

THE DRONTHEIM

THE LONG REACH OF THE DRONTHEIM BOAT
FROM NORWAY TO SCOTLAND TO CANADA?

The Gokstad ship is a 9th-century Viking ship found in a burial mound at Gokstad in Sandar, Sandefjord, Vestfold, Norway. It is currently on display at the Viking Ship Museum in Oslo, Norway.



to
Chadler
Sabbagh
Sollana

9/14

enny John. F. McKeever

14th O.A. punt

Malin Thos. Doherty (Robert)

H.C.

26 ft 6-8ⁱⁿ Copper

throughout 2 oars

George M. Mullan

Danseverick

By Bushmills

25x6-8x2-9 motor

extras

Fitting beavers etc

20x15-8 with

7 9 0

7 10 0

14 13 0

14 0 0

2 0 0

4 0 0

An entry in the McDonald's order book

Most locals simply call it a 'yawl' or a 'skiff', but the unique north Irish coastal boat, that has been on the Inishowen Peninsula for centuries, actually has a more distinct sounding name, one that stems back to its roots in Norway: the Drontheim, named after where historians believe it originated, in Trondheim, on Norway's west coast. Dig a little further into word origins, however, and the more common name of 'yawl' also likely comes from Norway—the Norse word 'yol' describes a double-ended boat. Whatever you call it, the reach of this unique boat has been long.

The Drontheim boat is a clinker-style open top vessel with a pointed bow and stern. It could be used for both rowing and sailing, carrying as many as two masts within its 26 or 28 foot length. Built originally to ply the large waves of the Norwegian Sea because of its narrow bow and stern, it found a perfect home in the Northwest of Ireland, where it could easily cut through the, at times, equally demanding waters of the North Atlantic.

How the Drontheim boat arrived in Ireland from Norway is a story that highlights the close connections between coastal communities stretching across the north coast of Ireland, the islands of Scotland and on to Scandinavia. The boat's initial arrival was likely with the Vikings over a thousand years ago, and then was kept and adapted to both the Scottish and Irish uses.

What is certain is that over the course of centuries, boat-builders have carried on the tradition. One boat-building family in Greencastle, Inishowen, can trace their boat-building lineage in Ireland back six generations, to the moment the McDonald family came over from Scotland around 1750. The McDonald clan arrived on the Donegal Coast after the rebellion of 1745, and immediately adapted it to suit the waters where they now lived on Lough Foyle.

The McDonald family still build their 'Greencastle Yawls' in the same community where their family came to live over 250 years ago, working each wooden hull by hand using knowledge passed down from generation to generation. Unlike most boat-builders, the McDonald's build their boats by eye, making the generational knowledge even more important.





Brian McDonald at work on a 'Foyle Punt'

But the journey from Trondheim to Scotland to Ireland may not be the only one made by the Drontheim boats. Research in Canada's Great Lakes area has been highlighting incredible links between the Drontheim style boats and the traditional Canadian fishing boat called the 'Collingwood Skiff'. In style, there is very little that separates it from the Drontheim. And tracing its roots, it seems not so surprising.

Because one family in particular appears to have made a big influence on the design of the Collingwood Skiff, a family of boat-builder Immigrants from Ireland. William and Matthew Watts were brothers of Scots-Irish heritage living in Sligo in the early 19th Century. In 1842 they immigrated to Ontario and began building boats on the coast of Lake Ontario, near a place that would soon be named Collingwood.

The Watts' boats were clinker-built, 20 foot long with sharp sterns and two sailing masts. Amazingly, the 'Collingwood Skiffs' the Watts built, were known to be designed and built by eye, much like the McDonald family do to this day in Greencastle.

The Watts' model of boat quickly became popular around Georgian Bay, as other builders copied their design. What is perhaps more intriguing, the only other Ontario builder of 'Collingwood Skiffs' known to history is a man named Dalt McDonald, who made boats near Georgian Bay. Knowing how long the Drontheim designs have stayed in the McDonald family in Inishowen, it is tempting to make a direct connection. Perhaps someone one day will find one.

Until then, the journey of the Drontheim from Norway, to Scotland to Ireland and perhaps even to Canada, seems enough of a link to get a sense of how far the close connections between Atlantic communities can reach—spanning across cultures, languages, and indeed, across continents.