

# Row Porty get a new boat

✖ At High Tide on Sunday (round about midday) Rowporty's new skiff will be named and launched from Portobello Beach. Teams of volunteers are working against the clock to finish the new vessel in time, painting it and adding the seats, rowlocks and rudder.

The plan is to carry the new racing skiff from its workshop off Portobello High Street, along the prom to the Sailing Club's yard and then down onto the beach for the official ceremony. Then it will join the club's existing skiff, "Ice Breaker" and a couple of historic "Jolly Boats" which have recently been donated to RowPorty.

The Royal West of Scotland Club will be travelling through the Edinburgh to present a racing trophy from the days of the original Portobello Amateur Rowing club. In future, it will be used as a prize in the annual Portobello Regatta due to be held on the last weekend of July.

Andres Leslie, one of the Founding Members of RowPorty, is excited by the arrival of the new skiff because the club's growing so quickly. "We currently have 85 members," he says, "and every day another couple of people are joining. Until now, it's growing organically. But we've had to put a lot of systems in place with this second boat because it's part-funded by the Lottery.

"And for everyone who chose to spend the long winter months working in an icy boatshed, "he adds, "this is a very exciting stage to have reached. It will be a momentous achievement when it is finally taken out into the sunshine, freshly painted and ready for the sea!"

The five-person wooden racing skiffs, known as St Ayles Skiffs, are based on a design of inshore fishing vessel used in the Northern Isles. They're now being built by coastal

communities all over Scotland as part of the Scottish Coastal Rowing Project developed by the Scottish Fisheries Museum. It wanted to encourage coastal rowing by providing affordable, lightweight skiffs that would be relatively easy for amateurs to construct and row.

Since it began two years ago, 50 kits have already been ordered from all over Scotland. Others are being built in the USA, Australia and Europe. By the end of this month, there will be 20 of them in the water, ready to race each other. The first regatta will take place in Dunbar in May with others as far afield as Achiltiebuie and Eyemouth. According to Nik Savage, another founding member who is also a skilled carpenter, the project has had much greater benefits for the community. "I've met people here in Portobello," he explains, "who I'd never have met before. But we've all now met dozens if not hundreds of like-minded folk around Scotland. It's building up a tremendous community spirit around the coast."

"It's also brought different generations together," adds Ali Grant, the third founder member of RowPorty. "Our building 'Ice Breaker' attracted the attention of people who'd been part of the old Rowing Club. As a result, we now have been given two racing skulls to restore, along with old oars which had been stored for years."

The club's also been given two "Jolly Boats" (so called because they were originally used to take the crews of large vessels in to port "for a jolly"). These also had been stored in a shed for the past 20 years by the Broughty Ferry Rowing Club which has now sadly been wound up. They were brought down to Portobello in the past few days where one has already been tried out on the river.

According to Andres Leslie, "she was very fast but kind of twitchy. If people on one side pulled the oars too hard, the people on the other could catch a crab. It means you really have to work as a team, much more than in the skiffs. She sits

very low in the water, especially compared to Ice Breaker so will be ideal for experienced crews or use on calm days.”

With the new boat launched, the existing skiff will be taken into the workshop for a little maintenance before the “Jolly Boats” and skulls move in for full-scale restoration. These boats provide a direct link to Portobello’s rowing past, and the Rowporty members who take them out will get a real taste of pre-war rowing in the Forth.

On Sunday, three other clubs with St Ayles Skiffs are expected to join the celebrations. They’re coming from Port Seton, Newhaven and North Berwick. Andres Leslie expects there to be five boats on the water, with a few informal races across a short course from the beach to a buoy and back again. It should be fun.