

Businesses urged to help save 109-year-old sailing ship

The octogenarian owners of a 109-year-old sailing ship in Exeter are calling on local businesses to help secure its future. Britannia is the last functional example of an East Coast Fishing Smack and is currently undergoing community restoration.

The aim is to restore the boat to working life, but £250,000 is needed to fund the project. The lack of funding has put two boatbuilder apprenticeships in jeopardy, according to owners Sam and Vicki Samuels, founders of Britannia Sailing Trust – a charity supporting disadvantaged young people through boatbuilding and sailing.

If the money cannot be found, it will also scupper dreams of operating an education programme for disadvantaged young people once the boat is seaworthy again.

To secure the ship's future, the duo have launched a national campaign called Help Save Britannia. So far more than £11,500 has been raised.

Sam said: "We have nine committed trustees and the support of many individuals, some of whom have sailed aboard Britannia in the past. It's got such wonderfully rich heritage and as the last ship of its kind in the UK, is a treasured part of our maritime culture. But the sad reality is, rising costs mean that we are now underfunded and urgently need more support to help us save this lovely boat."

The vessel has been an important part of Sam and Vicki's lives for the past 50 years, restoring her once already while raising their family on board as they sailed across the world.

Having sold Britannia in 1996, they crossed paths with her

again in 2013 and are now committed to restoring her for a second time.

“Young people are the future of traditional sailing ships,” Sam added. “They’re the next generation of boatbuilders, shipwrights, skippers and sailors. The ship will enable the charity to offer training and work experience for individuals to learn how to sail and maintain a traditional sailing boat, part of Britain’s maritime history. We owe it to them to give them this invaluable opportunity to learn vital life skills.”

Construction work on Britannia was started in 1914 by the Norfolk Brothers – a well-known pair of shipwrights from Friars Yard in Alexandra Dock, King’s Lynn, Norfolk. The ship was launched a year later to become the largest and fastest vessel in the King’s Lynn fleet.