

Lifeboats' new life

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Many ex-service life boats end up left to rot in creeks, forgotten in fields or butchered beyond all recognition as fishing or even pleasure boats - their tales of bravery lost forever.



Now, thanks to two brothers well known for their boat builder's yard in north Norfolk, the

George and David Hewitt on the Ernest Tom Nethercott, which is undergoing a makeover. Photo: Ian Burt

fates of three RNLI boats look set to be turned around.

George and David Hewitt, known for George's Stiffkey Cockles boats, hope to restore the boats, which span three decades of wooden boat building by some of the most famous boat builders in the trade.

It is a dream come true for the pair, having been brought up as children alongside fishing and RNLI boats along the Norfolk coast with their late father Eddie, who engineered many old crab boats.

They have gone on to work on boats from Wells to Sea Palling from their yard at Stiffkey, near Wells.

And now David hopes to fully restore a 1965 built lifeboat, stationed at Wells for 25 years.

And George's project is the 1951 built Robert Lindsay, famed for being involved in a disaster in October 1953 in Arbroath, Scotland. She capsized on a call out and six of the seven crew died.

After being refitted she was eventually taken out of service and ended up stripped and her stern lopped off to be fishing boat called Zephyr.

"She ended up fishing out of Wells," said David Hewitt. "She was in a very poor condition and she got so bad they couldn't really use her so they abandoned her in a creek there. But we knew where she was.

"The standard of workmanship on those boats was unbelievable. There was no expense spared."

The later Ernest Tom Nethercote was stationed from 1965 to 1990 - its sister boat, the Manchester Unity of Oddfellows, is in Sheringham Museum.

"She hadn't been in the water since she was sold out of the service," said David. "I knew all her crew and I felt I had the ability to do it up so I felt I should. I always wanted to do one up and she was the ideal one to do."

The third, the 1977 built Horace Clarkeson, is one of the last wooden lifeboats built.

Stationed at Moelfre on Anglesey until 1986 she found her way to Southampton where she was rotting in the mud.

It is to be renovated for a customer of the Hewitt's.

It is hoped the Clarkeson and Nethercote will be finished by early summer next year and will be launched together.

Work on the Robert Lindsay could take a couple more years depending on getting parts.

Efforts to get back its original engine canopy, currently on display at Lowestoft Maritime Museum, have so far proved fruitless.

Museum in gesture to lifeboat restorer

By **ELAINE MASLIN**
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A **STIFFKEY** boatbuilder who is restoring a historic lifeboat which lost six of her crew has been given a key part of the boat from a museum.

George Hewitt is restoring the Robert Lindsay, a lifeboat built in 1950 and stationed at Arbroath in Scotland where she capsized losing six of her seven crew in 1953.

The boat is a prime example of a Liverpool class type boat, a design dating back to the 1800s.

But while he has been able to rebuild much of her, the mahogany engine canopy was donated to a museum in Lowestoft when she was converted to a fishing boat, The Zephyr, after she was pensioned out of the RNLI.

Now Lowestoft Muscum has agreed to let Mr Hewitt have the engine canopy and he has given the museum a £500 donation in return.

"I want to thank them for letting me have it," said Mr Hewitt. "It was taken off and Elvin Foster, who owned her, gave it to the museum at some point.

"Part of it was chopped off and went to an old boy to make a garden seat or summer room in Lowestoft, I've been told."

While working on acquiring the



RENOVATION WORK: George Hewitt, busy restoring the Robert Lindsay.

Pictures: LIBRARY

hood he has been busy on renovating the Robert Lindsay, which he hopes could be launched in the summer next year.

The work has meant returning her to her full length after part of the stern was lopped off to meet fishing regulations.

When Mr Hewitt found her she was abandoned at Wells, having fallen into too bad disrepair to be used for fishing.

