

Tall Ships, Ahoy!

From today onwards Waterford is en fete and agog with excitement and a welcome break from all that talk of doom and gloom- we are in party mood! The focus, of course, is all those beautiful Tall Ships, so let's learn a little more about them so you can impress your friends with a few Tall Stories!

Let's start with the basics- A tall ship is a large, traditionally-rigged sailing vessel. Popular modern tall ship rigs include topsail schooners, brigantines, brigs and barques. So your task this week is to go on a voyage of discovery to work out which type each one is as you explore each in turn.

Traditional rigging may include square rigs and gaff rigs, with separate topmasts and topsails. It is generally more complex than modern rigging, which utilizes newer materials such as aluminum and steel to construct taller, lightweight masts with fewer, more versatile sails. Most smaller, modern vessels use the Bermuda rig. Though it did not become popular elsewhere until the twentieth century, this rig was developed in Bermuda in the seventeenth century, and had historically been used on its small ships, the Bermuda sloops.

The term tall ship came into widespread use in the mid-20th century with the advent of the Tall Ships' Races, and was not generally used in the era when such ships were the norm. The term's popularity may have stemmed from its use in a well-known nautical poem by English Poet Laureate John Masefield entitled "Sea-Fever", first published in 1902.

I must go down to the sea again, to the lonely sea and the sky,

All I ask is a tall ship and a star to steer her by.

While Sail Training International (STI) has extended the definition of tall ship for the purpose of its races to embrace any sailing vessel with more than 30 ft (9.14 m) waterline length and on which at least half the people on board are aged 15 to 25, this definition can include many modern sailing yachts, but in the context of this article, a tall ship refers to those vessels rated as class "A" only.

International Friendship

The Tall Ships' Races are races for sail training "tall ships". The races are designed to encourage international friendship and training for young people in the art of sailing. The races are held annually in European waters and consists of two racing legs of several hundred nautical miles, and a "cruise in company" between the legs. Between 1973 and 2003 the races were known as The Cutty Sark Tall Ships' Races, having been sponsored by Cutty Sark whisky. From 2004 to 2010 the races were supported by The City, Province, and Port of Antwerp. The current sponsor of the Tall Ships' Races 2010-2014 is the city of Szczecin which is the largest seaport in Poland on the Baltic Sea.

Participating vessels are manned by a largely cadet or trainee crew who are partaking in sail training, 50 percent of which must be aged between 15-25 years of age and who do not need any previous experience. Thus, tall ship does not describe a specific type of sailing vessel, but rather a monohull sailing vessel of at least 9.4 metres (30 ft) that is conducting sail training and education under sail voyages. Participating ships range from yachts to the large square-rigged sail training ships run by charities, schools and navies of many countries.

The Race

The first Tall Ships' race was held in 1956. It was a race of 20 of the world's remaining large sailing ships organised by Bernard Morgan, a London lawyer. The race was from Torquay, Devon to Lisbon, and was meant to be a last farewell to the era of the great sailing ships. Public interest was so intense, however, that race organisers founded the STI association to direct the planning of future events. Since then Tall Ships' Races have occurred annually in various parts of the world, with millions of spectators. Today, the race can attract up to a hundred ships, among these some of the largest sailing ships in

existence. The 50th Anniversary Tall Ships' Races took place during July and August, 2006, and was started by the patron, Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, who also started the first race in 1956 and he too is still going strong!