

News

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HERITAGE

Last plank laid to bridge a 90 year South Atlantic sailing adventure

by Andrew Carey
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THEY laid the last plank, and so a ship was rebuilt.

Last Saturday, the long tradition of wooden shipbuilding reached a significant milestone when the final deck plank on the sailing vessel Ilen was laid at a traditional ceremony hosted by the Limerick Ilen Project.

The project, whose primary goal was to bring Ireland's sole surviving wooden sailing ship back to Limerick, was completed in fine style after six years of education and practice in a near forgotten craft.

In 1926, the Ilen which was Ireland's sole surviving wooden sailing ship, sailed from Limerick to an active 70 year working life in the South Atlantic. The completion of the new all-weather deck last weekend marked the final stage of her remarkable return to her home port.

The Ilen project organisers say that the rebuild highlights the high quality of the materials used, the exemplary craftsmanship and, most significantly, the marine educational role the vessel will play when she goes into operation on the Shannon Estuary, and beyond, from her new home port.

Brother Anthony Keane of Glenstal Abbey, a key promoter of

the Ilen Project, officiated at the ceremony and said that what has been achieved so far showed that there was not only a great work ethic in the Ilen Project but also a spiritual commitment to the work being done.

"This is an amazing act of faith and commitment come to fruition. This boat, and the people involved with it, rock. It is heading for the sea, like a salmon, and it will not be stopped, even if some of the financial people have still to solve their problems of calculus and apply their mathematics."

Guest speaker at the ceremony was acclaimed film maker Lord David Putnam who said that "the project underlined what could be done by a determined community."

"It also demonstrated that the skills involved and which were being taught, were the skills that younger people could learn, use and remain in their community, without having to leave, and thus strengthen communities. This is a message from the Ilen project."

Dr Edward Walsh, founding president of the University of Limerick, told of how he had, at the outset of the project, exhorted all to simply "go ahead and buy the boat" and "pretend" that the money was there. It was a now a source of great pride for him to see how it had advanced so far.



David Putnam, Brother Anthony Keane of Glenstal and Edward Walsh. Ahoy there - Ed Walsh checks that all is ship-shape on board.



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