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The 'Red Carpet' for an important maritime vessel



In April the media was full of stories about pirate radio stations thanks to the new Richard Curtis film "The Boat That Rocked". As always there is the bevy of big stars vying for space on the 'red carpet' at the film's premier in London (as well as a charity premier at Harwich's Electric Palace, a restored 1911 cinema), but one 'star' of the film could not be present largely due to its size. The missing celeb was LV18, the last unaltered manned light ship that served in the Trinity House fleet, which starred in the film as one of the pirate radio ships.

The ship is moored in the harbour at Harwich and is managed and conserved by a small dedicated band of volunteers called The Pharos Trust, who acquired the ship from Trinity House. When the film makers were looking for suitable ships for the film they contacted the Pharos Trust to ask if they could hire LV18. The Trust jumped at the chance and LV18 was towed (these ships didn't have engines other than the ones driving the generating set for the light) down to Poole for a few weeks filming. She returned to her home at Harwich resplendent in her new pirate radio livery 'Radio Sunshine', well, down one side at least – film companies are very astute in how they film and spend money!

LV18 was built in 1958 and the Trust are currently investigating ways to moor LV18 permanently in Harwich and to allow access by the public telling the story of a Trinity House light ship as well as the story of pirate radio; many of the original pirate ships would use vessels similar to LV18 for broadcasting. They are currently negotiating for a mooring space and investigating running costs and funding. The ship's patron is the DJ Johnny Walker who was also an advisor on the film as he started his career in the music industry as a 'pirate disc jockey' in 1964. Harwich and Frinton were closely involved with the pirate radio stations moored in the North Sea as supplies were often sent from Harwich and DJs would land and leave from Frinton and Harwich.

By Tony O'Neil, Pharos Trust.

