

# Galway Hookers

With their distinctive black hulls and eye-catching rust-red sails, Galway Hookers are the traditional boats of Galway Bay. Having evolved to withstand the rough Atlantic seas, these boats were traditionally used for fishing and for transporting cargo – turf, seaweed, limestone, livestock and general supplies – around the coasts of Galway and North Clare. They consist of four types of boat, known in Irish as *Bád Mór*, *Leathbhád*, *Gleoiteog* and *Púcán*.

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## *Bád Mór* (35 to 44 feet)

The *bád mór* (big boat) could carry a cargo of 12 to 15 tons, and was used for transporting Connemara turf to Aran and North Clare, where fuel was scarce, and general supplies from shops in Galway to local providers in Connemara.

## *Leathbhád* (28 to 35 feet)

The *leathbhád* (half boat) was used for carrying turf and general supplies.

## *Gleoiteog* (20 to 28 feet)

The *gleoiteog* was used for fishing or carrying small cargoes on short journeys.

## *Púcán* (23 to 28 feet)

The *púcán* was mainly used for fishing and local transport.



Left: Galway Hookers in full sail.  
Courtesy of Joe O'Shaughnessy

# Parts of a Galway Hooker & What They Do

The **MAST** is the tall, tapered pole on a boat that supports the sails. Traditionally, the length of the boat's mast was equal to the overall length of the hull.

The **FORESAIL** is the sail situated in front of the mainsail.

The **JIB** or **JIBSAIL** is the small, triangular sail that extends beyond the bow of the boat.

The **BOWSPRIT** is the name for the pole that extends out from the front of the boat – the bow. Traditionally, the length of the bowsprit was equal to the maximum width of the boat.

The **HULL** is the body of the boat. It is made up of a sturdy framework, which is covered in planking. It provides the buoyancy that keeps the boat afloat.

The **KEEL** is the long piece of wood along the bottom of the hull, which helps to keep it balanced in the water. It is the backbone of the boat.

The **STARBOARD** is the right side of a boat as you are facing forward.

The **DECK** is the floor of the boat – the flat area for walking. Galway hookers are usually open-decked or half-decked.

The **BOW** is the front part of a boat.

The **PORT** is the left side of a boat as you are facing forward.

The **GAFF** is the pole (spar), attached to the mast, that runs along the top of the mainsail.

The **SAIL** is a sheet of material attached to the mast, which catches the wind and makes the boat move.

The **MAINSAIL** is the boat's largest and most important sail. The mainsail of a Galway Hooker is laced to the mast, and supported by a gaff and boom (see below). Apart from the *púcán*, the Galway Hookers are gaff-rigged, meaning that the mainsail is four-cornered.

The **BOOM** is the horizontal pole (spar), attached to the mast, that runs along the bottom of the mainsail.

The **TILLER** is the horizontal bar, attached to the rudder, which is used for steering.

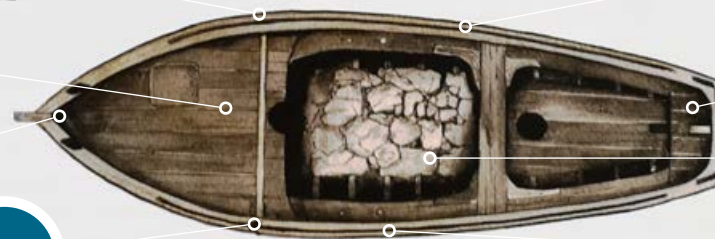
The **RUDDER** is the blade at the back of a boat, which is used to control the boat's direction.

The **GUNWALE** is the upper edge or rim of the boat's side.

The **STERN** is the back part of a boat.

The **BALLAST** is a weight added to a boat to make it more stable. The ballast of Galway Hookers consist of local stones expertly selected and distributed by an experienced *bádóir* (boatman).

The **TUMBLEHOME** is the word used to describe the narrowing of the upper part of the boat's sides.



*Bád Mór (Galway Hooker).*  
Courtesy of Dónal Mac Polin

