

Changing lives: finding kindness on board the Daniel Adamson

09/05/2016



After his wife died, Dave Lowles went down to Albert Dock on Liverpool's waterfront most days.

"I needed to get out of the house which seemed so empty after I lost Elaine," he says. Like many Liverpool men of his generation, he had been to sea, and the waterfront felt like a second home to him.

"I've made so many new friends. My week ahead is now planned. The phone is always ringing and we meet up regularly for a pint."

- Dave

One day, as he was walking past a rusty old tug tied up in the dock, he heard voices. Something drew him up the gangway, where he got talking to a couple of the ex-crew who were on board.

The tug was the *Daniel Adamson*, or “the Danny” as she is affectionately known, a steam-powered tug tender built in 1903 to tow barges and carry passengers across the River Mersey. Later ‘the Danny’ worked on the Manchester Ship Canal, but she hadn’t sailed since 1984.

The Danny had been rescued from the breaker’s yard with days to spare and a restoration project was underway, thanks to a £3.8million grant from HLF. This week, the *Daniel Adamson* will re-launch in Liverpool, fully restored and gleaming.

The HLF grant was awarded in recognition of the Danny’s importance in Britain’s maritime heritage as the last surviving Mersey-built steam tug still in operation. She is also unique in having 1930s Art Deco saloons, which have also been restored.

The Danny had been vandalised and left to rot but miraculously the 1903 engines were intact. The ex-crew members Colin and George had been deckhands on the tug and were working to bring her back into peak condition. “I asked if they needed any volunteers,” says Dave. “They said yes, and I took off my coat there and then and got to work.”

Making friends

It’s no exaggeration to say that volunteering has changed his life, he says. “I’ve made so many new friends. My week ahead is now planned. The phone is always ringing and we meet up regularly for a pint and an update on the Danny’s progress. None of that would have happened if I hadn’t walked up that gangplank.”

Dave was part of the team that made the rope fenders, which act like bumpers fore and aft. “It’s intricate work like knitting, all made by hand, with the Turk’s Head knot in the middle,” he explains.

But it was the engine room that most caught his imagination. “Although I was at sea for 27 years I was catering crew and knew nothing about engines,” he says. “As I got to know more about them they became a passion for me, and I’ve learned the old skills of raking out the ash and gradually building the ‘upside-down’ fire.”

Now all the work is complete, Dave will take on a new role acting as a guide for visitors and schoolchildren. “People will be amazed when they see the engine room with all the gauges and valves, which are a work of art in themselves. Without people buying National Lottery tickets these amazing historic engines would never have been seen. When she’s in steam and the flags are flying she’s going to look splendid.”

Finding kindness and camaraderie

Two years ago Dave’s brother Carl died. “He was 11 years older than me, but we were very close,” he says. “He showed me how to look after myself, everything from how to put the crease in my trousers to how to treat people properly.

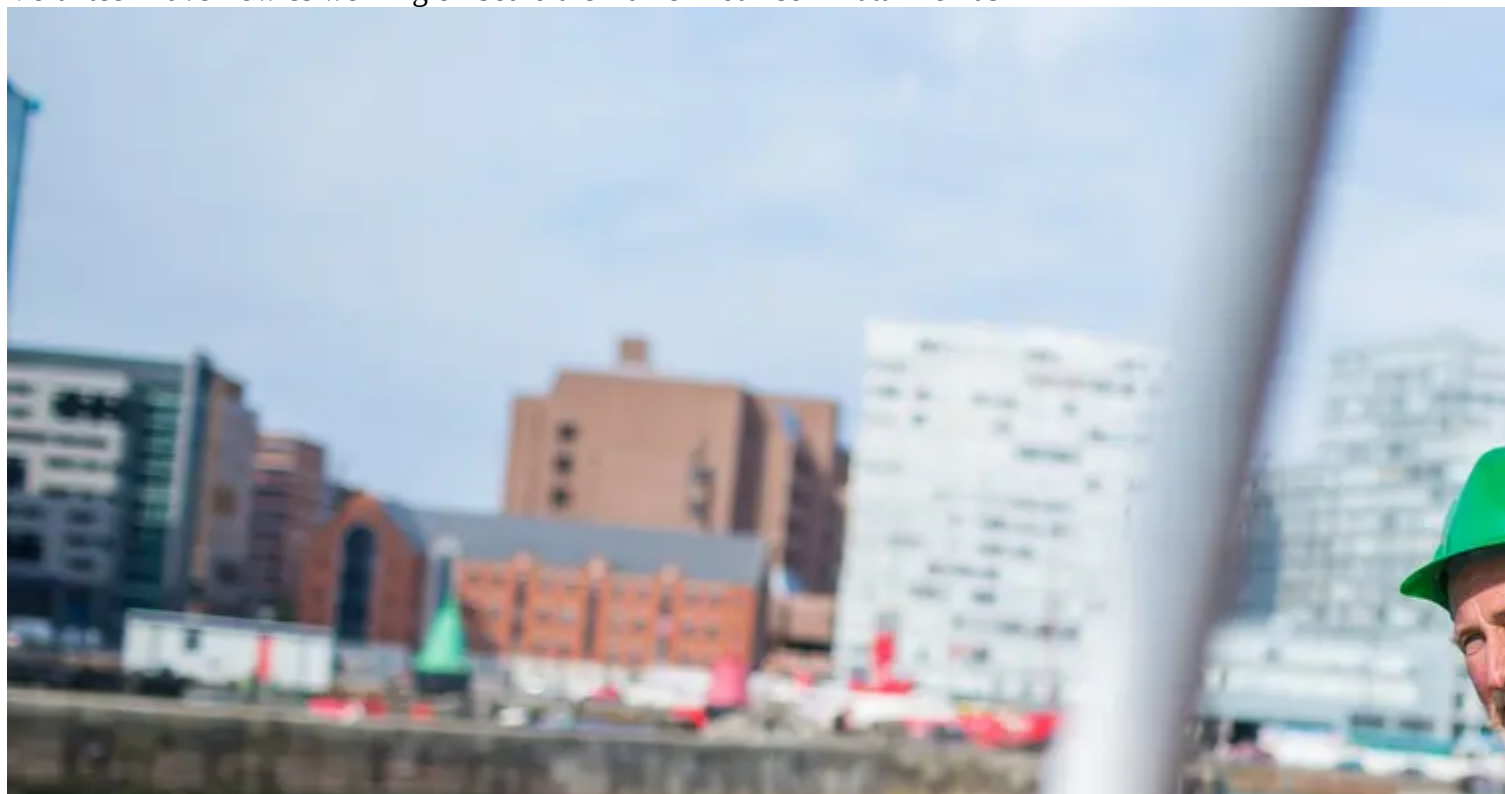
“I miss him badly but the lads are there for me, and I don’t know what I’ve had done without them,” he adds. “I’ve sailed around the world more than a dozen times, but I’ve found true camaraderie and kindness here at home on the Danny.”



Volunteer Dave Lowles working on board the Daniel Adamson Matt Thomas



Volunteer Dave Lowles working on board the Daniel Adamson Matt Thomas



Dave on board the Daniel Adamson at Liverpool's Albert Dock Matt Thomas