

Fishguard's most famous lifeboat was launched 100 years ago and is still afloat. Now moves are under way to provide a permanent home for the vessel in the town

Centenary return for *Charterhouse*?

THE LIFEBOAT which was involved in the most gallant rescue ever undertaken by the crew of the Fishguard Lifeboat service, could be returning to the town where she was officially launched a century ago.

It was on a stormy December night in 1920 that flares were spotted in Fishguard Bay. They had been fired from the Dutch schooner *Hermina* which had anchored in the Bay, just outside the breakwater, to ride out the gale.

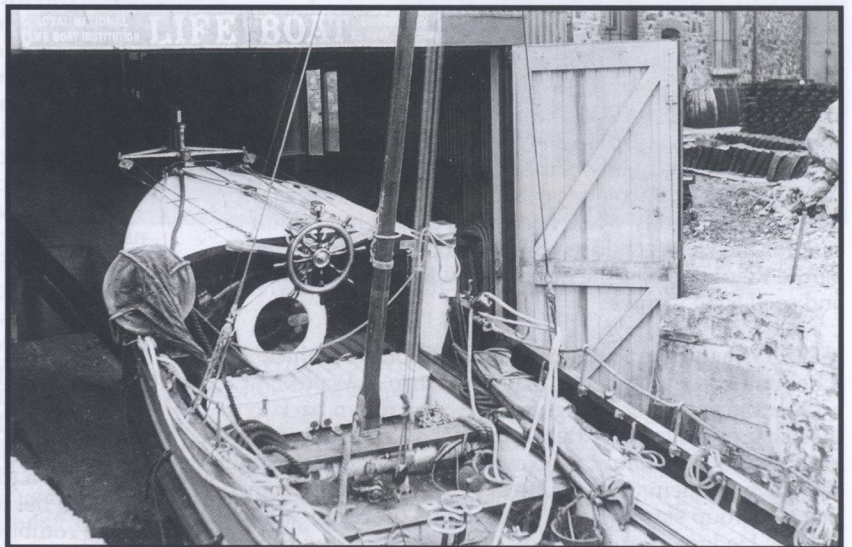
In the mountainous seas the ship began to drag her anchor, taking her slowly but inexorably towards the cliffs and Needle Rock.

The lifeboat crew quickly assembled at the lifeboat slip in Goodwick, and with coxswain John Howells in command *Charterhouse* was launched. She was equipped with sails and oars, but also had an engine and was able to motor across the bay to the stricken vessel.

Here the problems began, because the seas were so high that the lifeboat could not approach too close to the *Hermina* for fear of being entangled in the ship's rigging.

However, thanks to great courage and seamanship over the course of more than an hour, seven members of the Dutch crew were rescued.

Three other crewmen – the captain, the chief officer and the second mate – all decided to stay with the ship, despite warnings from coxswain Howells that the vessel was doomed to be wrecked on the lee shore.



Charterhouse awaits her naming ceremony in 1909.

Leaving the Dutchmen to their chosen fate, the lifeboatmen now had to undertake the hazardous voyage back across the exposed Bay to the shelter of the breakwater. The huge waves which had constantly washed over *Charterhouse* had drenched the engine so that it wouldn't start. This left the lifeboat reliant on sail and oar power.

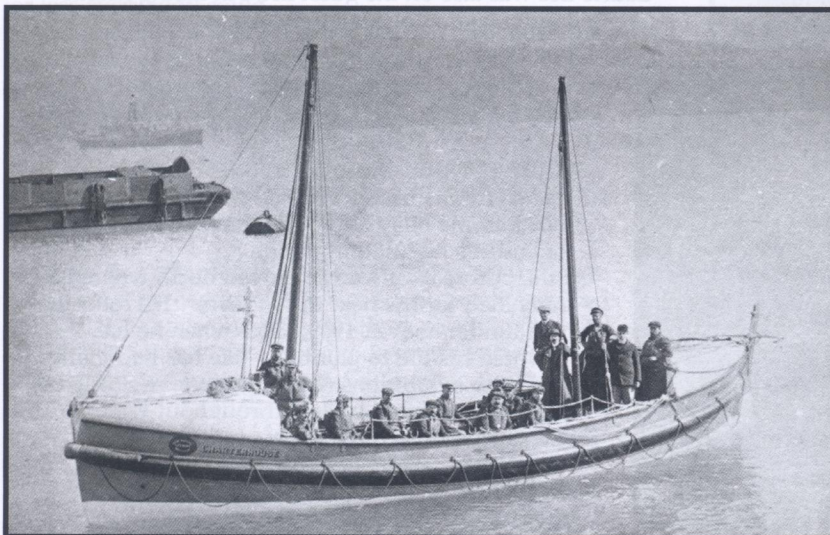
Soon they had even more problems. Having set the mizzen sail – the easier one to raise in the conditions – the crew members were dismayed to see the sail being shredded to ribbons by a ferocious blast of wind.

This left them reliant on the oars alone, unless the jib sail could be set. This was a very dangerous operation in the circumstances, with waves constantly breaking over the bows.

Two crewmen, Tom Davies and Tom Holmes, crawled forward onto the bow air tank and despite the danger of being washed overboard at any moment they managed to set the jib sail.

This allowed *Charterhouse* to sail away from the cliffs and the *Hermina*, although she still had to beat two miles out to sea before being able to tack back into the safety of the harbour. In all, the crew were at sea at night in appalling conditions for over three hours.

Meanwhile another courageous rescue was taking place at Needle Rock, where the *Hermina* had finally come to grief and was starting to break up.



Putting *Charterhouse* through her paces in Fishguard Bay. All the images in this article were provided by Philip Davies whose website, www.PembrokeshiresPast.com, contains details of all his publications