

‘Rotary Service’ A Former Dover Lifeboat Recalled

Peter Sherred

In the Rotary Year 1979 -1980, the Rotary Club of Dover hosted a lunch at the Royal Cinque Ports Yacht Club for many visiting Rotarians on the naming of a new Dover Lifeboat. On October 30, 1979, in her capacity as a patron of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) and as the newly appointed Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports and Two Antient Towns, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother visited Dover to name officially the town's recently arrived new lifeboat. In the ceremony at the Wellington Dock, following a service of dedication led by the Bishop of Dover, the Queen Mother was invited to name the lifeboat which she duly did – ‘Rotary Service.’

Based at Dover for nearly twenty years the provision of the boat was made possible by Rotarians throughout Rotary International in Great Britain and Ireland (RGI) contributing £100,000 towards its cost. The Dover club undertook to co-ordinate the collection of the money from all Rotary Districts in the southeast. The Lifeboat Committee was headed by Captain Mike Bodiam then of Guston (President of the club 1985-1986) who arranged for the charter of the ‘MS Caesarea’, the last

passenger only vessel on the cross-Channel routes, on her last journey before being sold – this memorable event included some 900 Rotarians and their ladies and friends on the ship when she sailed from Folkestone. The final cheque (to complete Rotary's contribution to the total cost of the Lifeboat ‘Rotary Service’) was eventually handed over by the President of RGI in the Dover club's Diamond Jubilee year (1982-1983).

The new lifeboat was a prototype Thames Class craft built in 1973 by Brooke Marine, Lowestoft and operated by the RNLI. In attendance at the naming ceremony in Dover was the President of Rotary International Great Britain and Ireland, Mr D. Imrie Brown, together with members of Rotary Clubs out in force to witness the crowning ceremony of a project to which Rotary had provided a substantial part of the cost of the 50ft lifeboat given the RNLI Official Number (ON) 1031 and Operational Number 50-001. ‘Rotary Service,’ known as the Rotary lifeboat, had started trials at Falmouth in 1974 as a prototype and, following an evaluation of the trials, enhancements were made to the lifeboat, which was self-righting, by means of a watertight super-structure. While serving in Falmouth she was called out on service forty-five times and saved seventeen lives. For one of these occasions the coxswain was awarded a RNLI Bronze Medal for outstanding bravery and seamanship. She was relocated to Dover in 1978 and was involved in two further medal occasions including one in 1987 when acting coxswain Roy Couzens was awarded the RNLI Silver medal and six of the crew received bronze medals. By the



Dover Lifeboat ‘Rotary Service’

end of her service life 'Rotary Service' had launched four hundred and eleven times and saved one hundred and seventy-seven lives.

The Thames Class was one of two designs for a fast lifeboat produced in the early 1970's (the Arun Class was the other) six of which were ordered. In the event only two were completed and put into service as four were cancelled and replaced by Arun Class lifeboats which were slightly larger and faster lifeboats. 'Rotary Service's sister lifeboat was sold to New Zealand and 'Rotary Service' was on station at Dover for many years. In 1997 she was replaced by a brand-new Severn Class craft, 'City of London II' and was placed in the relief fleet. After a few months in the relief fleet, 'Rotary Service' was withdrawn from service, and she was sold with her last known service being as a pilot boat in Cornwall and then at a location in Ireland. The present whereabouts of 'Rotary Service' was explained by a Past President of Dover Rotary Club, David Hannent (now a member of Deal Club), at a meeting on August 11th when he explained the former lifeboat was currently owned by a local charity in Lowestoft which had intended preserving the craft and using her as a youth training vessel. He indicated the trust could not continue and the future of the craft was uncertain and could be sold for scrap. He felt it would be entirely appropriate if the boat was returned to Dover and preserved. Inquiries were ongoing with the current owners and the cost of transportation of the craft to Dover was being investigated. The boat was in an unfinished condition having been stripped out and was on the dockside in Lowestoft but had to be removed by November. The positive news was that the trust would like to see the vessel live again and, provided a good home could be found for it, it could return to Dover. Issues

relating to funding and storage needed to be addressed and refurbishment was possible.

When the Queen Mother named 'Rotary Service' in Dover she first thanked Rotary International for providing the lifeboat which would maintain the traditions of the RNLI, a service admired worldwide. She also thanked the Dover crew for their splendid record paying especial tribute to wives and families of the crews. The Duke of Atholl, Chairman of the RNLI was presented with the craft, on behalf of the 58,000 Rotarians in Great Britain and Ireland (RBGI), by the President of RBGI who noted how well the Rotary motto 'Service above Self' applied to the lifeboat service. The Duke of Atholl then handed over the lifeboat to Captain Peter White, honorary secretary of Dover station, who expressed the honour and pride the station felt in receiving 'Rotary Service.' After the usual champagne christening of a new boat the Queen Mother boarded 'Rotary Service' at the invitation of Captain Peter White and clearly enjoyed herself as she spent a long time in the wheelhouse chatting to the crew. She was presented with a painting of the new lifeboat.

The Boulogne lifeboat and crew were present at the ceremony in Wellington Dock and a commemorative gold medal was presented by the President of the Boulogne lifeboat station Michel Boitard. A larger gold medal from the Societe Nationale de Sauvetage en Mer was presented by Admiral Picard-Destelan, Vice President of the French lifeboat service and a friend of the RNLI. Also on the day former celebrated Coxswain Arthur Liddon was presented with a service vellum. A Post Office commemorative cover illustrating the official naming of the lifeboat by H M the Queen Mother was issued bearing the date

of 30th October 1979 with a 10p stamp and bearing a Dover, Kent postmark.

October 30 1979 was a great day for Dover, for the RNLI and for all those who had



'Rotary Service' in Lowestoft facing an uncertain future

worked so hard to raise funds for the acquisition of the new lifeboat for Dover. It was an especial day for Rotary. It surely would be a fitting tribute to all the efforts to acquire the boat if it found its way back to Dover preserved as an interesting tourist attraction and as a memory of the way in which Rotary played such an important role in providing Dover with a new craft to help police the very busy Dover Strait. Society members should welcome and support David Hannett's efforts to achieve this result. It would be a worthy tangible permanent reminder of the work Rotary does in so many aspects of life locally. We should follow with interest developments regarding this special lifeboat in Dover's history and hope sponsors can be found to secure this piece of Dover's illustrious maritime history.

Environment Committee

Janet Dagys

The Environment Committee continues to meet at the Dover smART premises, next to the Yacht Club, on the second Monday of each month. We focus on the appearance of the town, cleanliness, litter, rights of way and tourism, acting when and where we can be effective and can make a positive difference. The Dover Society includes many rural areas around the town, and we would welcome new members from these areas to have their voice heard on these topics.

Ongoing areas of interest have been the Underpass & Cannon Street, the campaign to save the Discovery Centre theatre, signage in the town centre, conservation & the state of uninhabited buildings and the Dover Priory Station green corridor.

The Priory Station green corridor has been led by member Deborah Gasking with help

from the Dover Wombles. To date, a wildflower garden has been established close to the bicycle racks (a partnership of Dover District Council, Dover Wombles and the students at Dover Technical College) wooden planters for station platforms have been built by the students at Dover Technical College and placed and filled with flowers by the Dover Wombles and hanging baskets have been added to the platforms.

We continue to liaise with our colleagues and Dover Town Council 'Walkers are Welcome' promoter Pam Brivio on walks in the town, Chris Townend (Growth & Development, DDC), Diederik Smet (Destination Dover Manager) local Kent Police and other local town, district and KCC councillors. Sarah Bradley of DDC is to attend the next meeting of the Committee and will describe DDC's Litter Strategy.