

THE SS EXPLORER



The triple-expansion steam engine.

The Leith-registered, former Fishery Research Vessel *SS Explorer*, is a survivor. She is a little-known part of the UK's maritime heritage and played a crucial role in the development of our fishing industry, our knowledge of the sea, and its ecosystem. Created at a turning point for marine engineering as steam gave way to diesel, she has weathered the worst of the fickle seas, escaped the scrapman's torch twice, and dodged eviction, during her 61 years thus far. She is unique, with the fit-out of a cruise liner of the day, laboratories that would not have looked out of place in a university, and the beautiful lines of a time when ships were built with passion and hard graft.



At sea in the 1960s

“One of the very first research ships in the world to go to sea with a computer”

“Halls built her up to a quality, not down to a price, hell-bent to make sure she exemplified the best of British shipbuilding”

1955

Our ship's story began when she was launched in June 1955. The *FRV Explorer* as she was then known, built to the order of the Scottish Home Department, was one of the last vessels to be completed by the famous Aberdeen shipbuilding firm of **A. Hall & Co. Ltd.** The hull form was based on a deep-sea Arctic side-trawler for service in hostile northern waters, and the vessel contained a mixture of traditional and modern technologies. Unusually at that late date, her main propulsion was provided by a triple-expansion steam engine and an oil-fired, three furnace 'Scotch' boiler. Most auxiliary systems however were electrical, powered by on board Ruston diesel generators - two 80 kW main generators, and one 24 kW for use in harbour.

In her primary role as a research vessel, *FRV Explorer* was fitted out to the highest of standards to ensure the comfort of the scientists and seamen who served on her. She was retrofitted with an analogue computer, one of the first civilian ships so equipped.

SS Explorer operated in the waters around Scotland, the Barents Sea, Spitzbergen and as far south as the south coast of Ireland. She was built in Aberdeen and operated from there under the direction of the Torry Fisheries Marine Laboratory but often returned to Leith between cruises, which typically lasted about a month.

“A quality piece of heritage”

SS Explorer qualifies as a truly historic ship in her own right, worthy of preservation for future generations. She represents a unique example of one of the world's last steam-powered scientific research vessels and can claim to be at least as important in terms of her contribution to marine and ecological science as another steam driven research ship of an earlier time - *RRS Discovery* berthed in Dundee.

PROSPECTUS

The main purpose of this prospectus is to provide a fully-illustrated introduction to, and overview of, the unique historic importance of the *SS Explorer* – her value as an educational and heritage asset in the national context, and more particularly, as a unique part of the maritime heritage of Leith - her port of registry. We make the case for funding support to have the ship dry-docked to enable urgent essential work to be carried out on the hull. The document then explores the potential of the restored *SS Explorer*, berthed in Leith, to become a major visitor attraction and an important component of a wider cultural and educational experience, centred on the maritime history of Leith and beyond.

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