



BEE

The Stroma cattle boat called 'Bee' was rescued from, its slow but inevitable, disintegration and rebuilt by John William Laird of Eastend, Duncansby.

This document is an attempt to record the important steps in this process.

The history of the Bee, prior to her abandonment at the harbour in Stroma, can be found elsewhere. There is coverage in Nancy Houston's book 'Lest We Forget the Parish of Canisbay' and Donald Young's book 'Stroma'.

The information is to the best of my knowledge accurate.

Information for the Avoch days is courtesy of Colin Heape who contacted me last year (2012). Photographs of that era are also from Colin.

Ownership and Origin

The original owners of the 'Bee' (Source Don and Alex Wares of Stroma):

Sinclair Bremner

Matthew Dundas

James Robertson

Hugh Simpson

David Sinclair

She was a new build intended to carry livestock. A small fee was paid for her use and was spent on her upkeep.

The Registry of Sea Fishing Boats in Scotland gives the following information:

Port ... Wick

Registered number 378

Place to which boat belongs.... Stroma

When and where built 1904 Mey

How propelled Sail, fore and aft sprit sails

Mode of fishinglines

Length of keel18

Length.....24 feet 1

Breadth..... 8 feet 11

Tonnage....Gross and Net 2 , 90

Number of crew....5

Date of entry 5.7.1918

Name of SkipperDavid Sinclair

Name, Residence etc of owners.....David Sinclair and others of Stroma, Caithness

Certificate produced for endorsements etcevery year up to 1951

There is also the following note:

Certificate surrendered and registry cancelled. Boat no longer in use dated 5th February 1952.

Time Line

The 'Bee' was known, in the northern corner of Caithness, as the cattle boat. After many years of ferrying livestock to and from Stroma the 'Bee' was taken out of service in the early 1950's. For about 16 years she lay at the harbour in Stroma.

In the mid 1960's John William Laird and his friend Alec Wares (ex Stroma) were discussing the boat. Alex persuaded John William that he should take the 'Bee' to the mainland and rebuild her.

John William traced the descendants of the original owners. To legalise the deal a fee of one pound was paid to each family.

In 1968/9 (I am unsure of which) John William and Hugh Ross (me) started the job of patching up the 'Bee' for its trip across the Firth. Each Sunday we would pick up some stores at John O' Groats House Hotel and cross to Stroma in John William's boat. Over a period of 4 or 5 weeks, at a fairly leisurely pace, the 'Bee' was patched. Canvas, cow hide and several other materials were used. Some of the splits and holes were large enough to put an arm through. At one of these sessions Lena Simpson appeared with her camera.



Photographs by Lena Simpson

Towards the end of August that year arrangements had been made to tow the 'Bee' to Huna on the mainland.

Alec Wares used his boat the 'Valkyrie' and a group of us set sail from Huna on a beautiful day. On the Valkyrie were the following intrepid rescuers:

John William Laird (Eastend, Duncansby)

Alec Wares (Stroma)

Peter Sinclair (Stroma)

Don Wares (Stroma, brother of Alex)

Sheila Wares (John o Groats - married to Don Wares)

Hugh Ross (Upper Gills)

On arrival at Stroma we were met by James Simpson and others but I cannot recall who. James used his tractor to ease the 'Bee' into the water as we all held her on even keel.



Valkyrie alongside at Stroma

The boat slid into the water and rewarded us with a spectacular display of internal water spouts. The 'Bee' was tied up for a few hours in the hope that some of the strokes would swell a little. Ingress of water did subside but not greatly. A few photos taken (by me), are unfortunately of poor quality.



The 'Valkyrie' was attached and we set off for the mainland. On board the Valkyrie were Alec, Sheila and myself. On the 'Bee' Don, Peter and John William were each armed with a bucket. They bailed all the way across the Firth.



We eventually arrived at Huna after a crossing on a remarkably smooth sea, which was fortunate as this was a very fragile craft. The 'Bee' was hoisted on the Davits at Huna slipway. A trolley was then placed under the boat at low water and off went the 'Bee' to her new residence in the Eastend, Duncansby



Bee back at Huna

At this time I went to Leith Nautical College and John William went to Glasgow for a welding course. John William spent the next ten years or so at various venues as a welder.

Eventually John William started work on the 'Bee'. An old barn had had its gable end removed and a short extension built to accommodate the 'Bee'. The dressed stone around the doorway had come from the front porch of Alex Wares' house in Freswick (where a new extension was being built).

I missed out on the build as I was by that time in Gateshead. There were many helpers including Donald Miller. In the picture is John William (on deck) and Sinclair Bremner. In 1985 the boat was ready for launch. Missed that as well!



After John William's time the 'Bee' was used by his brother in law John Dunnet (Jock).

She was then sold to Colin MacDonald and moved to Avoch in the Black Isle.

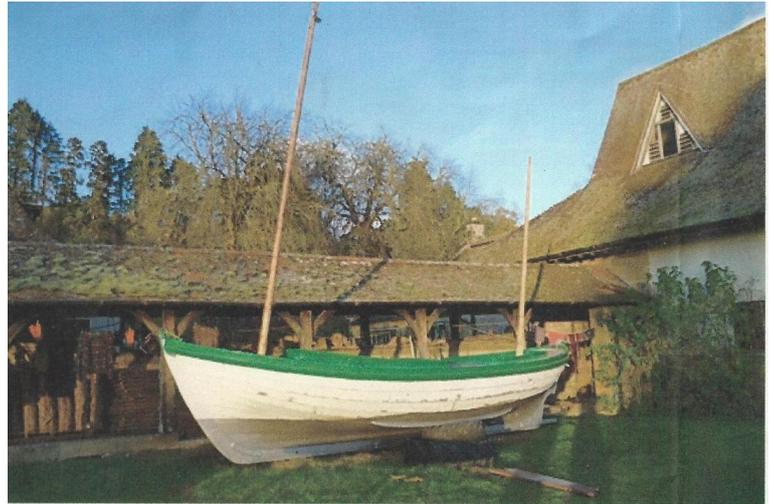
In 2000 the boat was bought by Colin Heape of Bay Farm, Avoch. Colin found the Bee at Avoch with a 'for sale' sign attached.



Impressed by the lines and the detail of her build, Colin made the purchase. He had her refurbished by Mark Stokl at Ullapool Boat Builders. She was fitted with a single mast and dipping lugsail.



In 2011 Colin Heape restored the deck to a more traditional style. He also added a mizzen mast and converted to sprit sails.



Notes

The original 'Bee' had no engine.

As with the other larger boats she had provision for two masts.

When transporting livestock the 'Bee' was always towed by another vessel.

In the 1950's depopulation of Stroma probably dictated the fate of the 'Bee'.

The 'Valkyrie' is now in the process of being renovated by Gordon Shearer at Seater.

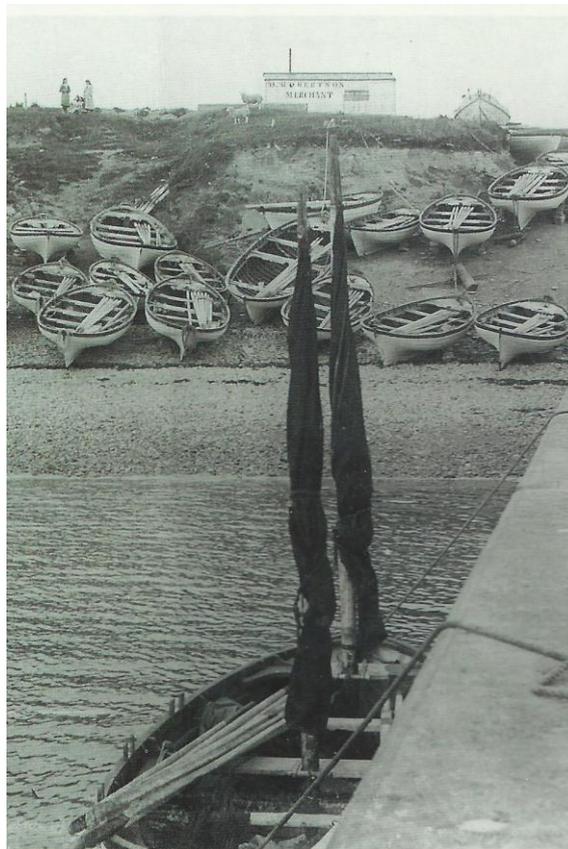
The 'Valkyrie' was used for fishing but doubled as the Stroma Mail boat.

I think it is appropriate that her last delivery from Stroma to Huna was the cattle boat.

Place of Build

The registration document (next page) definitely states Mey. The most famous builders in Mey were the Banks of Harrow, given as the builders by Hugh Simpson in Nancy Houston's book 'Lest We Forget the Parish of Canisbay'.

If 1904 is accurate then the photograph below (circa 1904) shows a very new 'Bee'.



A.

REGISTRY OF SEA

Port Wick

Name of Boat Bee

Letters _____
(If other than Letters of Port.)

Registered Number.			Port or Place to which Boat belongs. When and where built.	Description of Boat.		If Registered under Merchant Shipping Acts.		Length of Keel.	
1st Class.	2nd Class.	3rd Class.		How propelled, Rig and Sail used.	Mode of Fishing.	Official Number	Port Number and Year.	Feet.	Tenths
	348	348	Stroma. 1904: Mey.	Sail. Fore & aft. Aprit sail.	Lines.	-	-	18	24 1
						Certificate surrendered and right Boat no longer in use. Wick Registered			

Names, Residence, and Description of the Owners and Number of Shares held by each Owner.

David Sinclair and others of Stroma, county of Caithness.
Fishermer.

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FISHING BOATS IN SCOTLAND.

Name and Address of Builder Unknown

Breadth.		Depth.		Tonnage.		Number of Crew.		No. of Entry.	Date of Entry.	Name of Skipper.	Remarks.	Certificate produced for Endorsements, &c.
Feet.	Tenths.	Feet.	Tenths.	Gross.	Net.	Men.	Boys.					
8	11	3		2 ⁹⁰	2 ⁹⁰	5	1	375	5.7.1917	David Sinclair	First Registry. Lic. 59 b. 20358 3.6.1917 Art. boat: dup. issued keel 18 3/4	6 2572 18 1/2: 29 2/4; 20 3/4 26 1/2; 18 3/4; 23 3/4; 13 3/4 22 1/3; 16 3/4; 10 1/4 20/9/37. 20/7/38 21/10/39 20/9/40. 20/6/41 2576/42. 12 1/2; 3 1/2; 26 1/2 27 1/2; 5 1/2; 19 1/2; 9 1/2; 12 1/2
cancelled 5th February 1952. J. Dawson Registering Officer. Dated 5th July 1917.												