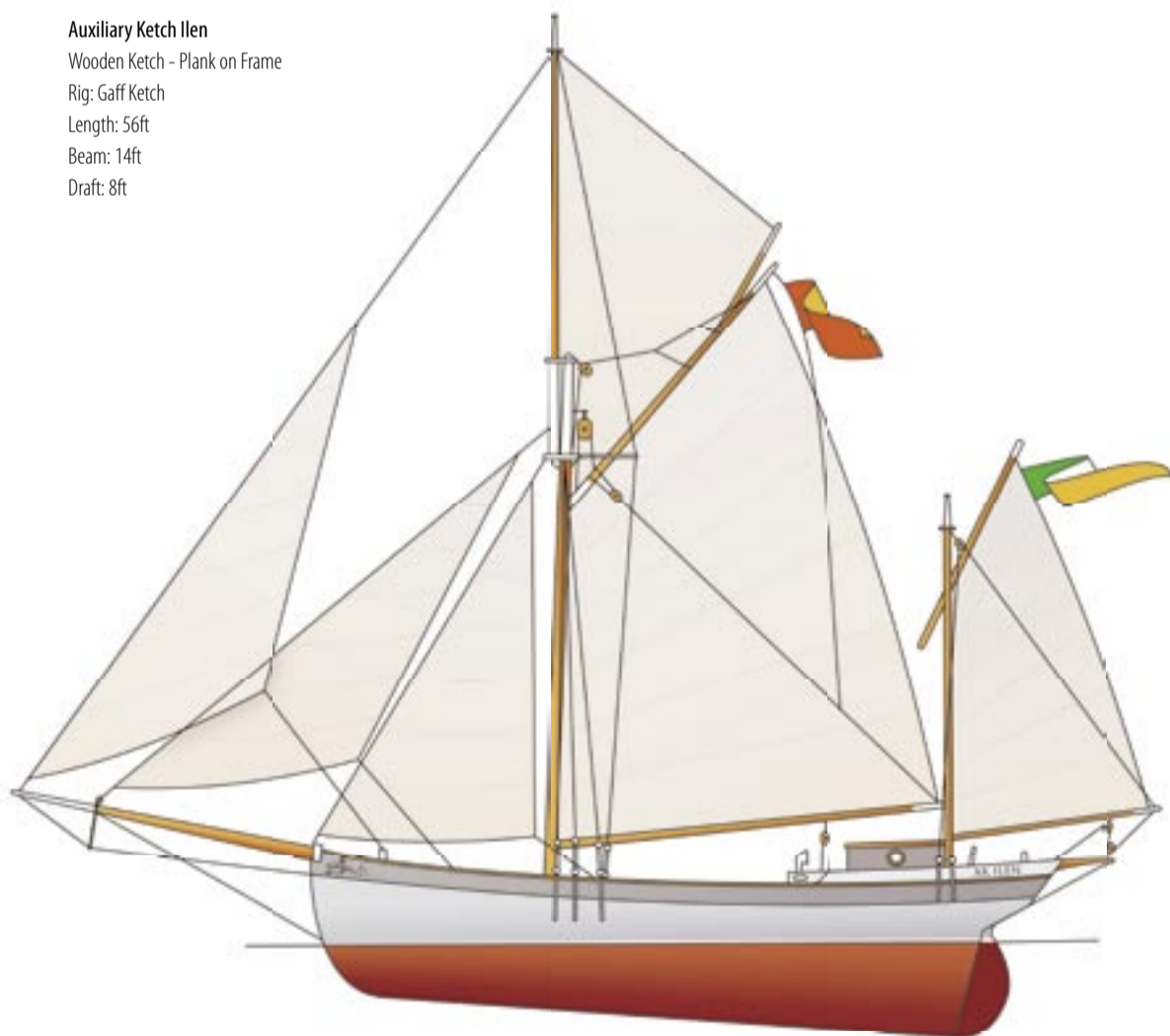
Lord David Puttnam, Donal O'Sullivan, Justin McDonagh and Mary Johnny Joe O'Driscoll

In an exceptional tour de force - Crookhaven's redoubtable Mary Johnny Joe O'Driscoll pulled together a very enjoyable March workshop. Her enthusiastic team of ardent shipwrights and willing cohorts succeeded in shaping, fitting and bolting two great Irish oak frames for the good ship Ilen. These new mighty additions were frame numbers 11 and 12. And with their arrival one could, for the first time, enjoy the palpable sense of how our mighty Irish oak was re-gifting the old vessel with great and natural strength. Mary Johnny Joe's enthusiasm for the success of this workshop in Hegarty's Boat Yard was shared by many in the coastal community of Crookhaven where she drew her vital support.

The Ketch Ilen

Designed by pioneering voyager, Conor O'Brien, Ilen was built by the Fisheries School, Baltimore, West Cork, Ireland and launched in 1926. Commissioned by the Falkland Islands Company she served as an inter-island trading vessel in the tempestuous seas of the southern Atlantic for over fifty years. The Ilen was repatriated in 1998.

Auxiliary Ketch Ilen
Wooden Ketch - Plank on Frame
Rig: Gaff Ketch
Length: 56ft
Beam: 14ft
Draft: 8ft



Limited edition poster print of the Ketch Ilen is available to buy online at www.ilen.ie

Terry Clifton Skipper of the Ilen



Terry Clifton, a modest and personable man, who passed away in 2009 was clearly a natural seaman. Having started on the Ilen at the age of 16 he soon took over boat handling and pilotage duties and was appointed skipper in the 1960s.

His love of the Ilen was evident on his visit to Oldcourt in January 2009, with his wife Brenda. He was in good form, although suffering from cardiac problems which necessitated a trip to specialists in London every six months. He was heartened to see that his beloved Ilen was on the road to restoration and promised to visit Oldcourt again on his next visit to London.

Sadly he did not survive to fulfil his promise. Criostóir MacCarthaigh, of the

Department of Irish folklore, UCD, succeeded in recording an hour and a half long interview with him, recording his memories of AK Ilen. Copies of this are held in the Falkland Islands Archive in Stanley. Jane Cameron, curator of the Archive, is one the many who have played a part in the rescue of the Ilen. Her plea, in December 2007, that Ireland should not let the Ilen rot away, was carried back and added to the voices calling for her restoration.

AK Ilen A First Report

Lorna Moloney, acting project manager for AK Ilen, compiles the management reports necessary to integrate all aspects of the project. This includes risk assessment and risk identification, interdependencies, resource documentation, project milestones, history and progress. To date briefing reports of all activities have been compiled.

At present, an educational strategic plan has been initiated and a full annual report will be available online by the end of the year. Progress to date includes, project initiation, scoping, and planning with a focus on third level liaison for curricula design, FETAC accreditation research, national framework of qualifications research and funding initiatives.

Lorna will compile directed learning outcomes to fulfill the requirements for the national framework of qualifications to ensure that learning objectives are met within the current economic environment. This will ensure that the learning needs for the learning cohorts are targeted, phased and constructed within a suitable framework.

Environmental Area 21

The AK Ilen Company has lodged applications for funding with Cork County Council, Limerick City and County Councils and Clare County Council under the Environmental Area 21 Scheme. This scheme fits in well with the ideals of the AK Ilen Company and is designed to encourage projects that are in keeping with the social, cultural, economic and environmental needs of citizens.

Projects must take into account the well being and quality of life of the entire community in the long term and will include a high level of participation at local level, giving particular attention to participation by minority or under-represented groups. Specific applications may focus on a particular social, economic, cultural or environmental issue and will present an integrated vision of how the other aspects of community life will be affected. The resurrection of the Ilen and all associated with it is in keeping with such sustainable development, so here's hoping ...

www.ilen.ie/en/Environment/LocalAgenda21/

Rebuilding the Ilen on the Ilen River

For workshop information visit
www.BigBoatBuild.com

Anthony Keane OSB



Liam Hegarty and Gary MacMahon

Within the walls and under the roof of an old unassuming corn store, well set into the landscape on the River Ilen (pron. 'eye. len'), a magnificent world roaming giant is once again gathering strength. Its devotees feed it with huge curved baulks of grown oak which fall into place and lock together, while outside the door the silver River Ilen sings gently to the ship to which it gave its name, enticing it to come to sea again. Responsive to this enticing call, the ship occasionally shudders as it flexes its muscles and thrills at the gentle smell of the sea, ready to slip down the estuary and exultantly to enter the lists with the great waves of the Atlantic, and fill its sails once again with lungfulls of Roaring Forties air. For this is a ship with a past and a pedigree that weaves together the finest lines of Ireland's maritime tradition.

The Auxiliary Ketch Ilen (The AK Ilen) was commissioned by Conor O'Brien at Baltimore Fisheries School in the 1920s.

Conor O'Brien was an architect, philosopher, gunrunner (when it was more fashionable, in 1914) and author of many books including *Across Three Oceans* and *From Three Yachts*.

He did indeed have three yachts. The first was the Kelpie which helped the Asgard in its gunrunning for the IRB in 1914, the Kelpie's share of the cargo being unloaded at Kilcoole, Co Wicklow. Conor O'Brien, always a gentleman, later remarked that it was very important for yachtsmen to honourably eschew petty smuggling so that when they really wanted to bring off something big they could get away with it. His war was spent with the Royal Navy. Some years later, the Kelpie ran aground off Kintyre, and its master and commander, exhausted and sailing alone awoke in time to see his boat disintegrate and the possessions of what had become for him a home, floating away on the waves or being washed up on the rocky shore.

His second boat was the Saoirse, built for him at Baltimore in 1922. With this he worked for Michael Collins and the new Free State as a fisheries

inspector, patrolling the West Coast in the midst of civil war. He was generally polite, but not too demonstrative in his friendships, as he found being too visibly friendly with one side often resulted in being shot at by the other. That affair being partially settled in 1923, with an inconstant crew of two, he sailed out of Dun Laoghaire, amidst a tumultuous send off of cheerful disbelief, to circumnavigate the globe, so becoming the first yachtsman to do so south of the capes.

Reentering the Atlantic towards the end of his voyage he harboured on the Falkland Islands at Port Stanley where he stayed for a few weeks and organised what seems to have been a very successful regatta. The Islanders greatly admired his traditional Irish sailing ship, the Saoirse, which floated the waves like a seagull and could cheerfully face into any storm, and asked him, to build and deliver to them one like it. So, on his return home, and having finalised the deal with the Falkland Island Company in London, he placed the order with Tom Moynihan at Baltimore, who produced the Ilen, a boat even more magnificent than his earlier Saoirse.

This was his third boat, in which, with two of the Cadogans

from Cape Clear, he headed south through a stormy Atlantic again, until, on January 8th 1927, at Port Stanley, he 'put upon the sails of his ship the stow which is the due of any port' and handed the Ilen over to her new owners.

Conor O'Brien died in 1952. The Saoirse was hit by a high wind off Jamaica in 1980; its keel today lies buried in the sand. The Ilen survives and recovers its strength at Liam Hegarty's traditional boat building yard at Oldcourt, Baltimore.

Upon its arrival at Port Stanley in 1927, the Ilen went willingly to work and stayed at it for seventy years, distributing teachers, cattle, sheep, stores and post among the islands of those Roaring Forties and more Furious Fifties. *Barca da seoladh le foirneart gaoth, is fairrge mora go deo lena dtaobh, Go bhfaiceathair fos me im' choige fein, Ar bhanchnuic Eireann Oighe.* Rearing cattle in the Falklands often meant distributing calves to remote islands and returning a few years later when they had become fiercely unmanageable with a rifle, shooting them and chopping their legs off, rolling them down to the shore and tying them all to a rope run in from the Ilen. The Ilen would then head out to sea dragging the carcasses into deeper water before returning for them and winching them on board.

In the 1990s, mariners tales of this heroic boat began to drift back to Ireland. During the Falklands War the Ilen was caught for a moment in the light of a flare and flashed through televised news clips to be instantly recognised in West Cork. Under one of the secret protocols of the Anglo Irish Agreement, slipped in after midnight by Sean Donlon, Gary MacMahon flew out by RAF

plane to Port Stanley, Falklands, to successfully negotiate her acquisition and return to Ireland. She returned by cargo vessel and in 1998 sailed from Dublin to a tumultuous reception at Baltimore. After the party there was a bit of a lull, and Liam Hegarty and his team at Oldcourt, heirs to Ireland's traditional timber ship building skills, nobly and generously took her in to rest awhile. Now at last, through an ongoing series of volunteer workshops, her refit is seriously underway.

The main task in the current workshops is the shaping and fitting of the great baulks of grown oak that make up her frames and other timbers.

Participation in these workshops seems to involve an entry into an amazing yet anciently familiar world of our inheritance. To see the wisdom and strength of an oak tree, normally a terrestrial creature, slip easily and naturally into a ship that sails the sea, is to sense the wisdom and delight that runs through all things, ever changing ever new. This is the song of the ever new tongue, *An Teanga Bith Nua, the Deer's Cry* that quietly thrills those who sail the sea in ship or see them sail. For wisdom is a subtle spirit that permeates all things. Ever constant in its playfulness, it transmigrates from one form to another.

Lord of the elements and deeper than them all, it is untouched by their division, and in the trinity of a sailing ship confounds the distinction between land air and water, making the three one with the fiery sun laughing at their side.

The oak is a generous tree, acting host to thousands of creatures while it lives; in death it is more generous still: Its giant curved limbs which once embraced the heavens now nurture a space, a haven for those marvellous creatures of human kind who wish to stand on earth, move in water and breathe in air all at the same time. In traditional boat building we find a miracle of transformation, a metempsychosis of forms made most manifest by the use of natural materials, that brings us back to the dawn of creation. In Hegarty's traditional boatyard we may have stumbled upon an ancient cult cheerfully practiced and faithfully maintained with a pious regard for old masters and an exultant authority in the ways of oak and ocean.

When the Ilen is refitted and relaunched she will sail the sea. In an oil free future, local production may increase, but there will always be some trade as local surpluses are distributed. A sail trading Ilen will bring the natural efficiency of a sustainable past to inspire and facilitate a sustainable future, bridging our current oily splurge. She will also serve those who wish to sail the sea in ships, to see the wonders of the deep, to brave the roar of the Southern Oceans, and to approach once more, with the Milesians, the fabled shores of Eireann.

But there are still a few spare ribs to be fitted and some great planks to be nailed.

For those willing to give a hand, www.bigboatbuild.com info@bigboatbuild.com or phone 086 2640479 may be the portals to a new and ancient world.



Photography courtesy of Gary MacMahon, black & white photography by Kevin O'Farrell



This project is supported by the **West Cork Development Partnership** under the Rural Development Programme 2007-2013