



The Rijnstroom IV taking shape again during its refurbishment after the devastating fire last May. CONTRIBUTED

Boat with a history rises from the ashes

SHE began life as a bulk grain carrier in Holland, was commandeered by the Germans during the Second World War to transport munitions and, as a Bembridge houseboat, was badly damaged by fire eight months ago.

Now, however, after a six-month refit by her owner, carpenter Robert Lowe, the Rijnstroom IV has been lowered back into the water at Hythe ready for the final refurbishment of her interior.

Rob, 62, who also has a house in Furrllongs, Newport, with his wife, Elaine, bought the former barge for £135,000

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11 years ago after spotting her moored at the Odessa Boatyard in Little London, Newport.

The keen sailor met Elaine, 60, while taking courses at UKSA in Cowes, which resulted in him gaining his Yachtmaster Ocean qualification.

After buying Rijnstroom IV, he spent eight years refitting the barge to a high standard before the disastrous fire at the end of May last year which completely destroyed its wheelhouse and badly damaged the interior.

Rob said: "The fire was only burning for half an hour

RIJNSTROOM IV

Built: 1923

Weight: 140 tonnes

Length: 97 feet.

First in service: In Holland, transporting bulk goods, such as grain, along the Dutch canal system
War service: Commandeered by the German navy and used to transport munitions along the River Rhine.
New engine: British engine fitted by the Germans during the war.

1974: Imported into the UK from Holland to Sunderland — refitted as a houseboat.

2000: Moored on the River Hamble until 2002 when she was moved to the IW.

but an amazing amount of damage was done.

"The seat of the fire was in the wheelhouse but they don't really know what caused it. It completely destroyed the wheelhouse and everything in it. The helm melted and a lot

of the original steelwork buckled. I was gutted."

The fire happened just before the couple were due to sell the vessel for £175,000.

However, Rob gritted his teeth and, after Rijnstroom IV was towed to a Hythe

shipyard, began the painstaking task of rebuilding the ship himself.

He encountered some problems along the way, including having to replace rusted plates on the hull.

In three months time, the interior refit will be finished and the vessel is likely to come back to Bembridge where Rob has bought a berth for her. Following the refit, the boat has been valued at around £345,000 and is being put up for sale.

Rob said: "Apart from a few weeks, I have worked between 12 and 15 hours a day, seven days a week on her. She has probably undergone the most comprehensive refit she has ever had."



Rob Lowe in the refurbished wheelhouse.

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Flashback to May last year when the boat was badly damaged by fire.