



# NEWS RELEASE

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## Posthumous British Empire Medal for Brian Alcock leads six King's Birthday Honours for heritage crafts

**The family of the late master hand grinder Brian Alcock have received a posthumous British Empire Medal in the King's Birthday Honours in recognition of his service to the Sheffield cutlery trade and heritage crafts.**

Brian, who passed away less than three weeks ago, was one of six makers nominated by **Heritage Crafts** to receive national honours, alongside clockmaker David Poole MBE, boatbuilder Ronald John Maclean MBE, blacksmithing trainer Delyth Done MBE, marbler and woodgrainer Robert Woodland MBE, and knitwear designer Jeanette Sloane MBE, in recognition of their unparalleled craftsmanship and tireless work in ensuring their skills are passed on to current and future generations.



The six were nominated for this year's Birthday Honours, following 24 previously successful nominations from Heritage Crafts since 2013. In May, the charitable organisation – which was set up in 2009 to support and champion traditional craft skills – published the fourth edition of its groundbreaking *Red List of Endangered Crafts*, the only report of its kind to rank UK craft skills by the likelihood they will survive into the next generation.

Heritage Crafts was deeply saddened to learn of **Brian Alcock BEM's** passing on 30 May. As a jobbing grinder working up to a week before his death, Brian was an unparalleled repository of knowledge and skill in the craft of hand grinding. He exemplified the honest work ethic of a skilled master craftsman, and even at the age of 81 he would work 40 hours a week, starting at 6.30am each morning through all four seasons. No job was

too small for him; even putting an edge on a simple pocket knife was handled with the care and concentration of a man who relished the craft he had learnt so well.

What set Brian apart was how freely he shared his knowledge and skill. Five years ago founding Heritage Crafts Chair Robin Wood MBE was concerned that once Brian stopped he would have nobody to grind axes for his growing business, and that this important part of Sheffield's cultural heritage could be lost. At this point Brian offered to train Robin's apprentice Zak Wolstenholme. He had been passing his knowledge of how to grind tools and maintain the machinery to Zak, free of charge, right up until his passing. Zak admired him greatly and he had become a very significant life mentor.



Thankfully, Brian learned of his forthcoming honour before he died, knowing the esteem in which he was held. Our thoughts are with his family and friends at this time.

**David Poole MBE** has been clock maker of the highest standard for over forty years. He has made critical contributions to horological education, establishing remote learning, support and examinations through the British Horological Institute and organising apprenticeships through the George Daniels Educational Trust. Between 2016 and 2019 David set up the Watchmakers Trailblazer Apprenticeship Scheme, one of the first of its kind under the government-backed initiative to promote craft apprenticeships, overcoming many obstacles with devotion and total service.

**Ronald John MacLean MBE** represents an unbroken line of boat builders who, over 150 years, have provided as many as one thousand workboats to the island communities of the Hebrides. He has preserved an entire style of vernacular boat building (the Grimsay workboat of Scotland) through his craft skills, teaching and interpretation of the tradition. He has designed accredited courses in Traditional Boatbuilding Skills, and with his gifts as a teacher devised a curriculum to transmit the Grimsay boat tradition through Gaelic boatbuilding terminology.



**Delyth Done MBE** has been unparalleled throughout the past decade in ensuring that the next generation of blacksmiths have the high-level skills they need. As head of the blacksmithing degree programme at Hereford College of Arts for over ten years, she has been directly responsible for improving the training standards so that graduates are recognised and sought after as employees by master blacksmiths around the world.



**Robert Woodland MBE** is one of the most highly-skilled ornamental artists, woodgrainers and marblers in the UK today. His work can be seen in a variety of buildings across the country, including the Palace of Westminster, Buckingham Palace, the British Museum, the Tower of London, Grand Lodge, Harrods, Harvey Nichols, Kensington Palace, Bagshot Park and the Mandarin Hotel. Robert has a passion to keep his trade alive and shares his knowledge openly with students from around the world, enthusiastically demonstrating his craft whenever he has a chance.



**Jeanette Sloane MBE** is one of the most prominent and successful Black knitwear designers in the UK today, and has done a huge amount to promote and celebrate the contribution of Black, Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPOC) to British textile crafts. Among a career of achievements, she devoted her time and expertise, unpaid, to found the 'BIPOC in Fibre' project, to celebrate and raise awareness of the contribution of BIPOC to British textile design.

Heritage Crafts Executive Director **Daniel Carpenter** said:

*"We are thrilled that six of our nominations have been recognised in this the first Birthday Honours of King Charles III's reign. Having traditional craftspeople up there with other great luminaries of public life in this way is vitally important, as UK is still one of only 12 of the 193 UNESCO member states yet to ratify the 2003 Convention on the Safeguarding of Intangible Heritage."*



Heritage Crafts encourages anyone who supports the continuation of traditional craft skills, whether or not they are makers themselves, to become Heritage Crafts members via its website [www.heritagecrafts.org.uk](http://www.heritagecrafts.org.uk).

The charity has set up an Endangered Crafts Fund to provide small grants to projects that increase the likelihood of endangered craft skills surviving into the next generation, and is currently seeking donations to save more of Britain's most endangered crafts from oblivion – visit [www.heritagecrafts.org.uk/ecf](http://www.heritagecrafts.org.uk/ecf) to find out more and to donate.

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### **Photo captions:**

- The late Brian Alcock BEM. Copyright Scott Merrylees.
- David Poole MBE
- Ronald John MacLean MBE with Stewart boatbuilder Uilleam Theàrlaich. Copyright Grimsay Boatshed Trust.
- Delyth Done MBE
- Robert Woodland MBE
- Jeanette Sloan MBE

### **About Heritage Crafts**

Founded in 2009, the Heritage Crafts is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) registered as the 'Heritage Crafts Association', the advocacy body for traditional heritage crafts. Working in partnership with government and key agencies, it provides a focus for craftspeople, groups, societies and guilds, as well as individuals who care about the loss of traditional crafts skills, and works towards a healthy and sustainable framework for the future. Its aim is to support and promote heritage crafts as a fundamental part of our living heritage.

[www.heritagecrafts.org.uk](http://www.heritagecrafts.org.uk)

### **About national honours for craftspeople**

Heritage Crafts is delighted to have successfully nominated a number of world-class craftspeople for national honours. To see the list of 24 previous recipients, visit [www.heritagecrafts.org.uk/national-honours](http://www.heritagecrafts.org.uk/national-honours).

### **About the *Red List of Endangered Crafts***

The *Red List of Endangered Crafts*, created by Heritage Crafts, was the first to rank traditional crafts in the UK by the likelihood they would survive the next generation. The 2021 edition of the Red List, funded by the Pilgrim Trust, assessed 244 crafts to identify those which are at greatest risk of disappearing, of which four have been classified as extinct, 56 as critically endangered, 74 as endangered and 110 as currently viable.

The Red List shows that the craft knowledge, skills and practices that form an important part of our shared cultural heritage are – for a number of reasons – at risk of being lost. Heritage Crafts believes that these cultural assets are as important as unique heritage buildings and ancient beautiful landscapes and could provide future generations with fantastic opportunities to enrich their lives and the lives of others.

<http://redlist.heritagecrafts.org.uk>