

The
Royal National Life-boat Institution
(Supported solely by Voluntary Contributions)

INAUGURAL CEREMONY
OF THE
MOTOR LIFE-BOAT
"HOWARD D."



at

THE OLD HARBOUR, ST HELIER,
on
THURSDAY, AUGUST 19th, 1937, at 4.30 p.m.

The Naming Ceremony to be performed by
LADY MOTTISTONE

The Life-boat is the gift of an anonymous donor.

The naming ceremony, 19 August 1937. A decorated barge moored beneath the specially erected stands provided a platform from which speeches were made. The old pulling lifeboat, the RNLB *William Henry Wilkinson*, was moored behind her new replacement.

Howard D

The launch of Jersey's first motorised lifeboat caused a stir in 1937. Its restoration and relaunch in 2008 caused just as much interest. Here **Doug Ford** tells the story of the vessel and her eventual restoration.

It was in June 1996 when Jersey Heritage bought the *Spero II*, a fishing boat from B&B Fishing of Wells, near Great Yarmouth, Norfolk. The *Howard D* had come home.

The *Howard D* was the first motorised lifeboat to be stationed at St Helier. It was purchased by the yachtsman and philanthropist, T B Davis, at a cost of £3,623, in memory of his son Howard, killed during the First World War. She arrived at the St Helier station in August 1937.

The *Howard D* (Official Number 797) was a Liverpool class lifeboat, built for the RNLI by Saunders Roe in Cowes, Isle of Wight. She was 35ft 6ins long (10.65m), 10ft 6ins in the beam (3.15m) and she had a draft of 3ft 6ins (1.05m) and had a gross tonnage of 8.61 tons. Fitted with a 35hp Weyburn petrol engine she was capable of being driven through the water at a top speed of 7 knots, although her cruising speed was 6 knots. Her two fuel tanks situated just ahead of the engines held 48 gallons, and gave her a range of about 60 miles at top speed, and about 80 miles at cruising speed. She was also fitted with a fore and mizzen mast, that meant that an extra knot could be squeezed out of her by hoisting sails. She was fitted with various safety features such as a searchlight, a mast headlight, rocket firing apparatus as well as a breeches buoy. Manned by a crew of seven, she could carry up to 30 survivors.

The hull was made up of two layers of mahogany planking with a layer of calico sandwiched between them. The single propeller was set in a metal ring to prevent it from fouling and was

then protected further by being placed in a tunnel formed by raising the deadwood. The vessel's buoyancy was enhanced by the hull being divided up into six watertight compartments, which were then filled with a total of 130 air cases.

She left Cowes on 12 August 1937 and arrived in Jersey on the afternoon of Saturday 14 August, having stopped off in Guernsey. Once in St Helier she was immediately hauled up into the newly lengthened lifeboat house behind South Pier on her new caterpillar carriage. The naming ceremony took place on the following Thursday afternoon 19 August.

It was only then that the Chairman of the St Helier branch of the RNLI, Rear-Admiral C L Lewin, announced that Mr T B Davis had been the anonymous benefactor and announced the name '*Howard D*'. The naming ceremony was then performed by Lady Mottistone¹.

The following day, as part of a successful RNLI flag day that raised £445 19s 4d, the *Howard D* ran trips around St Aubin's Bay.

The first official call on the *Howard D* was on 20 November 1937. She was called to attend the M.V. *Affaric* off Rozel to pick up her master, Captain Grossey, so that he could attend the inquest on his Chief Officer, Mr Alfred Lathwell, who had died as a result of an accident at Ronez Quarry.

¹ The wife of General 'Jack' Seely, Lord Mottistone whose book about the Isle of Wight Lifeboat "*Launch*" had inspired TB Davis to make the donation.



Following the fall of France in June 1940, when it looked likely that the Islands would be occupied by the Germans, the RNLI Inspectorate requested that the *Howard D* make her way to either Weymouth or Cowes for war service. On the evening of Friday 28 June the Guernsey relief lifeboat, the *Alfred and Clara Heath*, was due to call into St Helier to pick up the *Howard D* to take her to England. However, she was caught up in the air attack on the Island: just as she passed Noirmont, she was strafed by enemy aircraft and the son of the Coxswain was killed outright. Although both lifeboats were moored behind St Aubin's Fort ready to sail, the Bailiff, Alexander Coutanche, requested that they remain on station in the Islands.

The *Howard D* remained on service in Jersey throughout the Occupation, but service records during this time are patchy as it was a punishable offence to keep written records. Mr L P Stevens, the Honorary Secretary² of the local RNLI branch, recalled that the *Howard D* had been used for a variety of purposes, but that in the last two years of the Occupation she was only used on legitimate service. Obviously once the Island was cut off from the mainland the RNLI lost contact with their boat, but in 1943 they received a German Red Cross letter from Mr L P Stevens. It read: *Greetings to all. Often go out with Howard, Dee and the boys. Howard sends regards to Groves and Guttridge³ and hopes to see them soon.*

Following the Liberation she was indeed taken over to Groves and Gutteridge's yard in Cowes for a much-needed overhaul. When she returned to St Helier in November 1945, she had been fitted with a loud hailer and a radio telephone. In November 1947 the States of Jersey gave the RNLI the use of a German store bunker on the Albert Pier, by No 5 berth, and they moved out of the lifeboat house behind South Pier on London Bay. The *Howard D* was permanently moored in the harbour.

In September 1948 she was replaced by a new lifeboat, the *Elizabeth Rippon*. On leaving St Helier the *Howard D* was stationed

at Flamborough in Yorkshire until 1953, when she moved up the North Sea coast to take over the station at Arbroath, Angus in Scotland. In 1956 she joined the RNLI Reserve Fleet and was stationed in Newbiggin, Girvan, St Abbs, North Sunderland, Runswick, Scarborough, Bridlington, and Newcastle, before she was finally sold out of service in 1964 for the princely sum of £1,025.

In her time as a RNLI lifeboat the *Howard D* was launched on 70 occasions and saved 66 lives. While on station in St Helier (1937-48) she was launched on 23 occasions and saved 46 lives, in Flamborough (1948-53) she was launched 25 times and saved 16 lives and while in Arbroath (1953-56) she was launched nine times and saved one life. While in the reserve fleet she was launched on 13 occasions and saved three lives.

She was used as a fishing boat first in Wells, Norfolk, then in Lowestoft, Suffolk before returning to Wells again by which time she had been re-named Spero II.

In his article in the Friends of The Maritime Museum 1990 Journal, the then chairman, Robert Le Maistre, wrote '*But what of her future when the boat is no longer required for fishing? Would a boat of this size, and bearing in mind her strong connections with the Island, be a suitable candidate for restoration to her original appearance for our soon to be established Maritime Museum? Time will tell.*'

The boat has been bought at a very opportune moment, as it was likely to be shortened in the near future to avoid stringent fish quotas and safety regulations covering boats over ten metres in length.

²L P Stevens held this position for 25 years until his retirement in 1951.

³Groves and Guttridge was the Isle of Wight boatyard where the *Howard D* went for her regular overhauls.

Launching the *Howard D*, 1937





The *Spero II* (ex-Howard D) welcomed back to Jersey by the St Catherine's inshore recues boat in 1996

The Restoration

When the *Howard D* returned to Jersey in 1996 the job of restoration was started by the St Catherine's In-shore lifeboat team. The boat was given a temporary home in the old Abattoir site in St Helier, which was due for re-development. While in this covered area, the boat was cleared of the additions made to her while she was a fishing boat, and the external hull was cleaned down to bare wood and primed. The decks were lifted, the interior hull was cleaned and painted with bitumen paint while the bulkheads at the fore end and after end of the engine room were renewed with marine ply. The inner surfaces above deck level were stripped of paint and the engine was removed from the hull. At this stage the majority of fittings were removed and put into storage boxes.

Unfortunately, the St Catherine's team received notice to quit the Abattoir site – as it was said that re-development of the site was about to start almost immediately. Over the next few years, the boat took on an itinerant existence being moved to various sites around the Island before coming to rest on the reclamation site at La Collette. The St Catherine's team felt they were unable to make any real progress and so handed the project back to Jersey Heritage. While the half completed boat languished under a tarpaulin the team from the Maritime Museum boat shop obtained copies of the original building plans, and also visited the RNLI lifeboat museum at Chatham, where they were able to photograph a fully restored Liverpool class boat, the *Grace Darling*. The main difference being that *Grace Darling* was built some 10 years after *Howard D*, and is a twin screw vessel and so has a different underwater profile as well as a very different engine room layout.

Apart from clearing accumulated rubbish it was agreed that no further restoration was to be undertaken until the boat was under cover. Most of the fittings (including two engines), the internal air cases and the shelter, were taken out to Elizabeth Castle and stored in the Hospital building until they would be required. When the *Spero II* was brought to Jersey the original engine room/crew shelter had not been on board – she had been fitted with a very different wheel house/engine room cover, which was more suitable for a fishing vessel. Fortunately, an authentically suitable engine room/crew shelter was available from the Jersey Pilots' No 2 boat

l'Espérance (formerly the RNLB *Lucy Lavers*). This boat had started life as a Liverpool class lifeboat, but was to be converted into a cruising motorboat. Because the shelter did not feature in the conversion plan, it was possible to obtain it for the *Howard D*.

Thanks to an institutional blind eye by the Harbours Department the vessel spent about three years at La Collette until finally, in the autumn of 2006, due to the intervention of the Harbour Master, Captain Howard Le Cornu, a part of one of the Harbour works sheds was offered, on the basis that when required for redevelopment, the space would be vacated.

The use of this space was welcomed as it allowed the team from the Maritime Museum boat shop to get a lot of work done under cover during the winter of 2006/2007 despite the fact that the doors only offered a 10 cms clearance, even with the removal of the engine/crew shelter. Nevertheless, through the good offices of the Harbour mobile hoist team, it proved possible to get the boat into - and out of - the shed without damage.

The boat restoration team finally got started on the hull in autumn 2006. It was decided that the first task would be to ensure the hull (double diagonal mahogany, close riveted with a calico insert between the two skins) was in good condition. A superficial examination showed there to be no serious defects. There were a few small 'tingles' (copper patches) to be removed, which meant that any damage could be examined and repaired. Fortunately, there were no major repairs to the fabric of the hull, just a close examination and repair to some small gouges to the outer skin, which were filled using epoxy glue and filler. The design of the Liverpool Class lifeboats includes a soft wood fendering around the hull above deck level, and inevitably some of this required replacing and re-fastening.

The next stage was to examine the keel and bilge keel bolts. Some of the original bronze bolts to the bilge keel in the engine room had been replaced by steel bolts and so these were renewed in bronze. Several keel bolts were drawn and examined and the majority were found to be in good condition, and did not require replacement. However, the bilge keel bolts were not so good, and about 50% were renewed.

As it was not practicable to draw the bronze screws connecting the hull planking to the keel, these screws were doubled up throughout the entire length, and extra fastenings were inserted to the stem and stern posts.

Because the original design of the lifeboat allowed for it to be stored in a boat shed, provision was made for all the internal compartments to be checked and drained of water after recovery, the hull was pierced by 14 drain plugs. All 14 of these were removed and the screw fastenings to the drain plug flanges were renewed, while the cooling water inlet pipe flange bolts were checked. The grab rails at the turn of the bilge were replaced – the originals having been removed while *Howard D* was employed as a fishing vessel.

All decking panels were removed, the original sections were of double diagonal construction similar to the hull, however these had not stood up to the hard working life of a fishing boat and many had already been replaced with marine ply. Some of the deck beams were in poor condition and so had to be renewed. With the exception of some panels in the after end box, all deck panels were renewed with marine ply. In the fore end box, the original deck beams and panels had been removed to provide storage for fishing gear, and so new beams and panels had to be put in. The air cases stowed under the deck for buoyancy were all repaired, repainted and re-stowed. Where the fore end air cases and on-deck cases were missing, new cases were constructed along with the side benches and locker stowage which had also been removed.

The lifeboat is fitted with freeing ports along the length of the deck to clear any water coming on board. These had been placed in store and were repositioned after cleaning.

The fore end and after end box were still in position, but the after end box required considerable reconstruction, including a new bulkhead and deck covering. The fore end box needed some

new decking pieces and a new bulkhead. In the original construction, mahogany was extensively used, however Iroko had to be used in lieu of mahogany, due to cost and accessibility.

The Engine room/crew shelter was restored in the Maritime Museum boat shop: all the fittings were removed, the shell was taken down to the bare wood and the exterior re-varnished, some necessary small repairs to woodwork undertaken, new glass fitted to portholes, and all brass work cleaned to its original state.

The propeller shaft was closely examined, and a decision taken to replace this completely, as the existing shaft was showing signs of wear.

All electric wiring was replaced, and the engine, having been overhauled by the St Catherine's team, was run on a static test, cleaned and painted. New controls and gauges were fitted after installation. The engine and shelter were installed, using a truck with a hydraulic crane hoist. The engine was aligned and coupled to the shaft whilst on a road trailer. The electrical wiring, controls, switchboard, etc were all fitted once the engine was in place, and the engine compartment had been made watertight.

The original fuel tanks were cleaned out, new fittings installed and new securing chocks fitted. (The fuel compartment is forward of the engine room and is completely watertight.) The original engine was a petrol engine with no electric start, just a hand crank that led onto the deck. This had long since been replaced by a diesel engine, and the hand starting gear replaced by a starter motor!

When first constructed, *Howard D* was equipped with a petrol engine and sails. She had a drop keel to enable her to sail to windward. This drop keel was mounted in the fuel compartment between the two fuel tanks, but has long gone. The slot in the keel is still there, but has been sealed up. The mainsail and jib have been retained – these are not the original sails, but are approximately correct in shape and size. The sails

Sea trials 14 May 2008



she now carries were originally from a ship's lifeboat, made of very heavy canvas, with Manila roping. The sails are a traditional red colour, and are approximately the same size as the originals. A mizzenmast is installed as per original build, but at present there are no plans to fit a sail on this mast.

Crew comfort was not high on the priority list in 1937 - there are no cooking or heating facilities and no toilet facilities. There was little provision for the treatment of survivors either, the very small crew shelter would not have held the boat crew, never mind the rescued - survivors would have been expected to sit on the side benches totally exposed to the elements until the boat reached a safe haven! Modern safety requirements now mean that lifeboat carries safety gear to comply with today's requirements - VHF radio, life rafts, first aid, and a GPS set, plus lifejackets for all.

In the late summer of 2007 the *Howard D* was brought out of the work shed and the Engine room/Crew shelter was fitted and electrical work carried out. By early April 2008, the name and RNLI flag insignia had been fitted and on Wednesday 23 April the *Howard D* was put into the water once again - the first time in twelve years. The States of Jersey Harbour Department have kindly agreed to sponsor a berth for the *Howard D* in the St Helier Marina and the public of the Island were given a sneak

preview of the lifeboat during the First Jersey Boat show between 3 and 5 May. On Wednesday 14 May the team from the Maritime Museum boat shop took her out for sea trials.

Finally on Saturday 17 May there was a short ceremony of re-dedication on the Albert Quay. There were short speeches by Jurat John De Veulle, Chairman of Jersey Heritage, and Kevin Le Scelleur, Chairman of the Friends of the Maritime Museum, and the 'honorary chaplain' of the Maritime Museum's heritage fleet, the Reverend Jane Ilton, performed the Blessing. The actual re-dedication was carried out by Mrs Norma Asplet from Jersey, a friend of Howard Davis' sisters whose husband was a Howard Davis Scholar at HMS *Worcester*⁴, and Mrs Aylwen Lyddell from South Africa, the great granddaughter of T B Davis. Altogether nine members of the extended Davis family from Jersey, the UK and South Africa attended, along with many Islanders who had connections with former crewmembers of the *Howard D*, as well as the modern RNLI.

The restoration of the *Howard D* would not have been possible without the funding provided by Jersey Heritage and the Friends of the Maritime Museum, but more importantly, without the skills and dedication of the following: Lloyd Banks, John Heyes, John Le Goff, Chris MacFadyen, Michael Roche and Nigel Sweeny, Bob Asplet, Dave Hocquard and Edward Stephens, Trevor Bull and Doug Ford.

Bob Asplet, is a retired Master Mariner and Volunteer Boat Builder,
Jersey Maritime Museum

Trevor Bull, is a Boat Builder with Jersey Heritage

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Further Reading

Robert Le Maistre, 1990: "*Spero II*" - the history behind the name in Maritime Journal No 1 (Jersey)

Ian Le Moignard, 1975: *The history of Jersey's lifeboats* Ashton & Denton Publishing

L/F/30 *Howard D* Collection in Jersey Archive

⁴The Incorporated Thames Nautical Training College, more generally known as HMS *Worcester*, was set up in 1862 as a pre-sea training establishment for potential officers in the Royal and Merchant Navy. Howard Davis had been a cadet here in 1911.