

BRANCH MEMBERS AT THE LUCY LAVERS – June 2017

“Lucy Lavers” is a former lifeboat, and Dunkirk veteran. The vessel arrived in Aldeburgh in 1940, and was commandeered almost immediately by the Royal Navy, and summoned to Dover, where she arrived on 31st May of that year. Along with 17 other RNLI lifeboats, she was needed to help with the Dunkirk evacuation of the British Expeditionary Force and the French Army. Royal Navy crews supported by a small number of RNLI coxswains towed the lifeboats to the French coast, arriving just to the east of Dunkirk harbour to begin the evacuation. Lucy Lavers was in fact ordered to remain at Dunkirk ferrying evacuees out to the larger ships until receiving the order to return home, which came in the late evening of 4th June when she returned overnight with the other surviving lifeboats to Ramsgate.

After being retired from the RNLI in the 1960s, the boat went to Jersey, but was eventually traced by Norfolk boat rescue detectives! She has now been restored and refitted, and is now ‘floating history’, offering trips for a maximum of 10 people, for about 45 minutes to an hour from Wells harbour. Trips, which cost £15 per person, can be booked from the Wells Tourist Office; obviously timings depend on the tides, warm clothing is essential, and potential passengers should note that there are no facilities on board. Two of our members have recently enjoyed a trip on board, and recommend it.

BRANCH MEMBERS AT RESCUE WOODEN BOATS - September 2018



In early September, we finally managed to enjoy our long-planned trip to Stiffkey Maritime Heritage Centre, and on the Dunkirk lifeboat. Nine members and one friend arrived in Stiffkey, and spent a fascinating morning looking around the museum of wooden boats operated by the above named trust. With expert guidance, clearly labelled exhibits, and videos, we learned about the rescue and rebuilding of these beautiful little boats - lifeboats, crab, whelk and cockle boats and their crews, their families, and memories. There was an interesting section about the site: originally an Army camp hosting 15 different units, and with the original buildings still going strong - the museum is in the old Officers' Mess - and of course displays also showed a large amount of information on the restoration of the boats, and how it was done, and the morning flew by.

Before we had been there for long, hot drinks appeared, and we were told that we could go in two groups, to the workshop. What a fascinating eye-opener that was! We were able to look closely at boats under reconstruction, and chat to the men working on them, and next door we saw two of the total of seven lifeboats awaiting refurbishment.

Leaving the Heritage Centre, we returned to Wells in time for the sailing of "Lucy Lavers", which, newly commissioned in 1944, received its first "shout" which was to head for Dunkirk! A beautiful vessel, she took the party out for just under an hour, during which time several of those on board had the opportunity to steer the boat under sunny skies. We then continued to our next venue, the newly opened Granary Cafe at the new Maltings centre on Staithe Street, for a delicious light lunch, before returning home.

Photographs - Pamela Austin