



Garry Wilmott, Mike Grimes, Tony Daly, Brother Anthony, Robert Smalle and Mathew Dirr, working on one of the sail masts, at the AK Ilen boat building school in Roxboro

Picture: Michael Cowhey

# Historic sailing vessel AK Ilen set to take to waters in a year

■ Rigging of the famous ship brought back from Falklands will take 10 months' work

ANNE SHERIDAN

WITH the wind in their sails, a crew of boat builders in Limerick are now piecing together one of the crucial parts of a ship's infrastructure on a famous sailing vessel.

The AK Ilen was sailed to the Falklands Islands by Conor O'Brien, a Limerickman and the first Irishman to circumnavigate the globe, in 1927.

Some seven decades later another son of Limerick, Gary MacMahon, a sailor himself, flew to the Falklands and purchased this piece of living history, Ireland's largest original wooden sailing

ship, with a capacity of 43 tonnes.

Since then thousands of hours have been invested to restore the ship to its former glory.

The project has also seen the birth of the Ilen School & Network for Wooden Boat Building in Roxboro, which opened seven years ago.

The vessel is being patiently restored in Hegarty's boatyard in Old Court, near Baltimore in Cork, with materials transported from Limerick, after being crafted by skilled tradesmen and younger recruits who are signing up to learn this forgotten skill.

It will take some 10 months to

complete the rigging in Limerick before it is installed in Cork.

Speaking to the Limerick Leader, Br Anthony Keane, of Glenstal Abbey, said this week's work is of major importance to the future life of the ship.

"The great rigging for the Ilen is now being assembled. This is the first time it has been done in Limerick in 100 years. The timbers are being laid out, and we are making giant steps every day but it will be next year before the ship comes sailing in May 2016 is what we're hoping for if everything falls into place," he said.

Br Keane, one of the directors of

the boat building school, explained that the rigging is necessary to hold up the mast and haul up the sails, and also to control the size and angle of the sail, depending on the wind.

Mr MacMahon added that the rigging is a "significant phase" of the works, and that there has been great support from the community.

"The rigging will be finished here and brought to Cork next March. We have been audacious enough to set a date for its return to the water, hopefully next May, but it will sail. There will be a few sea trials and then it will sail up to Limerick, where the interior of the vessel will

be fitted," he said.

This February, the 'whiskey plank' was nailed into the hull in a symbolic celebration as the whiskey plank, traditionally, is the last plank fastened into the hull.

"There are certain immemorial traditions in boat building. It might seem absurd to the land person that you would down tools halfway through the project and celebrate," laughed Gary, "but we don't go against tradition. It's a very rare thing, as ships aren't being built."

Gandelows, currachs, and the City One dinghy, a faster, high performing vessel, have also been built in the Roxboro school.

## Coach laid on for travel to protest

NICK RABBITTS

THE Mandate trade union is laying on a free coach for people who wish to join Saturday's march to the Dunnes Stores head office in Dublin.

The coach will pick up outside Henry Street garda station from 8.30am for a 9am departure, with the return journey from the capital at 3pm.

The march to the

march, because of the fact it is the busiest shopping day.

It is for this reason she is putting out a call to the wider union movement to travel to Dublin and show their solidarity.

"We are looking on the wider union movement as a whole to look at the issues. Issues like these affect everybody across the union movement. We are depending on the bigger groups in the union movement to come," she said.

## Spaceman landing in county

AINE FITZGERALD

AN ASTRONAUT who is one of only 24 people to have flown to the moon is making a return visit to Limerick next week to a place that he truly fell in love with - Lough Gur.

Since the voluntary board members took over the lakeside heritage centre in 2011, and under the management of Kate Harrold, the visitor attraction has reached the number one spot on Trip Advisor for places to



Mr Worden served as a command module pilot for the historic Apollo 15 in 1971.

After the primary school presentation Mr Worden will visit Grange Stone Circle to meet with Music Generation Limerick to officially launch the Summer Solstice Festival for 2015. Music Generation will perform a sound art act on June 21 within the stone circle to test the archaeoacoustics of the ancient monument. Following on from this