

Councillor Deirdre Mackay

Speech marking Helmsdale Lifeboat Day

6th. August 2011

For the people of Helmsdale and Wick the sea forms part of every day life. It is livelihood, pastime and heritage.

But the sea is also unforgiving.

Nobody knows that better than the brave souls who put their lives on the line to save others from its grasp.

That is why we hold in unique regard the courageous and selfless men and women of the Royal National Lifeboat Institute.

The people of Helmsdale and Wick are very proud of their long association with the RNLI.

This is why we recognise the vital part that Corrie and his crew play in our combined effort to save people from the sea.

Last Thursday I enjoyed a lovely, entertaining evening in the company of Sandy, Annie, Margaret and Andy.

I come from Wick and am delighted with the strong connection between my former home and my new one.

Conversation flowed with stories about the sea, Helmsdale and Wick boats past and present and Helmsdale and Wick worthies past and present.

Colourful stories which should be recorded before they are lost

Many a colourful tale, particularly about Wick when the town was dry.

The shebeens, illicit stills, even a block in the wall of a house where, if you chapped with a coin, the block came out, the coin went in and a bottle would be placed in your hand.

Reflecting on these stories later on what struck me was that every story involving criminality involved a Wicker!

The Helmie never featured in the illegal goings on- apart from happily being on the receiving end of the contraband!

So, in defence of my home town, all I can say is try knocking on any wall in Helmsdale and see if a dram miraculously appears!

With the humorous stories however were the graphic, tragic tales.

Men lost just yards from here we stand today - while relatives struggled to save them.

There are few people here today who do not know someone tragically lost at sea.

This is why we understand the strong relationship between Helmsdale, Wick and lifeboat

It is surely from these bitter personal experiences that sailors all around the coast could see the value of a nationally organised sea rescue of well built boats, volunteer crews, funded completely by voluntary effort.

It is no mean feat that the RNLI has weathered every national economic upheaval by remaining a voluntary organisation. And why?

Through effort like we see today.

Helmsdale branch always been strong and raised lots of money.

It's a wee branch but is widely, and at highest level, recognised as top fundraisers.

This year they should be very proud of this magnificent cheque for over £5000.

Fundraising is not easy particularly in present times so thanks to everybody who willingly gives their time to the lifeboat for their hard work, constant support and dedication.

This is what it takes to maintain a thriving lifeboat service which, through your efforts, is the envy of the world.

Thankyou also to all those who contribute so generously to the boxes not only in Helmsdale but also down the coast, Brora, Golspie, Tain and in to Rogart.

There is a very special thank you this year and it sums up the generosity of the fishing community so concerned with the welfare of those on the sea that it does all it can to support them.

Mr and Mrs Jappy, recently celebrated their Golden Wedding, and instead of presents, requested that donations instead be made to the Lifeboat – heartfelt thanks for the raised £800.

I had the great privilege today of travelling down from Wick on the Roy Barker 11 and, in a world so often marked with arrogance and selfishness, it is humbling to witness the unassuming commitment and dedication of the crew of volunteers who, without question, have elected to put their lives on the line to save others.

Corrie and crew - it is a comfort to us all to see you here today and on behalf of the people of Helmsdale we pray that the Roy Barker 11 will keep you safe while you work to keep others safe and we thank you for your work in the past and your work in the future.

web links :

Deirdre Mackay : <http://www.deirdremackay.org.uk>

Helmsdale Community website : http://www.helmsdale.org/helmsdale_introduction.html