

Launch of the Living Boat Trust's first St Ayles Skiff figurehead

The LBT Open Day on October 31, 2021 aims to provide opportunities for "messaging about with boats", which this Sunday from 11am includes model boats, "Come and Try" and launching the first figurehead.

The figurehead is for "Freyja" the third St Ayles Skiff built in Franklin in 2016 to celebrate community rowing. "Imagine" was the first skiff launched in Australia in 2012 and "Billie" followed suit in 2015. There are now 30 skiffs proposed for communities throughout Australia, and over 250 in the world, demonstrating that from little things, big things have grown. One important outcome is that more people are out 'messaging about in boats'.

From medieval times a figurehead was one of the necessary, fascinating aspects of boatbuilding, a highlight that reinforced ancient shipbuilding and architectural techniques. A figurehead sometimes provided magical significance and frequently provided a recognisable feature, an identity for the vessel. Many people believed it gave protection to the vessel and crew and the choice of a figurehead was important. A swan represents grace and mobility and Cygnet skiffies have created an elegant and easily recognized St Ayles Skiff feature for their community.

The Living Boat Trust now has its own representation of the spirit of a boat. Historically, the Bittern rowing group achieved a community grant through Westpac and chose the name as the bird resides in the Egg Island area. The Bittern figurehead is carved from Huon Pine by Mary-Lou Conway, a skilled woodworker with a veterinary, hence ornithological background. There was enthusiasm and patience with the first clay mould created, and many hours spent reinstating an ancient and creative feature of wooden boat-building.

Dennis Muscovich instigated, supported and coordinated the project that will also see an eagle carved for "Imagine" and a profile of Billie the sheepdog attached to the skiff named in her honour.

With this launch the LBT joins the Augusta community in WA with Pelican and Dolphin creations. Through carving a figurehead, each St Ayles Skiff will have a unique community spirit.