

Coxswains and Crew

In March 2015, the North East Maritime Trust, having already researched the rescues carried out by the lifeboat, launched a project to find out about the men who formed her crew, with an appeal to relatives or anyone with connections with former crew who, through their own family history research, may have archive material, press cuttings, photographs or stories about their relatives, that can all be brought together to tell the full story of the Henry Frederick Swan.

Following press coverage in local newspapers and on television news, responses were received from 12 relatives and friends, living in Tynemouth, North Shields, Cullercoats, Whitley Bay, Chester-le-Street and Prudhoe, but also as far afield as Edmonton in Canada.

Up to page 36 is the story of *Henry Frederick Swan* until she was replaced by the Watson class motor lifeboat, *Tynesider*, which arrived on the 1st December 1947.

Pages 36 to 64 was about the men and their relatives who formed her crew and pages 65 onwards are about her New Life and that is given below:-

A New Life

The Henry Frederick Swan started a new career as a sea scout training boat, in January 1948, when she was handed over to District Scout Commissioner, Paulin Denham Christie, of the 3rd Tyne Sea Scouts. In 1954 Mr. Denholm Christie, a senior manager at Swan Hunter and Wigham Richardson shipyard, was appointed Coxswain of Tynemouth lifeboat in 1954, a post he held until 1964. He was appointed to the RNLI's Committee of Management and was instrumental in the design and development of one of the new generation of fast lifeboats, the 47ft. slipway housed 'Tyne' class lifeboat, in the early 1980's.



The Henry Frederick Swan on the day of her handover to the 3rd Tyne Sea Scouts

The Henry Frederick Swan was fitted with a small galley cabin, against the fore-end box, a radio, and her sail area was increased by 100sqft without altering the rig. A sleeping tent could also be rigged over the deck to provide shelter. Other than these alterations there was little change to her appearance.

In August 1950, the Henry Frederick Swan sailed to Gothenburg, for a two week summer cruise around the Swedish Islands. With a crew of nineteen aboard, the boat left the Tyne and crossed the North Sea in two days reaching speeds of 7 knots under sail and power.

On Sunday, 10th June, 1956, the *Henry Frederick Swan* was purchased, at a cost of £400, by the 1st Alnmouth and Lesbury Sea Scouts, with the intention of keeping her at Alnmouth. Setting sail that day, with a crew of four adults and 16 boys, aged between 12 and 18, the voyage was somewhat eventful, the sea being rough and many of the young crew were sea sick.



Press Cuttings from Evening Chronicle, June 1956,

The first article explains that heavy seas and strong head winds delayed the trip from Tyneside to Alnmouth and the second says, “A fine study of the Henry Frederick Swan, purchased by the Alnmouth Sea Scouts from Tynemouth Sea Scouts, as it lay at its anchorage at Alnmouth after its arrival on Tuesday night.”

There was also a problem with the engine, with Jimmy Brown, the mechanic , who was also sea sick, managing to fix the fault. With a heavy swell and head winds, the sails could not be hoisted, and the motor had to be used all the way. Due to knowing what the sea conditions would be like at Alnmouth harbour entrance, and fuel running low, the decision was made to make for Amble. It was not until Thursday 14th June that the Henry Frederick Swan sailed into Alnmouth harbour.

However, being moored in Alnmouth harbour, the weather and tidal conditions restricted access to the sea, and the boat was moved to nearby Amble harbour in 1957.



The Henry Frederick Swan at Alnmouth, 1956. On board, from left to right are, George Abbott, Hylton Charleton, Hugh Lillico, John Field, Frank Bagsahw, Alan Pentleton, Cecil Earle, Dick Taylor(Engineer), Not Known, Jack Richardson(Master), Peter Jefferson, Geoff O'Neil, Not Known, Julian Wilkinson (Scoutmaster), Terry Wilkinson, Clifford Quince, Michael Bedford, John Hurlock, Keith Gerrard.

In the spring of 1958, the lifeboat grounded on a sharp object, piercing the hull and flooding the engine compartment, resulting in the engine being damaged beyond repair. A replacement BMC Commodore engine was installed by Harrison's boatyard in Amble.

The prominent gunwale fender, a characteristic of lifeboat design, was also removed around this time.

On the 28th June, 1958, the *Henry Frederick Swan* left Amble and sailed to Holy Island, anchoring in the harbour, with other small boats, to welcome the Queen on her visit to Lindisfarne. The Sea Scouts also formed a 'Guard of Honour' for the Queen's walkabout around the village.

By 1959, the big problem with sailing the *Henry Frederick Swan* was finding adults with sea faring and navigation experience to skipper the boat, together with an engineer to maintain and run the boat. Scoutmaster, Julian Wilkins, had left the group, and by 1962/63, the Sea Scout Troop disbanded, and the *Henry Frederick Swan* was abandoned.



The Henry Frederick Swan at Harrison's Yard, Amble

In 1963, The *Henry Frederick Swan* was bought by the Hylton Red House Nautical School, Sunderland, and based at the North Dock, and renamed *Wearsider*. It was under this name that she was used in conjunction with Camden Square School, for training pupils attending a Nautical Studies Course set up for Durham County Council.



The Wearsider

The object of the Course was to encourage pupils to stay on at school until they were 16 and give them a sense of adventure and achievement. The pupils on the course were given instruction in rowing, sailing, boat handling and other aspects of seamanship. The Course was not only intended for those who were destined to go to sea although many of the pupils did join either the Merchant or Royal Navy.

In 1972, she was sold into private ownership and renamed Survival, being based at Lemington on the Tyne and little is known about her life after this date, other than during the 1980's and 1990's she became semi-derelict, stuck in the tidal mud for a number of years, on the south side of the river, under the New Scotswood Bridge, before being refloated and stored at Lemington Gut.

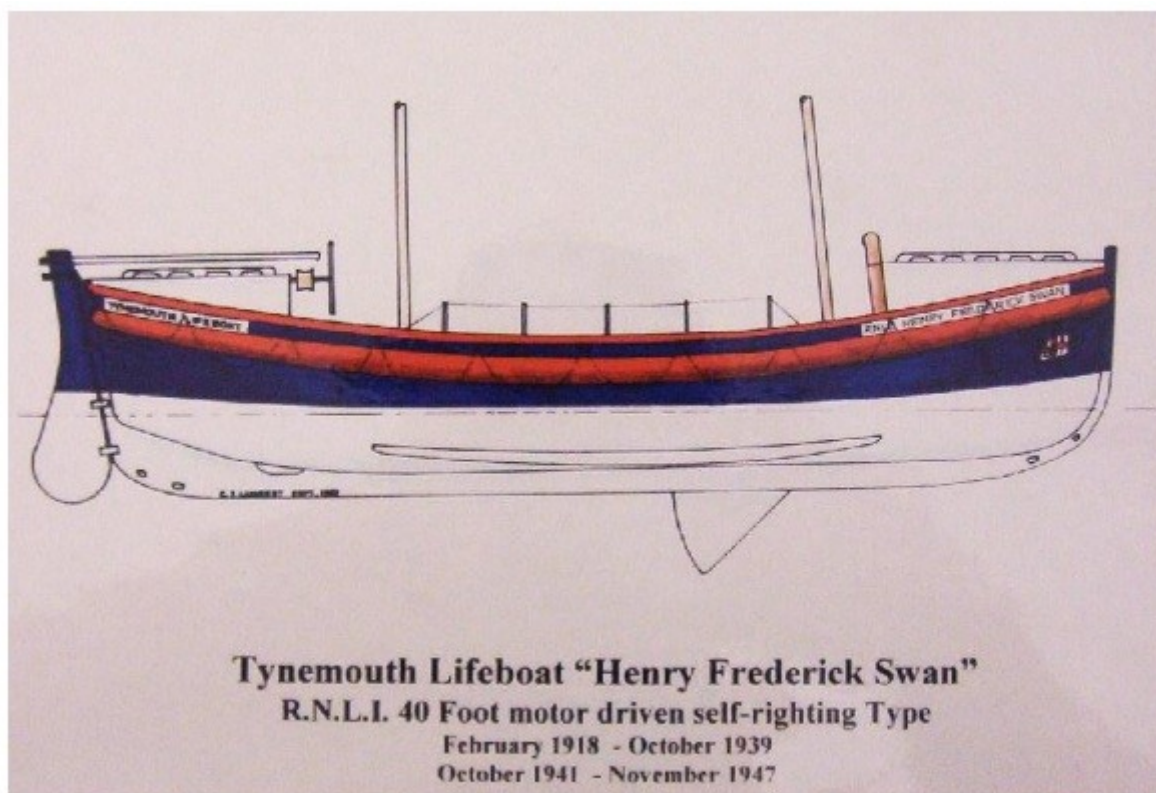
In 2005, she was purchased by the North East Maritime Trust and on May 6th, moved to Tyne Dock and put in temporary storage. The following spring, she was brought to the NEMT workshops at Corporation Quay, Wapping Street, South Shields. Following a condition survey, restoration work to bring her back to her full operational condition, commenced in July 2006, with an anticipated completion date of 2016.



The *Henry Frederick Swan* at Lemington. The galley cabin can be seen toward the front of the boat



The *Henry Frederick Swan* arriving at Tyne Dock, South Shields, 6th May 2005



Line Drawing of the Henry Frederick Swan – Chris Lambert

- 1918: Damaged by a government drifter and repairs to rig, port side fender & bruised planking.
- 1919: Survey and new reversing gear, hatch & skeg band fitted.
- 1920: Survey
- 1921: 2 side air cases and 1 over propeller repaired.
- 1922: Towing bollard stiffened & leaks stopped.
- 1923: Iron knee fitted to towing bollard, new skeg band & rudder chain.
- 1924: Cleaned and painted.
- 1925: New zinc plates to stern band.
- 1927: Cleaned & painted.
- 1930: Complete overhaul, leaks stopped to air cases, bilge keel irons updated & 7 bolts renewed on frame.
- 1932: Small repairs.
- 1933: Complete overhaul, repairs to air cases, rudder, leaks stopped in petrol compartments and on deck.

Henry Frederick Swan RNLI Maintenance Schedule