



Lifeboats

# News release

30 September 2006

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## A special Exmouth RNLI welcome for the new generation of inshore lifeboat

**Exmouth RNLI officially welcomes the station's new D class inshore lifeboat at a special naming ceremony today, Saturday 30 September. The IB1 is the latest version of this popular lifeboat that was first introduced into the RNLI fleet in 1963. The *George Bearman* is faster than the stations present D class, *Spirit of the Exe*, and boasts improved manoeuvrability and equipment.**

The new lifeboat is being named by Mrs Pauline Smith, granddaughter of George Bearman during a special ceremony on Exmouth seafront opposite the inshore lifeboat station.

Tim Mock, RNLI Coxswain at Exmouth, says the lifeboat represents the bravery shown by all volunteers who aim to save lives at sea, as she is named after a coastguard who lost his life on the east coast of England back in 1898\*:

'George Bearman was stationed at Wells-next-the-Sea when he lost his life along with four of his colleagues in February of 1898. They'd been launched in appalling conditions to collect supplies from a gunboat, but capsized. Only one of the coastguards was found alive, clinging to the upturned hull, but he sadly died after being rescued by a fellow coastguard who spotted him from the shore. This tragic incident is yet another example of the selfless bravery that's shown by all seafaring volunteers, including those of the RNLI.'

'We are delighted to receive this new inshore lifeboat and would like to thank Mrs Pauline Smith for her generosity. As a charity, the RNLI relies on public support and as crew, we rely on the best training, equipment and lifeboats to carry out our work saving lives at sea.'

Exmouth's last D class, *Spirit of the Exe*, has served the station since 1997 and her volunteer crews have responded to more than 450 emergency call outs. She has launched to 62 large sailing craft, 32 large powerboats, 53 small powerboats, 32 rubber dinghies, 52 windsurfers, 9 kayaks, 7 jet skis, 6 divers, 18 kite boards, 1 water skier and a single aircraft. These 'shouts' have led to the successful rescue of 323 people and directly saved the lives of 36.

**ENDS**

### Notes to editors

- \*The full story of George Bearman follows this news release.

- The RNLI is a registered charity that saves lives at sea.
- It provides, on call, the 24-hour service necessary to cover search and rescue requirements to 100 nautical miles out from the coasts of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland.
- There are over 230 lifeboat stations.
- RNLI Lifeguards operate in the south and south west of England.
- The RNLI further saves lives through sea and beach education.
- The RNLI depends on voluntary contributions and legacies for its income.

### Vision

To be recognised universally as the most effective, innovative and dependable lifeboat service.

### Royal National Lifeboat Institution headquarters:

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Dorset, BH15 1HZ  
Tel 0845 122 6999  
Fax 0845 126 1999

Charity registered in  
England: 209603  
Republic of Ireland: CHY2678

- The IB1 D class:** Introduced in 2003, the new D class looks very similar to her predecessor, and is exactly the same size and shape externally but the construction and fit out is far superior. The engine has changed from a 40hp to 50hp, which will give her more speed and manoeuvrability in surf. The new engine also has an electric start with a manual start override – a facility much loved by the crew.

The ‘pod’ in the bow allows for dedicated stowage of the lifeboats equipment to keep it secure and more easily accessed at sea.

The IB1 is constructed from a fibre re-enforced pod, deck and transom, with hypalon coated polyester fabric hull sponsons.

The IB1 is fitted with a VHF radio and a chart plotter to ease the job of the navigator in a small boat travelling at speed and allow for pinpoint navigation and communications with the Search and Rescue Co-ordinators ashore.

**Specifications:**

<b>Length:</b>	<b>4.95m</b>
<b>Beam:</b>	<b>2.0m</b>
<b>Displacement:</b>	<b>338kg</b>
<b>Crew:</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Endurance:</b>	<b>3 hours at 25 knots</b>
<b>Construction:</b>	<b>FRC pod with hypalon coated polyester sponsons.</b>

- As a registered charity, the RNLI relies on voluntary contributions and legacies to ensure its volunteer crews have the very best lifeboats, equipment and training to help them save lives at sea.

**For further information please contact Tamsin Thomas, RNLI Media Relations Manager for the south, on 07786 668847.**

[www.exmouth-lifeboat.org.uk](http://www.exmouth-lifeboat.org.uk)

**\*Who was George Bearman?**

A coastguard, stationed at Wells-next-the-Sea on the north Norfolk coast. 108 years ago, in 1898, coastguards were stationed all around the coast of Britain. Their key role was customs and excise as well as watching the coast to ensure the safety of seafarers and to protect from invasion.

On Tuesday 22 February 1898, the gunboat HMS ALARM was sighted off the station and signalled that she had stores for Wells and the coastguards should row out to collect them. A strong and bitterly cold wind was blowing from the north, causing a dangerous sea to build up at Wells.

The divisional officer was on leave at the time so Chief Boatman John Devlin was in charge of the station. Devlin signalled to the HMS ALARM that conditions were not suitable to put a boat out, but was told to go anyway. Devlin had to wait until the flood tide brought enough water into the channel to launch his boat.

The station had only a four-oared gig, which was not suited to bad weather. It was beginning to get dark when they set off at 1645 hrs, with 42-year-old John

Devlin at the helm and oars manned by George Bearman 38, Henry Perry 42, George Jordan 33 and Patrick Driscoll 31.

After two hours rowing against the wind, the men were exhausted and unable to hold the boat on course when they rounded the point at the end of the channel.

Williams, another coastguard on duty that day, was at the point where he had gone to signal to the HMS ALARM that the coastguards were on their way, when to his horror, he heard cries and saw a lone figure clinging to the upturned hull. In a totally selfless act, Williams entered the icy water and dragged John Devlin, the only survivor, to the beach. His colleague, Fitzgerald, summoned help from the town but, sadly, John Devlin died later that night.

Immediately a search was mounted and in the early hours of the morning, the bodies of George Bearman and George Jordan were recovered.

At 0900 hrs another search party found the two remaining bodies, bringing the loss of coastguards to five. Unfortunately they also found the wreck of a gig belonging to HMS ALARM.

It transpired during the day that HMS ALARM had believed that no boat was coming from Wells. Anchored as they were, the ship's Master was unaware of the treacherous conditions nearer to the shore, so he sent his gig with a crew of six to deliver the stores.

All six men had drowned, bringing the total dead to eleven. In Wells, five women lost husbands and seventeen children lost their fathers, and all for the sake of a replacement morse signalling lamp and a mounting post!

George Bearman and his fellow crew had braved ferocious sea conditions in their efforts to collect the stores but had lost their battle with the sea.

A monument to those who lost their lives was erected in the church cemetery near their graves, and 100 years later, in 1998, a flagstaff and a lectern with photographs of the men was set up on Wells Quay.