

GALWAY TRADITIONAL BOATS CONSERVATION PROJECT

- The Galway Traditional Boats Conservation Project was set up by the Heritage Office of Galway City Council to record preserve and promote the maritime heritage of the City generally and, more specifically, to have the last six boats of the Claddagh fleet restored to working order. The boats will not just be museum pieces but will part of Galway's living heritage and culture.
- The Heritage Office of Galway City Council is working closely with the Heritage Council nationally and Bádóirí na Claddaigh (the Claddagh Boat owners association) locally to ensure that the remaining Claddagh boats are restored in time for the Volvo Ocean Boat Race which will come to Galway in 2009.
- The Heritage Office acknowledges the help and support of the organisers of Cruinniú na mBád who, in order to highlight the importance of the Galway City boats, brought the Cruinniú fleet into Galway port two years ago and to Dr. Michael Brogan who gave impetus to that event and to Brian Sheridan and Tom O'Neill of the Harbour Company who helped facilitate the event.
- The committee of the GTBCP has cross party support and Cllr. Mary Leahy has been to the fore in promoting the aims of the project. Minister Eamon O'Cuiv has taken a particular interest in the project and has been active in sourcing additional funding for the project. Cllr. Pádraig Conneely, Mayor of Galway, is promoting the project with a new Mayoral gift featuring award winning photographs by local photographer Joe Shaughnessy whose images have graced the pages of the *City Tribune*, *Connacht Tribune*, the *Irish Times* and numerous other newspapers and books.
- The Heritage Council has recently completed a Heritage Audit of the Republic's Maritime Heritage Collections and has published a report on the topic.
- Galway's maritime routes were always a unifying factor and indeed the traditional sailing routes were of immense importance for trade, and social contact between the Galway area and South Connemara for centuries. These links are vital.
- The restoration of the boats is being done not just for reasons of nostalgia but in order to promote a renewed interest among the youth of the area in traditional sailing craft and to provide an additional heritage and tourism asset.
- The folklore traditions and history of the boats will also be recorded on CD, video and book form however.

- Galway has a very ancient and extensive maritime heritage. Dug-out canoes were used to navigate the waters of Galway Bay as early as the Mesolithic (Middle Stone Age 9000-4000 BC). Indeed recently a wooden dug-out which has been scientifically dated to 4800 BC was put on display in Galway Atlantiquarium at Salthill. The boat is being preserved in sea water in a project coordinated by Dr. Conor Newman of the Archaeology Department NUI Galway and Chair of the Heritage Council.
- The wide span of maritime heritage includes some of the Claddagh hookers, one of which is over 159 years old and was built at the famous Reanly boat yard, at Long Walk, Galway. According to chairman of the GTBCP Michael Connelly, Mr. Michael Folan's boat is of the greatest cultural, archaeological and historical interest.
- The Heritage Office has engaged Moore Marine, part of the Moore Group Archaeological and Environmental Consultancy, to record the lines of all the boats and to video them before work on their conservation begins.

Galway's maritime heritage

Only six of the Claddagh boats survive.

The preservation and promotion of Galwegian Maritime Heritage is one of the aims of the actions of the Galway City Heritage Plan. Implementing at a local level what is the national policy of the Heritage Council. On a national level Ireland's maritime heritage is a priority with the Heritage Council and the Minister is delighted to be associated with City Council's Heritage Office's efforts in recording, preserving and promoting Galway's maritime heritage. This heritage always linked Galway City and its hinterland, the Gaeltacht of the Calddagh with South Connemara.

Jim Higgins

Heritage officer