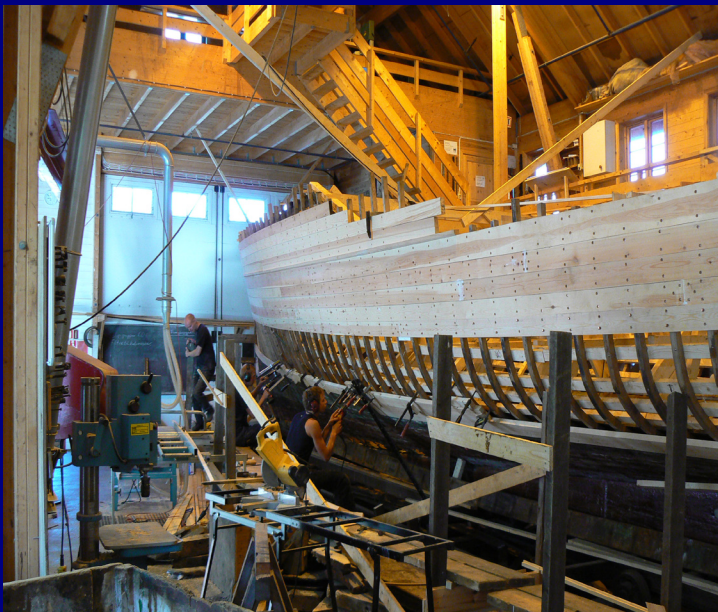




Traditional Wooden Boatbuilding and Restoration in the New Millennium



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'06 National Overseas Fellowship

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Executive Summary

The purpose of the Fellowship was to undertake an overseas study program in New Zealand and Norway, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the traditional wooden boat building techniques used in these countries and how they are integrating using modern products and techniques into their work. The fellow also wanted to learn how they are teaching tradesmen to preserve and restore historically important boats and what training programs are available on the use of traditional wooden boatbuilding and how these programs are delivered.

In the last two centuries Australia has been a maritime nation with a legacy of various types of wooden boats, many of which are still in existence and date back to the 1880's. If the historical and cultural significance of these boats is not recognised they may be lost forever as a timber boat has a limited lifespan. In many ways these vessels are living history. By studying their construction we can learn much about what materials and methods were used at specific periods in time. So while the preservation of maritime culture and heritage is in the hands of a few individual devotees we will continue to lose not only these boats but also the history and culture that created them in the first place. In Australia there is not enough done to promote our maritime cultural heritage to the broad base community. In Australia today, boat restoration/preservation projects are largely carried out by individual boat owners employing individual tradesmen or boat sheds, with no outside funding or assistance.

This history, and the current context of boat building in Australia, identifies the need to retain traditional wooden boatbuilding skills and promote the importance of these skills so underpinning skills so important to the preservation and building of wooden boats is not lost. It must be acknowledged that skills and knowledge and the ability to problem solve can be transferred to more contemporary boatbuilding. As economic pressure mounts to purchase product offshore, the direct result is a shrinking demand for skilled tradespeople. Traditional wooden boatbuilding is highly labour intensive and requires tradespeople with specialised skills. This means we have to design the very best training packages available for our boat builders and restorers.

This fellowship program has realised the opportunity to study the design and delivery of traditional wooden boatbuilding and restoration training and to judge if it meets industry needs, to study boatbuilding/restoration methods and make observations against Australian practice and to ascertain whether New Zealand and Norway are recognising and meeting local skills shortages. The knowledge gained will allow the fellow to address skills shortages in Australia through recommendations made at the conclusion of this report. Opportunities for transferring the knowledge gained through this fellowship can be created through ISS Institute, organised presentations, publishing and generally liaising with the industry. It is apparent that we may lose the skills identified if we do not develop a greater awareness of our culture, heritage and the specialised skills needed to build, restore and present traditional wooden boats. We are in danger of losing skills developed over hundreds if not thousands of years and whilst skills and the training of them must evolve, if we lose traditional skills in any trade we are losing not only history and culture but valuable transferable skills and therefore the ability to preserve our history.

It is well documented that Norway has been building wooden boats for practical and recreational use for at least 1000 years. In Australia our boatbuilding, as in New Zealand only dates back 200 years. In Norway and New Zealand the traditional wooden boat community promotes itself as being historically and culturally important. In both countries the boating public and the boat building industry are very aware and appreciative of function, beauty and cultural importance of their traditional wooden boats. Within the Australian context, it is apparent that education is vital to establish wider community awareness of local maritime culture and the importance of the role wooden boats have played through our short history. By studying maritime culture in New Zealand and Norway knowledge, insights and ideas will be explored, which will provide opportunities to

Executive Summary

promote, advise and improve understanding and acceptance of traditional wooden boat culture in Australia.

There are a number of stakeholders who will benefit from addressing skills gaps that can be addressed through site visits in New Zealand and Norway.

Specific skills and knowledge gaps to be addressed include:

- Construction methods used in traditional New Zealand and Norwegian boat building.
- Application of current technology in the restoration of traditional wooden boats.
- Application of current technology in the building of traditional wooden boats.
- The relationship of modern technologies and traditional methods, including product knowledge.
- Sustainability of supply of traditional wooden boats for restoration.
- Strategies for promoting traditional wooden boatbuilding/repair methods to tradesmen.

In order to effectively address the skill gaps identified throughout the application process, the following activities were undertaken during the course of the Fellowship:

- Visits to traditional wooden boat restorers in both New Zealand and Norway to obtain information on how they implement their methods and technology to suit different vessel types and constructions.
- Investigation of boatbuilding training packages and their delivery in New Zealand.
- Discussion with New Zealand and Norwegian boat builders regarding the sourcing and use of indigenous timbers (the availability of these timbers are an integral part of the restoration and building process).
- Visits to museums and cultural centres in New Zealand, England and Norway to gain an appreciation of the background and history of the boats and boatbuilding of those countries.
- Investigation of the balance of contemporary composite to pure traditional method in the restoration/repair of traditional wooden boats and how the philosophy may vary from country to country.
- Investigation of the relationship between traditional wooden boat owning community and boatbuilding industry by meeting with individuals, associations and industry representatives.

These objectives were achieved by:

- Undertaking a study program on the North Island of New Zealand and particularly in the greater Auckland area to gain a comprehensive understanding of the method, materials sustainability and training delivery.
- Visiting museums in Norway to understand how they present the importance of coastal culture and maritime history.
- Undertaking a study program of marine preservation and training centres in Norway to identify how they combine their boatbuilding training packages and boatbuilding method while providing interpretation and museum opportunities to the public.

Following an overview of the fellowship experience, a series of recommendations are made to government, industry, and the business sector, professional associations, education and training providers, our community and the ISS Institute.