



## ***Shefarers of Ipswich* evaluation report**

*January 2024*

**Profiling and advocating for local women in the maritime**

**Forging new local networks for women living and working on the water**

**Seeding new mentoring relationships and employment pathways for young women considering maritime careers**



Flag design by Claudia Myatt, Suffolk-based sailor and maritime illustrator



Shefarers and Young Shefarers embarking on the skills-sharing sail, 20th October 2023 (photo: Alexander Ward)

SPILL Festival is thrilled to have presented the significant community commission *Shefarers of Ipswich* during October 2023. Initiated by SPILL Festival with German collective secret agency (founders of the global Women of the Seven Seas network), *Shefarers of Ipswich* incorporated multiple arts, heritage, and educational elements, each created and delivered with a cohort of professional 'shefarers'.

After exceeding our original fundraising target by £5,125 and allocating a further £10,224 from SPILL's core Arts Council England grant, we were able to add an additional charter sail for our cohort of 'Young Shefarers', bring a guest speaker working in global shipping over from Lagos, commission photographic portraits of key participants and a special flag design, and significantly expand our distribution of tide calendars. As a result, *Shefarers of Ipswich* has been one of the most extensive and successful projects in SPILL's history.

## We delivered:

- 3 days of 'Open Ship' drop-in public research sessions on a historic Thames Sailing Barge
- 1 public 'renaming ceremony' during which Sailing Barge Victor was temporarily rechristened 'Victoria'
- 1 accessible research hub session hosted in the DanceEast foyer on Ipswich Waterfront
- 1 sold out lecture-performance (also on the historic Sailing Barge 'Victoria') featuring women professionals working in the maritime industries (including international guest Koni Duniya who represents the Nigerian Seafarers' Association) and a bespoke captain's table banquet of sea-themed platters
- 1 accessible livestream of the lecture-performance in the auditorium of The Hold (Suffolk Archives)
- 2 performances from local all-female sea shanty choir The Silver Darlings
- 1 premiere of a short film created by participant shefarer Belinda Joslin and her colleagues from the Women in Boatbuilding initiative
- 12 photographic portraits of participating shefarers for archive and publication
- A special 'Young Shefarers' skill-sharing sail on the River Orwell, bringing 8 young women and girls aged 14-24 together with female role models from the maritime industries
- As part of the 'Young Shefarers' sail, talks and presentations by professional shefarers including Jessica Ashley (ShePaddles Ambassador and representative of British Canoeing), Belinda Joslin (Founder of Women in Boatbuilding), Jane Chevous (Sustainable Sailing), Cathy Shelbourne (maritime historian), and Ana Reis Fisher (former Olympic swimmer and founder of migrant support charity SPEAK Ipswich)
- Also as part of the 'Young Shefarers' sail, a knot-tying demonstration and workshop by Jane O'Halloran, third mate on Sailing Barge Thalatta
- 11 new oral histories recorded and archived at Suffolk Archives, addressing a significant gap in our primary county archive
- 1 *Shefarers of Ipswich* flag/emblem, designed by Claudia Myatt, maritime illustrator living and working aboard a houseboat moored on the nearby River Deben
- 1 pocket-sized tide table publication featuring shefarer portraits alongside 2024 tidal information for Ipswich



The Silver Darlings perform sea shanties on deck (photo: Alexander Ward)

The project was delivered with a core group of 12 professional Shefarers and 8 Young Shefarers, and has so far reached an estimated 4,000 people.

228 people visited the Open Ship research sessions (including the film premiere) to learn about local women in maritime and contribute their own experiences.

34 (our maximum capacity) attended the lecture-performance, with a further 16 people choosing to experience it via the accessible livestream nearby.

38 women (either working in the maritime industries or interested in doing so) joined the Young Shefarers' river sail, including the talks and knot-tying workshop.

To date, the tide calendar has been distributed to 3,573 recipients, via schools, colleges, watersports centres, sailing clubs, sea cadets, tourist information sites, waterfront leisure and retail businesses, and through direct requests made on the SPILL website. (Key distribution points will continue to be replenished throughout Spring 2024.)

Our 11 oral histories will remain accessible in perpetuity via Suffolk Archives (under catalogue reference GA414).



Belinda Joslin of Women in Boatbuilding presents her work to the Young Shefarers (photo: Alexander Ward)

## Evaluation

Our evaluation methodology for *Shefarers of Ipswich* involved multiple strands and datasets:

### 1. Postcode profiling provided by The Audience Agency

Alongside the general engagement statistics listed earlier in this document, profiling the postcodes of our attendees according to cultural engagement benchmarks provided by sector consultants The Audience Agency helps us to gauge our success in reaching new and under-engaged communities, such as those experiencing significant economic hardship.

The Shefarers of Ipswich project has helped SPILL to reach a greater number of those least engaged in arts and culture than ever before.

We saw a 5% increase in attendances from those living in the areas immediately flanking the Orwell to the south of Ipswich, where residents live side-by-side with industry and are historically less well-off economically than elsewhere in the town.

We attracted 50% more low-income families living in rented accommodation in the IP2 0 and IP2 8 postcode areas (which include the portside areas of Stoke and Maidenhall) than at our previous festival events.

We more than doubled the proportion of mixed age, ethnically-diverse residents of council and housing association properties across inner Ipswich. Significantly, we welcomed a larger proportion of this group than currently live in our area (7% of our audience, compared to 2% of local residents). This is a huge audience development achievement, representing a major step forward for SPILL’s community and people-centred working.

## 2. Pre- and post-event social media quizzes

This helps us to gauge the impact of our educational messaging around maritime and local heritage knowledge.

We used the inbuilt quiz function on Instagram Stories to create and share our two short quizzes, each with three multiple choice questions that we designed in collaboration with Ipswich Maritime Trust. The first was active for a 24 hour period starting on 5th October, 12 days before we opened our drop-in research hub sessions; the second was active for 24 hours starting on 27th October, 6 days after the public event and livestream. We included questions on the history of Ipswich port, its current exports, and local shefarers from now and from twentieth century history. 277 people participated and we were delighted to find that, compared to the pre-event quiz, average correct answers in the post-event quiz increased by 8%.

Pre-event quiz		Post-event quiz	
Q1 (on WW2 Wrens working out of Felixstowe)	50% correct	Q1 (on the construction of Ipswich Customs House)	52% correct
Q2 (on the Saxon origins of Ipswich Port)	34% correct	Q2 (on local shefarer Jane O’Halloran, who works aboard Sailing Barge Thalatta)	60% correct
Q3 (on the gender balance in current maritime industries globally)	66% correct	Q3 (on Ipswich Port’s primary exports)	63% correct
Average correct:	<b>50%</b>	Average correct:	<b>58%</b>

## 3. General satisfaction survey data

This helps us to understand the experience of audiences and visitors.

In our survey, we asked all attendees to rate the quality of our work numerically and provide the 3 words that best describe their experience. Results were overwhelmingly positive, with 87% of respondents rating the overall quality of their experience as a 4 or 5 out of 5.

The descriptive words chosen were also exclusively positive, such as the following representative examples:

*Exciting, fulfilling, captivating  
Innovative, interesting, varied  
Stimulating, uplifting, sociable*

*Inspiring, thought provoking  
Diverse and collaborative  
Interesting, unique, fun*

#### **4. Direct feedback received from audiences and participants**

This helps to provide us with a fuller picture of where we succeeded and what work still needs to be done. A selection of representative quotes are included here.

*'I had such a positive experience. Really well run and a wonderful idea.'*

*'I've felt so lucky and proud to have been involved with this project, getting to meet some inspirational women in maritime telling their stories.'*

*'To bring like minded women together, to have somewhere for women to feel safe to talk or just to give them the confidence to get on the water has been so valuable.'*

*'They were so warm and encouraging.'*

*'What an incredible group of women. They were so inspiring. I wanted to become their friend and join them at sea!'*

*'An inspiration to local young women.'*



The shefarers enjoy the captain's table banquet at the lecture-performance (photo: Alexander Ward)

## What's next...

### ...for the shefarers?

Through their participation in the project, our local shefarers have become part of the global Women In The Seven Seas network. This was established in 2019 in Hamburg in order to connect women from all aspects of maritime life: female seafarers, artists, and all women who live or work at sea.

Following the conclusion of our project in December 2023, administration of the Women of the Seven Seas network passed from Germany to Indonesia, where it is now led by shefarer Nova Ruth. Nova is the co-founder of the boat project Arka Kinari in Malang, East Java. A seventy-tonne sailing ship and floating cultural platform, Arka Kinari is on a voyage to promote resilience to climate change and re-engagement with the sea.

[www.arkakinari.org/about](http://www.arkakinari.org/about)

SPILL continues to support the Shefarers of Ipswich with space for meetings and network events, and we have started to meet with new artists to expand our maritime initiatives in the next SPILL Festival, planned for Autumn 2025. Meanwhile, several of our participant shefarers have initiated a new sea shanty choir after meeting on the project. We can't wait to go to their first gig!



Watching the official handover of the portraits and oral histories to Suffolk Archives (photo: Alexander Ward)



### **...for SPILL?**

Starting in January 2024, SPILL has initiated a new community heritage project to profile and celebrate the story of the former Ipswich Caribbean Association (ICA) building. An essential cultural hub for Caribbean migrants to Ipswich in the twentieth century, the ICA hosted youth clubs, supplementary schools, salsa nights, dominoes clubs, keep fit classes... but was sadly demolished in 2012.

Working under the guidance of an experienced steering group of community leaders and elders, over 2024 and 2025 we will be preserving new oral histories and commissioning new creative resources to tell the story of this fondly remembered - and much missed - cultural institution.

Should you be interested in hearing more about SPILL's local heritage projects, including how your organisation can support our work, email [megan@spillfestival.com](mailto:megan@spillfestival.com).