

The Lifeboat History of Worthing



The maritime history of Worthing reflects the heroism of the town's local fishermen and is a unique part of our heritage which surprisingly is not well known but which more than deserves recognition in this archive. There is a long tradition of fishing in the town and there were several early coastguard stations dating from circa 1809, but it is the bravery of the fisherman which really stands out and captures the imagination

Incredibly, the local fishermen performed the role of voluntary rescuers in the absence of a town Lifeboat Service. From 1832 to 1865 when the RNLI took over, the brave fishermen carried out many heroic rescues, going to sea in an open boat. The wives, families and volunteers often waited in dread when the lifeboat was launched, not knowing if their loved ones would return.

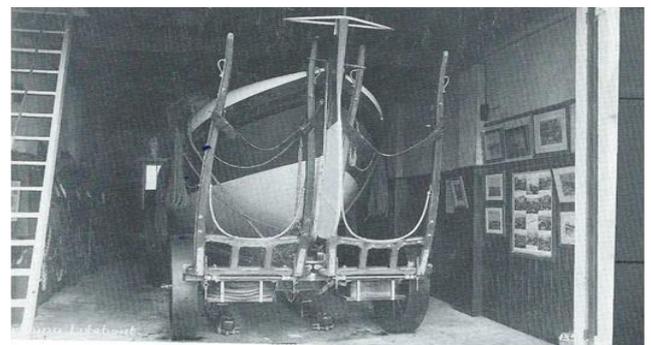
Their heroism is exemplified by the tragedy of the "Lallah Rookh" disaster of November 1850. It is perhaps Worthing's best known maritime tragedy. During a violent storm the barque "Lallah Rookh" was in severe distress. The fishermen launched an open boat from the beach but tragically before it could reach the crew of the stricken vessel the life boat capsized. All eleven crewmen perished. Most were family men and left widows with young children. A fund was set up by local dignitaries and raised £5000 for the families of these heroic men. There is a Memorial at St Mary's Church, Broadwater.



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The Richard Coleman hauled and crewed on the seafront road, and ready for action. Taken by P.C. of Brighton for publication in the Navy and Army Illustrated, this photograph clearly shows the little Victorian lifeboat house, with its turret window open, nestling between two attractive four-storey 18th century terraced dwellings.



A glimpse through the open doors of Worthing's lifeboat house, exposing the Richard Coleman.



The Richard Coleman and its heavy transporting carriage on the sands, preparing to launch at low tide.

The launches were often attended by large crowds when news of a vessel in trouble circulated through the town. Reference material shows that the Worthing and West Sussex coastline experiences difficult currents and sudden shifts in the seabed resulting in shipwrecks and many similar incidents. This makes the heroism of these local fishermen and crews even more poignant. The lifeboats were taken to the launching site east of Worthing Pier by a team of six strong horses and launched from the beach.

A new boat was commissioned by the RNLI in 1887 and 1901, * Various commemorations have been held to remember the "Lalla Rookh" disaster as well as the shipwrecks of the Ophir off the coast of East Worthing and the Capella. The India is remembered annually by a charity event where oranges and lemons are thrown in a friendly charitable competition. These fruits were the original cargo of the India.

The heroism of these early fishermen and lifeboat crews is a moving and important part of Worthing's maritime history which should be honoured and remembered.



Second Coxswain Bill Blann (left) and Coxswain Harry Marshall in the Worthing lifeboat Richard Coleman, 1902.

DEDICATION OF NEW BEACH GARDEN AT SPLASH POINT TO WORTHING LIFEBOAT CREWS & FISHERMEN



The final phase of the Splash Point Regeneration Project has now been completed with the opening of the new Beach Garden to the east of Splash Point.

The Worthing Society proposed that the garden be dedicated to the RNLI in recognition of their significant role in saving so many lives. The bravery and dedication of Worthing's lifeboat crews between 1850 and 1931 and the fishermen is remembered on a slate memorial in the garden.

The new garden on the beach was designed by Len Sephton and created by Worthing Borough Council's Parks Department. The garden has been dedicated to the RNLI and the significant role the organisation has played in saving so many lives in our area.

On Monday 7th May 2012 Sir Peter Bottomley MP dedicated the garden to the memory of the lifeboat crews and fishermen. Peter Huxtable MBE, Coxswain of the Shoreham Lifeboat from 1991 to 2011, replied on behalf of the RNLI.



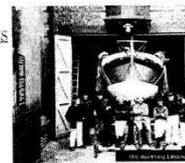
IN RECOGNITION OF THE BRAVERY OF THE WORTHING LIFEBOATMEN 1853 - 1930

SIGNIFICANT RESCUES

- 1868 Lifeboat saved the distressed brigantine *Hilena* and its 6 crew.
- 1883 Lifeboat saved 4 lives in the loss of the schooner *Theresa*
- 1888 Lifeboat saved 10 in the grounding of the brig *Albert H Locke*
- 1891 Double rescue saved 7 from schooner *Kang Karl* and 7 from barque *Caj*
- 1895 Lifeboat saved French captain from foundering brigantine *Halcyon*
- 1896 2 Crew of *Ophir* rescued by breeches buoy, 5 saved from *Flora Emily*
- 1905 Swedish *Liburno* foundered - 2 lifeboats help
- 1912 3 lifeboats + tug rescued 14 Italian sailors from *Andrac*
- 1915 Lifeboat capsized twice - crewman drowned
- 1920 2 lifeboat services, the last one to a big sailing ship and another to the motor-boat *Shamrock II* saving 2 lives
- 1928 Manpowered lifeboat rescued broken-down motor yacht saving 3 lives

WORTHING LIFEBOAT COXSAINS

- 1853 - 1866 George (Johnny) Tyler
Parkes, Tom Blann
- 1866 - 1883 Alfred Dean
- 1883 - 1898 Charles Lee
- 1898 - 1919 Harry Marshall
- 1919 - 1930 William (Bill) Blann



WORTHING'S SUCCESSION OF 4 LIFEBOATS (rowing & sailing)

- 1st boat: 1853 - 1866 Unnamed boat (Supported by local subscript)
- 2nd boat: 1866 - 1880 *The Jane* (RNLI)
- 3rd boat: 1880 - 1887 Renamed the *Henry Harris* (RNLI)
- 4th boat: 1887 - 1901 *The Henry Harris* (RNLI)
- 1901 - 1930 *The Richard Coleman* (RNLI)

Go to Rob Blann's excellent web site (see link below), for the expanded TIMELINE of Worthing's brave lifeboatmen and their deeds in detail, and find comprehensive volumes on the town's close-knit maritime communities of the Victorian, Edwardian and Vintage eras :

<http://www.worthing-lifeboat-town.com/>

Susan Belton , Worthing Society Chair