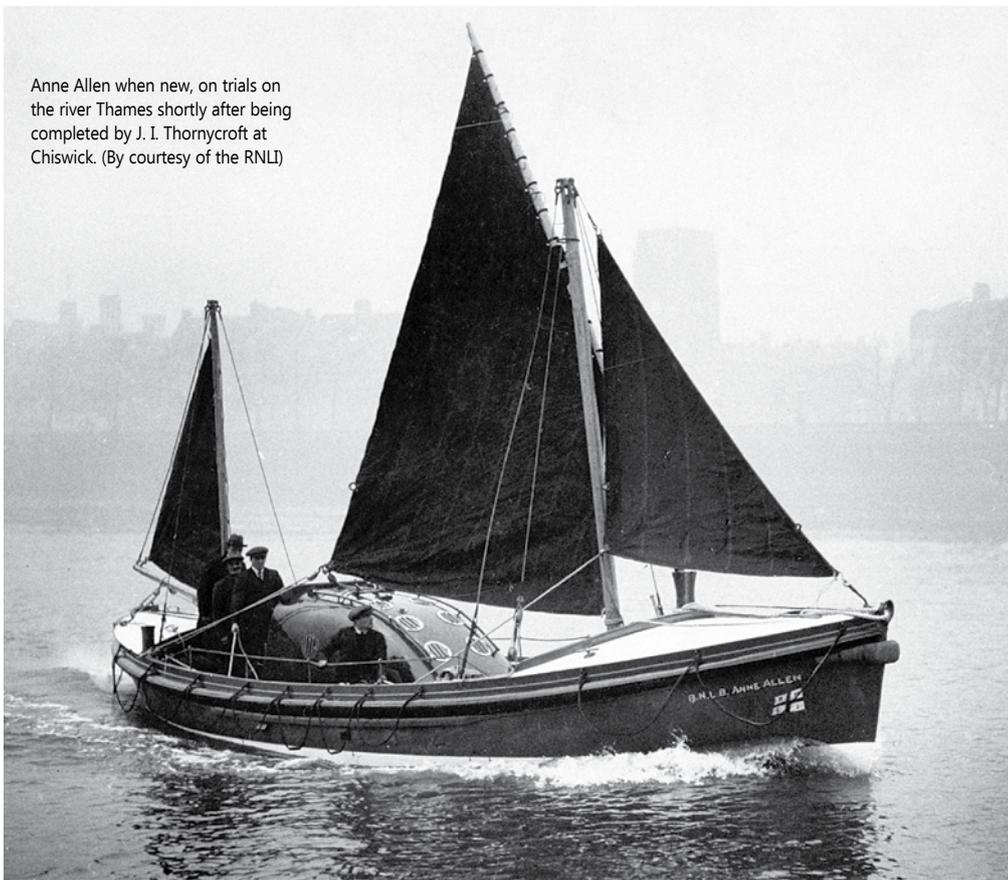


Restoration of a Liverpool motor sailer

The restoration of the historic former Skegness lifeboat Anne Allen has been a labour of love for owner Terry Despicht. But the finished product is an outstanding former lifeboat.

Anne Allen restored and sailing in the Wash with a beam wind off the Roger Sands. This was the boat's first day of sailing in 62 years.
(By courtesy of John Holland)

Anne Allen when new, on trials on the river Thames shortly after being completed by J. I. Thornycroft at Chiswick. (By courtesy of the RNLI)



until 1950, when Anne Allen was at Skegness, and had taken me at the tender age of four to 'see the lifeboat', a visit which left a lasting impression. I clearly recall looking round to see that no one was watching before I touched that gleaming hull.'

So, with plans for a restoration in place, enquiries were made regarding the sourcing of original parts. The first item to become available was the galvanised centreboard case, which was taken from Nellie and Charlie (ex-ON-764), the former Anstruther lifeboat then at Felixstowe Ferry. Between 2002 and 2010 many more items were purchased, including some duplicates which have been put to good use on other Liverpool. Parts from the then derelict Morison Watson (ex-ON-741), found in a field in Terregles, Dumfries, were retrieved and shared between Anne Allen and the 35ft 6in self-righter City of Nottingham (ex-ON-726).

Annie Ronald and Isabella Forrest (ex-ON-792), one of eight of that Liverpool class that had been fitted with bronze underwater parts, was then acquired. Her canopy had been removed and, as the hull of Anne Allen was in much better condition, it was decided to use the major parts of ON-792 to restore Anne Allen.

Anne Allen's original iron keel had lost 20 per cent due to rusting, so the bronze replacement from ON-792 was a bonus, although replacing a keel is not an easy task. The spars showed the scars of 66 years of use, so a lathe was constructed to turn them while square sheets of abrasive paper were used to bring them back to clean timber.

After years of dedicated restoration work by owner Terry Despicht, the former Skegness motor lifeboat Anne Allen (ex-ON-760) took to the water for the first time in 2013 having been completely renovated, and made a fine spectacle as she was sailed on the Wash, her original home waters. This historic lifeboat was the first motor boat to serve at Skegness, where she was on station from 1932 to 1953, and is now back to her best having been saved for the future by a dedicated owner.

After a 21-year RNLI career, Anne Allen was sold out of service at the end of 1953, but is the only survivor of the eight lifeboats that served at Skegness prior to the current 12m Mersey Lincolnshire

Poacher. One of only a handful of lifeboats built by Thornycroft, she was the second of 28 single-screw 35ft 6in Liverpool class lifeboats to be built, and is the oldest surviving boat of the class. The first, Oldham (ON-750), was broken up at Hoylake in November 1955.

During the 21 years that Anne Allen served Skegness, she was launched 120 times on service and is credited with saving 43 lives. Between 1939 and 1945 she was particularly busy, searching for crews of crashed aircraft as Skegness was close to the many Bomber Command air bases in Lincolnshire and Norfolk.

After her sale, she was acquired by the Cox family of Wells next the Sea, where she was adapted for whelking in the 1950s with all her

side air cases and seats removed, her steering wheel moved aft to the aft end box bulkhead, and the open end of the canopy taken out to create extra deck space. She was based at Wells for 21 years before being bought by Stratton Long Marine, in Blakeney, and substantially altered to become an angling boat. The alterations saw the removal of the drop keel and casing, as well as the main decking and canopy, which was burnt, and she was renamed Golden Fleece II.

In 1999 she was purchased by Terry Despicht and, although she only possessed a few of her original fittings, a complete restoration was planned. Terry explains: 'This was partly motivated by the fact that my father had been a Wash fisherman



ABOVE Anne Allen at Wells in the 1950s after being sold out of service.



ABOVE As Golden Fleece II, Anne Allen is loaded onto road transport in 2002.

A major challenge was the replacement of the belting, which still retained some of the original cork infill in parts, so the original cork-filled belting was replaced by a strip planked one to increase the strength and rigidity while also offering a chance to put the correct curve back into the port gunwale, which had lost its original shape. The belting was covered by modern red sail cloth material to replicate the original canvas.

Restoration under way

The restoration started in early 2000 while she was still on a mooring in the Blakeney estuary with hours of paint stripping, a repetitive task interspersed with the removal of interior structures that had been added during the conversion to an angling boat. These included water tanks, rusty steel fuel tanks in the aft end box, and a hydraulic steering system that had replaced the original one.

When Anne Allen was brought to Terry's home in Sutterton in 2002, the anti foul and exterior paint were removed and the whole hull was allowed to breathe while being regularly sprayed with wood preservative. This process took about ten minutes and prevented the hull timbers from drying out too much. Ten years later the hull was painted and to date the paint has adhered well.

From the start of the restoration the construction of a new canopy



ABOVE The HW3M Lister engine being saved from Morison Watson (ex-ON-741).

BELOW The reconditioned Lister HW3M engine ready for installation in Anne Allen.



had been considered. Prior to the purchase of ON-792, a quantity of Honduras Mahogany had been bought with the intention of cladding a newly-built canopy with an outer layer of this timber



ABOVE Joel Grunnill MBE (on left), who joined Anne Allen as a crew member aged 15, visits the boat to monitor progress in May 2008, with Terry Despicht.

to replicate the original. Although a canopy came with ON-792 it had been removed by a jigsaw cut around its base, and its original shape was distorted.

The sections of the main frame

were temporarily fitted to Anne Allen's deck and locked into position with temporary braces to guarantee it would fit when completed before being glued together. Considering that we were taking virtually everything from the hull of one Liverpool and fitting it all into another Liverpool hull made four years earlier in a different boatyard, the similarities of the two boats were amazing.

Once the outer skin of the canopy had been sanded back to bare wood, it was clear that the finish would not pass muster so in the end the Honduras mahogany was used here. Planks measuring 5mm by 100mm wide, and about 8ft in length, were cut. Getting the pattern below was difficult, but was eventually achieved after much trial and error. The final stage was to open up the screw holes to replicate the original rivets, and drill dozens of others to match the original rivet hole pattern.

Every metal part was grit blasted with the finest glass bead, then buffed and polished, before being cleaned twice with cellulose thinners. Three coats of Incralac were applied, which have withstood three years of weathering.

When purchased in 1999, Anne Allen had a Perkins 4236 engine, but Terry wanted to replace it. Brought from Morison Watson was an old HW3M 36bhp Lister engine, which had been fitted in



Owner Terry Despicht with Anne Allen in 2008, with restoration work in full swing. (Nicholas Leach)

ANNE ALLEN

BUILT	1932, J.I. Thornycroft, Chiswick, yard no.T2255
TYPE	35ft 6in x 10ft Liverpool motor
DONOR	Legacy of Mrs Anne Allen, Spalding, Lincolnshire
STATIONS	Skegness Dec 1932–Dec 1953
RECORD	120 launches, 43 lives saved
ENGINES	Single 35hp Weyburn AE6 six-cylinder petrol
SOLD	1953
LATER NAMES	LN175, Golden Fleece II
CURRENT LOCATION	Fosdyke Marina, Lincolnshire

Restored and refurbished, Anne Allen homeward bound to her new home at Fosdyke Yacht Haven . (By courtesy of John Holland)



ABOVE The new engine canopy in build.

her. It was completely seized and had been under water at some time, but was a nice compromise between the original six-cylinder 35bhp Weyburn AE6 RNLI petrol engine and the 67bhp Perkins. Getting the engine cleaned up was a considerable effort, with the cylinders being rebored, the crankshaft reground and many new parts fitted, but the end result was a power unit that looks very at home under the canopy.

A retired Lister foreman commented: 'You will have more power at your propeller with that Lister than they had with the AE6'. He also assured Terry that the smaller diameter original dry RNLI exhaust system would cope with the Lister's exhaust.

Replacing the sails

The final major task was to replace the sails acquired with a new set, which was made by Ratsey and Lapthorn whose name appeared on two original Liverpool jibs Terry had come across. They were fitted and tried out for the first time

in 2015. Considering that Anne Allen has a long straight keel, a small area of centre keel and a very moderate low aspect sail area meant mainly as a back up to the engine, Terry was pleased to find she goes about well and gybes effortlessly.

At the end of the process, Terry said: 'The restoration has taken many years, but to own and sail the oldest surviving Liverpool is a privilege. Having now completed much of the restoration, were I to be given unlimited funds with

which to purchase any boat of my choice I would chose her.'

But what of this historic boat's long-term future? Terry says he has been asked what he plans to do with Anne Allen in the long-term, but has no simple answer. 'If anyone has a possible answer, I would like to hear from them,' he says. Meanwhile, she is being kept at Fosdyke Yacht Haven, in the water from April to October and in the shed from November to March, while the many smaller additional tasks are worked

through, but these are relatively minor compared to the work that has been completed.

And now, as Terry looks back over what he has achieved, he says, 'A debt of gratitude must go to the skilled Thornycroft boatbuilders who built her at Platts Eyot, Hampton; to the Skegness RNLI crew members who looked after her so well for her first 21 years; and to the Cox family and Tikkie Taylor who preserved her for almost half a century between 1953 and 1999.'

Anne Allen under sail. (By courtesy of John Holland)

