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Ernest Wilson

Scarborough's historic Dunkirk 'little ship' visitor attraction goes on sale for £250,000



A historic vessel that helped rescue more than 1,200 Allied troops from Dunkirk during the Second World War is being put up for sale in Scarborough as a hospitality business and visitor attraction.

The Regal Lady, known as the Dunkirk Experience, has been moored in Scarborough harbour since 1987 and is now home to a bar and café, with indoor and outdoor seating overlooking the town's South Bay and harbour.

Ernest Wilson, part of BTG Eddisons, has been instructed to market the freehold business and vessel with offers around £250,000.

The floating venue generates a weekly turnover of around £5,000, with net profits of more than £80,000 a year. It has seating for around 60 people inside, with a further 60 seats on the pier outside, and hosts regular events during the tourist season.

Originally built in steel in 1930, the Regal Lady was among around 850 privately owned vessels that joined the Royal Navy during Operation Dynamo, the evacuation of Allied troops from Dunkirk between 26 May and 4 June 1940.

The flotilla included fishing boats, pleasure craft, lifeboats and commercial vessels, which made the journey across the Channel to help bring 338,000 Allied soldiers to safety.

The Regal Lady itself made three trips to Dunkirk and helped rescue more than 1,200 soldiers.

It is now registered as a National Historic Ship and is a member of the Association of Dunkirk Little Ships.

The vessel underwent extensive restoration and refurbishment in 2019, including renewal of electrical and mechanical systems. A full survey was carried out in 2020, followed by an ultrasound survey in 2024, confirming its continued seaworthiness.

Michael Peel, director at Ernest Wilson, said: “The Regal Lady is an iconic vessel with an extraordinary story, and it’s a very unusual business opportunity.

“It played a part in one of the most famous events of the Second World War, making three trips to Dunkirk to bring back more than 1,000 soldiers, saving their lives in the process. To still have an asset with that much history operating as a visitor attraction today is pretty remarkable.

“Having been part of the Scarborough waterfront for nearly 40 years, it is well established as a popular place to visit, so there is a great business here as well as an important piece of maritime history.

“I think there is huge potential for a new owner to build on both sides of that story – developing the bar, café and events business while making even more of the Dunkirk connection and enhancing a much-loved visitor attraction for Scarborough.”

The business currently operates mainly between Easter and October, with scope to increase revenues through evening opening, private parties and other events.

Although currently based in Scarborough, the vessel remains fully seaworthy and could be relocated to another location by a new owner.

Ernest Wilson, now part of real estate consultancy BTG Eddisons, was founded in 1956 and specialises in buying and selling hundreds of small businesses every year, from cafés and restaurants to hotels, pubs and visitor attractions.