

Former RNLI lifeboat returns to the water, 70 years after her service life ended

The 101-year-old Henry Frederick Swan has been restored to her former glory thanks to 14 years of hard work - and you could soon climb aboard.

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10:59, 22 Apr 2019 | Updated 11:00, 22 Apr 2019



(Image: Newcastle Chronicle) **The 101-year-old former Tynemouth RNLI lifeboat Henry Frederick Swan is relaunched after an extensive restoration by volunteers at the North East Maritime Trust.**

A restored lifeboat took to the Tyne at the weekend more than 70 years after she left operational service on the river.

The 101-year-old Henry Frederick Swan is the former **Tynemouth** motor, sail and oar lifeboat which saw 30 years of service off the North East coast.

On Saturday, 14 years of restoration by the volunteers of the North East Maritime Trust (NEMT) in South Shields paid off when, watched by an enthusiastic crowd, the boat became reunited with the from the trust's slipway workshop in Wapping Street. As she made circuits of the river she was accompanied by the Tynemouth all-weather lifeboat Spirit of **Northumberland** , and inshore lifeboat Little Susie.

The original crewmen of a century ago would no doubt have been astonished at the advances represented by the 20-year-old Spirit of Northumberland, with its two engines and technology such as radar and electronic chart plotting.

At the launch, the Rev Phillip Bullock performed a blessing of the boat at the quayside, while the brass band of the People's Mission in South Shields played.

The Henry Frederick Swan was the first restoration project undertaken by the trust when it was established in 2005 to keep alive traditional wooden boat building and repair skills.

As part of the project, a new engine and an electrical system were fitted to comply with modern marine safety requirements.

The lifeboat has been restored to her 1918 livery, using the original builders' plans of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution. All the work was carried out by NEMT volunteers, with the exception of new masts, rigging, sails and rope fenders, sourced from specialist manufacturers.

From tomorrow for two weeks, the boat will be moored at Newcastle Quayside near the Tyne Bridge so that people can view her.

The trust also has plans to apply for registration with the Marine and Coastguard Agency to use the lifeboat to operate passenger river trips from the Quayside down river, to raise funds for the organisation's restoration activities.

Jerry Dudman, NEMT chairman, said: "This is the culmination of 14 years hard work by our dedicated volunteers in restoring one of the few remaining early motor lifeboats, built for the RNLI during the First World War.

"The lifeboat spent all of her operational life across the river at Tynemouth and, as well as the restoration, her history has been researched and relatives of former coxswains and crew traced. The completed project allows her story to be told and brings back to life this unique and historic lifeboat – a testament to the bravery of the crews who manned her."

Dave Stafford, chairman of Tynemouth RNLI Branch said: “The launch of the former Tynemouth RNLI lifeboat Henry Frederick Swan is the culmination of many years of restoration work for the volunteers of the North East Maritime Trust. The RNLI has a strong historical background, nowhere more than on the River Tyne, and we are delighted that Henry Frederick Swan has been preserved for future generations to see just how different conditions were for lifeboat crews of the past.”

The boat was named in memory of Henry Frederick Swan, the managing director Tyneside’s Armstrong Whitworth works, who for many years was chairman of the Tynemouth branch of the RNLI.