

Port Isaac RNLI - the early days

Records show that back in 1790, South Shields had a Lifeboat, named the *Original*, and around the UK there were over 20 other craft built to this first specific practical life-saving design. Yet it wasn't until 1824 that the first National Lifeboat Service was formed. Sir William Hillary, a distinguished service soldier, was the force behind it:

“... from the calamity of shipwreck no man can say that he may at all times remain free and while he is now providing only for the safety of others, a day may come which will render the Cause his own. A Cause which contemplates the rescue of thousands of human beings now in existence, and an incalculable number yet unborn, from one of the most tremendous of all perils...”

Port Isaac was no different from the rest of the country and local men risked their lives saving the crews of boats in trouble. In 1859, Port Isaac's William Mitchell led three trips out to rescue four men from the sloop *Busy* of Newquay. The Institution awarded him their Silver Medal for his bravery – an award he was to receive again some ten years later whilst out on the first service of the first Port Isaac Lifeboat, *Richard and Sarah*.

Port Isaac Lifeboat Station was established in 1869, mainly to provide better protection to the fishing boats of the village and local area – in bad weather these fishing boats were at great risk as they ran into the harbour. The first *Richard and Sarah*, paid for by a gift of £700 from Mr & Mrs Thornton West of Streatham and Exeter, was sent to Port Isaac in October of the same year. She was 32ft long and 7ft 7in wide, had ten rowing oars and came from the boatyard of Messrs Forrest of Limehouse. The crew consisted of local boatmen and her management was undertaken by a committee of 'resident gentlemen'.

The arrival of the *Richard and Sarah* was a great event for the village and was reported in the Western Daily Mercury:

“The Lifeboat arrived with gear at Bodmin Road Station on Tuesday October 5th 1869. Here it was met by a team of eight horses, kindly lent by the merchants of Wadebridge. At Bodmin she remained for an hour for the inspection of the inhabitants; from here it proceeded to Wadebridge for the night. Early next morning it left, via St Minver and St Endellion, with eight horses lent by farmers of St Endellion. At Trewetha, about a mile from Port Isaac, they were met to form a procession by Capt Ward (Lifeboat Inspector), the local committee, the Rev Smith, Vicar of St Minver, and band, then the boat on her carriage carrying two flags. She contained the crew dressed in white frocks and red caps, holding aloft their oars, while the horses were decorated with ribbons. On arrival at the beach, Capt Ward gave an excellent speech to 2-3000 people. After launching, rowing and sailing exercises, the boat was fastened to a vessel by means of tackle. She was then turned over with her crew, uprighting in less than a minute, and freeing of water in a few seconds.”

Miss Trevan, daughter of the Chairman of the local committee, christened the boat and placed a bottle containing coins and documents below the foundation stone of the Boathouse. Lack of space down near the harbour meant that the Boathouse (today *The Boathouse Stores*) had to be built on a level piece of ground half way up Fore Street that was provided by Lord Robartes of Lanhydrock.



Tom Collins outside the old Boathouse

photo courtesy Annie Philp