

Pumping a tired old boat full of new life

Kay Lockett meets the man whose labour of love could see the Thames' last big fire boat brought back to its former glory

An unsung hero of the Thames is being restored to its former glory at Southdock Marina, in Southwark.

Built in 1935, The Massey Shaw fireboat served the London Fire Brigade for many years and also took part in the Second World War Operation Dynamo to rescue soldiers from the beaches at Dunkirk.

It ferried 500 men to the warships and brought over 100 men back to England.

During the Blitz, the vessel pumped vast quantities of water from the Thames to fight fires all along the waterfront.

The historic boat, the last of its kind, has been saved from dereliction by a group of enthusiasts who are currently engaged in its restoration.

Thanks to a substantial grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund, a team of volunteers is hoping to have her seaworthy by 2012.

Project manager David Rogers said: "We saved her from the scrap heap and she deserves to live on."

"Although a labour of love for me, she is London's boat and is part of London's heritage."

The boat has survived two sinkings and has also been the victim of vandals twice. Mr Rogers retired from the fire brigade three years ago and is now piloting an education project to teach

FACTFILE

- In service until 1971
- Length: 78 feet
- Beam: 13 feet 6 inches
- Draught: 3 feet 9 inches
- Weight: 50 tons approximately
- Speed: 12 knots (maximum)
- Pumps: Two Merryweather & Sons four-stage fire pumps, can pump 3,000 gallons of water per minute
- The London Fire Brigade currently operates two smaller fireboats – Firedart and Fireflash on the Thames

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youngsters about the history of the boat and the river.

He also wants to work with the local community and unemployed people to teach them new skills by working on the restoration.

He said: "Once restored she will need to earn her keep – we can hire her out for weddings, christenings, corporate events and educational visits."

"We hope to get involved with some displays on the river during the Olympics."

The restoration team is on site five days a week and anyone is welcome to go along and offer help.

For more details email Mr Rogers via David.Rogers@MasseyShaw.org or go to masseyshaw.org for more information.



The Massey Shaw on the banks of the Thames, above, patrolling the river, right, and showing off her pumps, below



GETTY



Widdecombe

Celebrities back charity in £16m fundraising bid

JEREMY Paxman and Ann Widdecombe have thrown their weight behind a Newham charity looking to raise £15.6million.

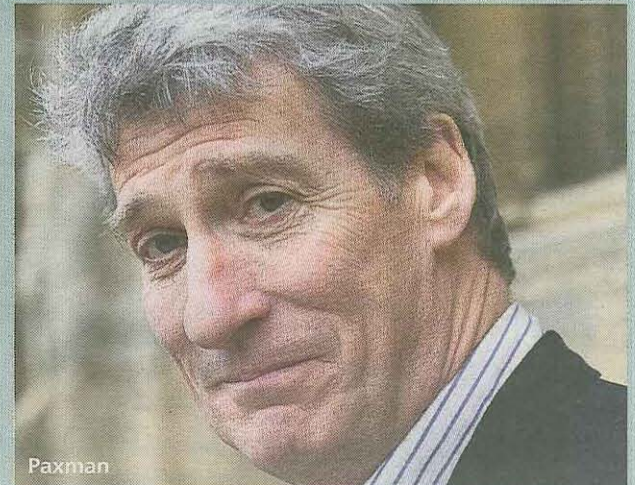
The duo have become patrons of Anchor House, which is based in Canning Town and helps homeless people get back on their feet.

The group has helped over 300 people in the last two years and is now looking to expand their premises.

Director Keith Fennett said: "Our mission is to build a new 21st century building with a purpose-built block of 25 move-on studio flats, workshops, a new catering training facility, leisure and recreational areas."

"Full planning permission has already been secured and we have raised £6million so far, but more support is needed." Go to anchorhouseuk.org

GETTY



Paxman