

## Fowey Lifeboat Celebrates 150 Years of Saving Lives

2009 marks the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Fowey RNLI lifeboat station and several events to celebrate this achievement are being arranged.

Fowey Lifeboat station started its life in 1859 based at the small beach village of Polkerris, and was introduced to cover St. Austell Bay and the Fowey estuary. The need for a lifeboat in this area followed a tragic wreck in May 1856 when three men died after their vessel was wrecked near Gribbin Head. One crewmember had been rescued by three local men, who had lowered a boat down the cliff nearby, and braved the rough seas to get to the rock that he was clinging to. Following this dramatic rescue it was decided that a lifeboat was needed in the area and a suitable site was searched for. After large donations of land, stone and money from local landowner William Rashleigh, a lifeboat station was established at Polkerris. Fowey was deemed unsuitable at the time, due to the difficulty in getting out of the harbour in onshore gales, in a pulling and sailing lifeboat. The first lifeboat was named Catherine Rashleigh in honour of William Rashleigh's wife.

During the next 50 years, the lifeboat station at Polkerris continued to rescue people in trouble in St Austell bay and the Fowey area. The name of the station varied over the years, beginning as Fowey, then Polkerris, and at one stage being called Fowey and Polkerris for a number of years. It was finally established as Fowey RNLI lifeboat station in 1922. During the first 60 years, four different lifeboats were stationed at Polkerris, each being the latest model developed by the RNLI. In 1919 the RNLI proposed a self-righting motor lifeboat the area however it would need to be moored as there were no carriage-borne motor lifeboats developed at that time. It was decided that Fowey harbour would be the best place for the motorised lifeboat as the harbour would provide sheltered moorings. The lifeboat station at Polkerris closed in 1922 and the existing lifeboat '*James, William and Caroline Courtney*' was sold and the boathouse was converted into the lifeboat cafe and so remains until this day.

At the same time a lifeboat station was established at Fowey. However due to the First World War the development of the motorised lifeboats had been delayed, so a pulling and sailing boat was stationed on moorings in the estuary. After a period of 6 years Fowey received its first new motorised Watson class lifeboat, which was named '*C.D.E.C.*' by its donors. The new lifeboat was named and dedicated during Fowey Regatta week in 1929 at a ceremony at Whitehouse Slip. During more than 25 years on station the lifeboat men of Fowey used the '*C.D.E.C.*' in more than 60 rescues and were credited with saving almost 50 lives. During the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century most rescues were involved commercial shipping, with only a few pleasure craft needing assistance. Nowadays incidents involving pleasure craft make up the majority of the callouts for the Fowey lifeboats.

Following the success of the '*C.D.E.C.*' Fowey has been served by the '*Denys Reitz*' the latest in the Watson Class of lifeboats; the '*Gertrude*' another Watson Class; the '*Leonore Chilcott*' the first Brede Class lifeboat to be put on station in the UK and the '*Thomas Forehead and Mary Rowse II*' which was a 44ft Waveney Class lifeboat. Fowey's present RNLI lifeboat '*Maurice and Joyce Hardy*' has been on station in Fowey since October 1996 it is a 14.3m all-weather self-righting Trent Class lifeboat which cost £1.75 million at the time. Earlier the same year Fowey lifeboat station also welcomed their first Inshore Lifeboat (ILB), to provide more effective cover around the cliffs and beaches in the local area. The first two

ILB's were relief boats from the fleet before the appointment of the first permanent ILB to Fowey in September 1997. The '*Olive Herbert*' was launched via a quayside davit, and stored in a small wooden container at Berrill's yard.

In the autumn of 1997 the new boathouse for the ILB and the crew facilities were completed and a triple dedication ceremony held for both lifeboats and the shore facility. By this time the Trent class '*Maurice and Joyce Hardy*' was moored opposite Berrills yard so that both boats were positioned closer together facilitating quicker launches. In 2000 the pontoon at Berrills yard was extended alongside the lifeboat moorings eliminating the need for a boarding boat which reduced launch times even further. 2008 saw the dedication of the latest addition to the Fowey Lifeboat Station when a new D Class Inshore lifeboat, '*Olive Two*' replaced the much utilised '*Olive Herbert*'.

In the early years lifeboats were only called upon a few times a year however that has increased over the years. It is worth remembering that the majority of the crew who have served on the various lifeboats at both Fowey and Polkerris are and were volunteers who leave their jobs and families at a moments notice, usually without any idea of what will be required of them. The volunteer crew at Fowey completed 43 launches during 2008, in addition to regular training exercises, extra First Aid and radar simulator courses. Although the crew had a quiet autumn August was busy with 13 callouts, four of which were on the same day! The majority of incidents they attended last year have been to assist broken down craft however this was closely followed by 7 callouts to rescue people who have been cut off by the tide and were trapped on the rocks or cliffs. For more information on the station and details of any shouts this year, go to [www.foweylifeboat.co.uk](http://www.foweylifeboat.co.uk)

Watch out for posters around town with details of the celebration events.