

# Our Late Friend, Iain Haig Oughtred

## The Testimony from a Memorial Gathering

A testimony to the grace of God as shown in the life of *Iain Haig Oughtred*, born in Melbourne, Australia, 15 September 1939, who died in his adopted home the Isle of Skye, Scotland, on 21 February 2024 at the age of 84.

Gathered together online on 28<sup>th</sup> March (or 29<sup>th</sup> for those of his family in some international time zones), we comprised members of his family, his fellow Quaker friends of North Scotland Area Meeting and beyond, those who are part of the boatbuilding and sailing fraternities and of communities of music and the many arts. We assembled in shared presence “after the manner of Friends” (i.e. Quakers) to remember Iain’s life.

We listened to testimony on behalf of the family from one of Iain’s brothers, Rick Outhred. (*Oughtred* had been Iain’s variation of the family name). Rick’s time zone meant him sharing at 4 a.m. on Good Friday morning from Brisbane, Australia. He told of the passion that both he and his brother David have for sailing, and how Iain augmented this with passion for music and nature. He spoke of Iain’s love of his mother, Jeannie Henderson, who had been a lass of Scottish provenance. In recent years, Iain and his sister Liz (or Elizabeth) had been working to recover their father Douglas’ war service records in the Mosquito Squadron that was seconded to the RAF during World War II. In this, Douglas was a fast bomber navigator. Wounded, and affected by Post Traumatic Stress Disorder from the horrors that he had witnessed in the war, he returned to Australia somewhat traumatised. This sat uneasily with his trying to be a good father. Rick shared the family’s joy on seeing all the love and support that Iain received from the wooden boat fraternity in the UK and from his local Quaker friends.

We heard testimony from those gathered with us. There was the story of Iain building a boat inside Jane and Roger Kelly’s living room, and having to take the window out to ease it out. This was not the only such deconstruction. When he was young, he had built a boat under the house, and his father Douglas was none too pleased when a wall had to be knocked out to get it out. We heard from seafaring groups including from Govan in Glasgow and Portree in the Isle of Skye; the way that Iain helped them to design and build their boats, making poetry of woodwork and leaving a sense of enduring gratitude, for Iain was an artist of wood, wind, water.

We heard from those with whom he had designed boats, for “there was only one person” they could go to for the St Ayles Skiff: a self-build design which has opened up boat building and rowing to communities across Scotland, and now, across the world. The beauty and functionality of these vessels has brought people together in local communities who would not otherwise have known each other. Iain’s biographer, Nic Compton, said that of the many books that he has written on boats, this was the only one so much about the person; for Iain was such a very lovely man.

He was, we heard in ample testimony, a man of gentleness, of sincerity and of pronounced humility. As a Quaker, he was like a boat upon the ocean, for he enjoyed being among people but was an entity unto himself. He lived a very simple life. When working with him on a project, you could feel like you were the only person, and the only boat, that really mattered during the time when you were with him. Witness to what his boats mean to people was borne in a reading, from the Isle of Skye, of Morag Henrikson's poem, *Launching the Skiff*. It is appended hereto, noting especially its line: "a home-made gift for the community."

Iain also loved aircraft, and used to build model airplanes. In short, his work, like his love of porridge, was of the greatest delicacy: yet if push came to shove, he was capable of coming out with a line like, "When all else fails, use bloody big nails!"

What a legacy his life has left!

## LAUNCHING THE SKIFF

9.9.23

Sleek black shape  
beached on the high-water mark,  
clothed in black plastic,  
mystic, wonderful.  
Is it a porpoise,  
a torpedo  
or a whale?

Eager hands rip the wrappings.  
Eager eyes and cameras watch.  
It's Christmas for us all; a home-  
made gift for the community.  
"It's your boat now".

And there she is,  
revealed,  
pristine, beautiful and bright.  
Fix the tiller.  
Ship the long oars.  
Let her feel the water.

Willing hands in wellies  
slide her to the sea.  
She's our boat now.  
There's satisfaction on the waterfront  
at a good job done.

Strike up the music.  
Pass round the food. The  
spirit of An Tuireann still  
carries on in ATLAS.



The poem, by Morag Henriksen, was given to Iain as a gift at the request of Rosie Somerville on the occasion of his last birthday, a week or so after the launch of the Portree St Ayles Skiff. An Tuireann was a gallery and cafe space in Portree.

A recording of the memorial gathering can be viewed at: <https://bit.ly/oughtred-memorial> (family photos, 24 mins in).