



Our Flatner

The boat that now sits just off the museum courtyard space is known as a Flatner. Its name is 'The Flare' and it is an important part of the story of Weston-super-Mare.



Flatners at work in Weston Bay, 1885 © Weston Museum

The Flare was the last Flatner (a flat bottomed fishing boat) to work in this area. These ships are so-called because the flat bottom could be pushed out over the mud to meet the incoming tide, so gaining precious extra hours afloat.

Weston Museum's Flatner is a 20ft long boat built in the clinker style with overlapping planks rather than having planks that fit edge to edge (carvel style).

This boat building method has an interesting history. There were several raids in Somerset during the Viking age. While the raiding warriors took a lot from the local people they did at least leave them with some new ideas. Building ships in the clinker style seems to have been one of them.

The Flare could float in just eight inches of water. It was the last boat to be made in the tradition of the Flatners and represents the final stage of the transition from sail to engine.

Our Flatner was built in 1962 in Kimber's boatyard in Highbridge for Alf Payne (one of the Payne family connected to Clara's Cottage). He used it for fishing regularly until his death in 1984.



A Flatner beached on Anchor Head © Watchet Boat Museum

It was also used to give holidaymakers trips around the bay. When not in use it was kept in a unit in Weston and kept wet by being sprayed with water once a week by the harbourmaster.



A Flatner under sail off Weston seafront © Watchet Boat Museum

Alf (known as Juicy) was a stalwart member of the lifeboat crew for 40 years, eventually becoming the coxswain; the person who steers the boat. He came from a long line of local fishermen and lifeboatmen, some of whom still serve on the lifeboat today.

The Flare was purchased by the museum from his son after Alf's death. This was possible thanks to a grant from the Science Museum as well as generous donations from the public and from the Friends of the Museum.

The boat was refurbished by museum staff and children from the Museum Club, re-floated at the Uphill boatyard and then put on display in the museum.

Getting our Flatner inside the museum was a real challenge. In the end a wall had to be demolished to allow the boat in!

The museum has a voice recording of Juicy and photos of him sitting in his Flatner.

The original documents, invoice and plans of the boat, and the oars, sail, fishing nets, a mud sled and a model Flatner are all in the collection, though not currently on display.

Alf 'Juicy' Payne was a local character remembered fondly by many for his long service to the RNLI, his trips round the bay and his fish, which he used to sell from his yard in Palmer Row close to the museum.



Flatners picking up tourists in Madeira Cove © Watchet Boat Museum

Weston-super-Mare is a town defined by its relationship with the sea. It is our privilege to preserve this important part of Weston's history.



Weston-super-Mare
Town Council