

Isle of Luing Constellation Project

The Luing Constellation was created in early 2009 by the residents of the Isle of Luing with support from the Isle of Luing Community Trust. The first step was to choose dates which are significant in the history of Luing. These were suggested at an astronomy night by an enthusiastic audience of residents. The dates were then matched as closely as possible with prominent stars close to the Pole Star so that they are visible throughout the year in the Northern Hemisphere. They are paired up by finding a star that is roughly as many light years away as the event is back in time. For example, electricity first came to the island 53 years ago in 1956 and was matched up with the star Caph within the constellation Cassiopeia which is 54 light years away. Of the 40 dates suggested, matches were found for 26 of them. Where a cluster of dates occurred close together these were grouped with one star, so the end result was 14 stars from which a constellation could be created.

The next step was for residents to single out a few of these stars which they felt represented the most important dates for Luing, and then design a constellation using these stars. The 30 designs that came back were a wonderful mix of ideas, but there was a strong maritime theme with 9 boats, 3 anchors, a mermaid, a lighthouse. There were also many animals including a bull, otters, birds, fish, lobsters and shells. The remaining included an outline of Luing, the Grey Dog and a flower.

As well as taking into account the designs, note was also taken of the dates which were most often used and these were included in the final design. The most popular date was A (representing the last quarry closing, the Luing cattle breed being officially recognised, the first Post Bus for the island and Cullipool Shop being built) but the allocated star (Capella) was further away from the rest of the popular stars. It was found that there was a closer star (Errai) which was a similar distance away in light years so this was used instead at the final design stage so that the date could be incorporated more easily into the constellation.

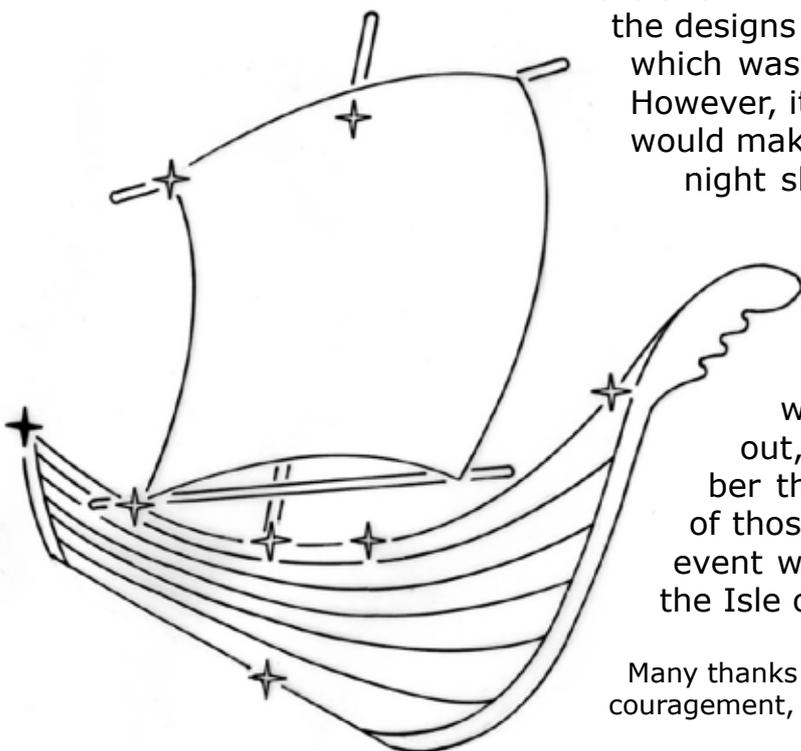
As so many boats, mainly sailing boats or birlinns were sent in, it seemed appropriate for the final design to be a boat. A birlinn was chosen for its historical significance and as

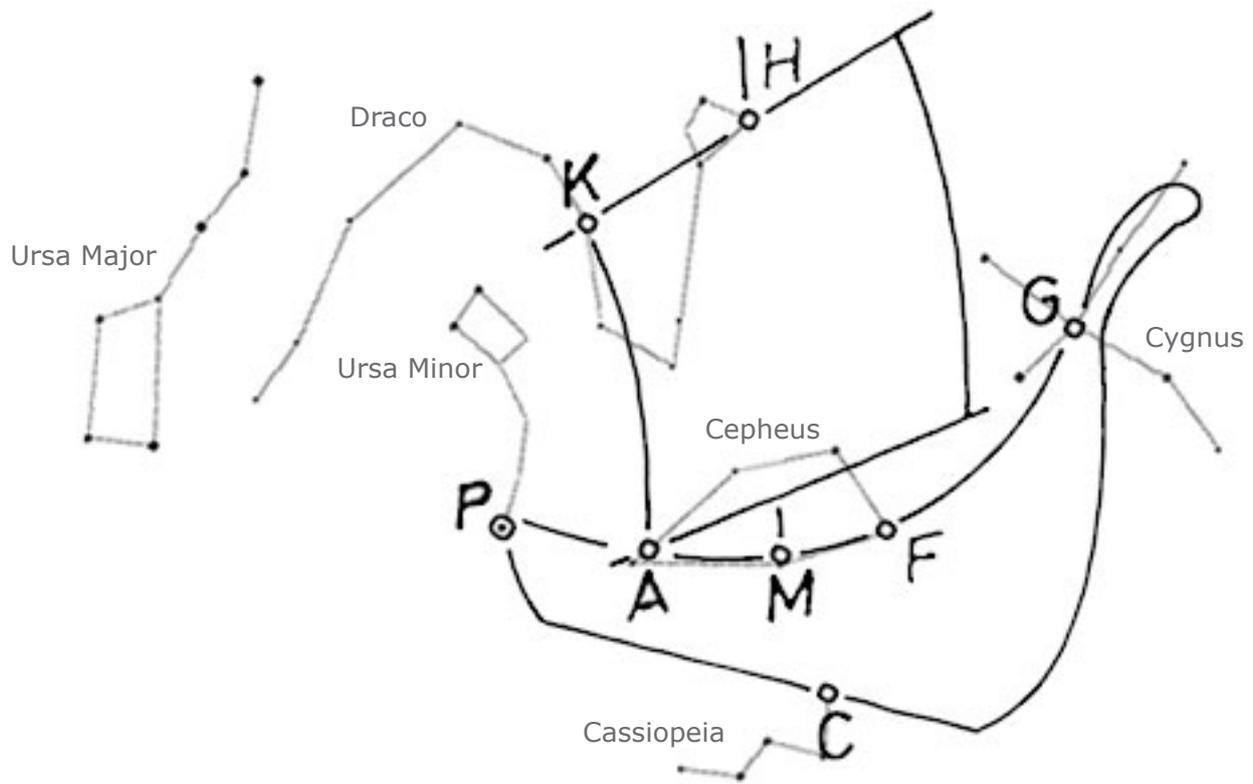
it is shown in the graffiti on the old church. One of the designs sent in included Polaris (the Pole Star) which was not one of the original stars chosen. However, it seemed a good idea to include it as it would make the constellation easier to find in the night sky so it was kept for the final design.

It also felt appropriate as it has been so important in navigation for boats throughout history.

So the next time we have one of our wonderfully dark nights and the stars are out, look for the constellation and remember that the light we are seeing from each of those stars was created when its allocated event was happening down here on earth, on the Isle of Luing.

Many thanks go to Dark Sky Scotland for their help and encouragement, and to Birgit Whitmore for the final design.





Symbol on chart	Star name	Location	Light years away	Represents event	Event date	Years ago
A	Errai	Point of Cepheus	45	Luing breed of cattle officially recognized Last quarry closed First Post Bus Cullipool Shop built	1965 1965 1976 1976	44 44 33 33
C	Caph	End of Cassiopeia	54	First car ferry (Maid of Luing) Electricity first came to Luing	1953 1956	56 53
F	ζ Cep	Bottom corner of Cepheus	726	Alexander II's fleet anchored in Toberonochy Bay Ruined church built 12th century (approx. date)	1249 1150	760 859
G	Sadr	Centre of Cygnus	1524	St Brendan came to Holy Isle St Columba came to Iona	542 563	1467 1446
H	Etamin	Draco's nose	148	Fladda Lighthouse built The Square built First steamers came to Black Mill Bay via Crinan Canal	1860 1853 mid19thC	149 156
K	ζ Dra	Middle of Draco	340	Oldest marked grave in the kirkyard	1680	329
M	ι Cep	In Cepheus	115	Black Mill Bay Pier built	1890's	114
P	Polaris					