

CASE STUDY

Vagrant Restoration and Boat Building Apprenticeship: Scottish Maritime Museum

With funding from Museums Galleries Scotland, the Scottish Maritime Museum embarked on an ambitious project to restore *Vagrant*, a 19th century racing yacht. Boat building manager Martin Hughes explains how this restoration created new training opportunities and succeeded in revitalising a traditional craft.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

VAGRANT:

- 23ft racing yacht designed by William Fife
- Built in Maidens, Ayrshire, in 1884
- Purchased by the Scottish Maritime Museum Trust in 1984

SCOTTISH MARITIME MUSEUM:

- Founded in 1983
- One of Scotland's Nationally Recognised Collections
- Member of the Go Industrial museum group

TRADITIONAL BOAT BUILDING APPRENTICESHIP:

- SCQF level 6 qualification
- 3 years of training
- No formal entry requirements

THE PROJECT:

The Scottish Boat Building School at the Scottish Maritime Museum set out to restore *Vagrant*, a yacht created by the celebrated designer William Fife in 1884. As the oldest surviving example of a Fife design, *Vagrant* represents the start of a significant chapter in Scotland's sailing history.

Vagrant's restoration was undertaken by lead boat builder Connor Campbell with support from volunteer Matthew Driscoll and apprentices Edel McCarthy and Gavin Proctor. Edel is Scotland's first ever Modern Apprentice in [boat building](#), a traditional skill recognised as being under threat. We campaigned for years to establish this apprenticeship and are delighted to have finally achieved it with this restoration project.

Vagrant was restored in line with [National Historic Ships](#) guidelines, with the entire process being documented for our museum records.



“Our apprentices have achieved something that’s nothing short of amazing. I am personally very grateful for the dedication, patience and ultimately immense skill that they put into restoring this fantastic piece of Scotland’s maritime heritage.”

Martin Hughes, Boat Building Manager,
Scottish Maritime Museum Trust

CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSSES:

- When it comes to old vessels, restoration can be more of a challenge than replacement. *Vagrant* was seriously dilapidated, and her structural integrity was severely jeopardized: an expert restoration was required to bring her back to her original condition.
- Some areas of the boat's superstructure could not be accessed until restoration work had begun. This made it difficult to ascertain the level of work required on the vessel.
- The Covid-19 pandemic was our greatest challenge. Staff were placed on furlough, leading to massive delays which affected team morale. However, thanks to the amazing work of our apprentices and volunteers, we were able to restore *Vagrant* in time for 2022 Fife Regatta.
- *Vagrant* will be entered into the 2023 Classic Boat Awards. We also hope that she will feature in several yachting publications.

THE IMPACT IT HAS MADE:

- This project has proven that young people are more than capable of achieving great things.
- The dedication of the team was fantastic, and recognition they received from experts and members of the public has massively boosted their confidence.

- *Vagrant's* restoration has allowed the museum to increase its fleet of William Fife vessels, now believed to be the largest single collection of this craft in the world.
- *Vagrant* was visited by over 4,000 people at the 2022 Fife Regatta. The display also received extensive coverage in the press and on social media, including over 30,000 views on Facebook.

LESSONS LEARNED:

- Time management. *Vagrant's* poor condition meant that we could not fully appreciate how much work was involved until we had begun. If we had factored this in, we would have given ourselves longer to complete the project.
- Training young people in a skilled profession takes patience and dedicated teaching staff. Our work on other projects resulted in delays to completion and placed a strain on staff. Next time a better allocation of facilities and resources will be implemented.

GUIDANCE:

- Don't bite off too much. Given that the day-to-day running of the boat building school takes up the majority of our time, our plan was probably not realistic within the timescale we had set.

USEFUL RESOURCES:

Contact Martin Hughes: martin@scotmaritime.org.uk

Scottish Maritime Museum website: www.scottishmaritimemuseum.org

Find out more about the Traditional Boat Building Apprenticeship: www.apprenticeships.scot/browse-frameworks/modern-apprenticeships/boat-building-and-repair/individual-boat-building-and-repair/

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