

Building an Exe Salmon boat



Background

We want to offer our community the opportunity to **build a traditional wooden salmon boat** – the first to be built on the Exe for over 50 years!! Locals will be able to rediscover lost skills and bring this traditional and sustainable boat back to the Exe. The wooden salmon boat can be rowed by a **crew of 5** and will be an environmentally friendly way to appreciate the **beauty of the Exe**. Once used for fishing, the boat will now be used for rowing, learning, and wildlife watching - turning a working craft into a **shared community asset**.

For centuries, the Exe salmon or seine boat was the traditional wooden boat designed and built on the River Exe estuary to catch salmon. Between 16ft and 22ft long, it was built from locally sourced timber by local builders who lived beside the estuary. Salmon boats were;

- Stable and strong, so that heavy nets could be hauled over the gunwales whilst standing
- Flat bottomed, allowing it to sit safely on mud at low tide
- Sometimes additional power was added by a lugsail

Each town and village around the Exe had their own salmon boats. Salmon are no longer fished in the Exe and the tradition of building wooden salmon boats has disappeared. This project is about **keeping that knowledge alive** - and using it to help people reconnect with the Exe.

Throughout the winter, a group of enthusiastic volunteers have measured and drawn plans for a seine boat. Now we would like to take this voyage further...



How to build a boat together?

Under the guidance of an **experienced volunteer boatbuilder**, a team of volunteers will collaborate and work together to build the boat using traditional wooden boatbuilding techniques over a period of ~18months.

The project will:

- Teach practical woodworking and boatbuilding skills
- Bring people together across generations
- Share progress through talks, exhibitions, and updates
- Create a focus for understanding the Exe — its history, landscape, and challenges

To support sustainable boatbuilding in the future, we will also plant 100 oak and 100 larch trees, creating a **“Salmon Boat Wood” for future generations**.

When & Where?

Start: September 2026

Launch: Spring 2028

We are currently seeking an appropriate site in and around Starcross within which we will build a secure boat building shelter.

Cost / Funding

We estimate the total cost at £15,000–£20,000, covering:

- Timber and materials
- Tools, insurance, and shelter
- Project administration
- Professional input from an independent boatbuilding mentor and qualified marine surveyor

All labour and project organisation will be voluntary and further avenues from individual sponsorship to community funding and grants are being explored.

Ownership

Similar initiatives across the UK have successfully operated under charitable trusts, ensuring long-term accessibility, and community benefit. Options are being investigated and will be openly discussed to ensure the most effective and sustainable structure for this project

We firmly believe this boat has the potential to become a genuine **asset for the community** around the Exe. The build itself would provide a focal point for community engagement - bringing together volunteers, local groups, and enthusiasts - while the completed boat would offer a lasting and meaningful way for **people to connect with and enjoy the estuary**. We see no reason why traditional salmon boat racing could not achieve the popularity of, for example, gig racing in Cornwall.

Get involved

We have divided the project into these phases, with 1 complete. We are now embarking on phases 2 and 3:

1. Planning and design
2. Gaining new volunteers and support
3. Feasibility and discussion
4. Fund raising
5. Project set up and shelter build
6. Production - building the boat
7. Launch and use
8. Ongoing care and maintenance



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