



Prawle Point

No: 53

'eyes along the coast'

Spring 2016

BRIXHAM SEAWATCH A Passion for Cetaceans

When Lindy Hingley, with husband, John, purchased the 90ft deep sea beam trawler *Jacoba* BM 77 in 1990, the venture developed far beyond a living in the fishing industry. Early the following year they sighted, near the Channel Light Vessel, what they thought to be an upturned boat which, on closer inspection, revealed itself as the dead body of a pilot whale.

Many more were spotted over a wide area, the by-catch of extensive Danish mackerel fishing conducted on a vast commercial scale for pulverising as animal feeds. Lindy, galvanised by this grisly sight and hearing too many reports of dead dolphins being washed in, minke whales caught in excessively lengthy pot lines and other distressing finds, launched Brixham Seawatch to protect and promote awareness of whales, dolphins and porpoises and monitor welfare—a desperate reaction to shocking disregard for the plight of intelligent, highly developed mammals.

Responses from Devon Wildlife Trust, dolphin conservation organisations and Greenpeace seemed inadequate so Lindy, realising the advantageous overview gained from being at sea for up to ten days at a time among the fishing fleets and the hands-on experience gained thereby, bravely decided that protection of cetaceans would become her major role in life. Beam trawling involved a repetitious procedure of shooting nets then steaming at one knot for two hours before hauling and shooting again thus enabling a great deal of time for observation, compiling data in a daily log and acquiring knowledge. She learned, for instance, that bottle nosed dolphins would be seen only in calm weather, common dolphins when the sea was rough, pilot whales are often associated with heavy swells, killer whales or orcas normally appear in January or February and August or September. She became attuned to connections between seabird species and likely cetacean appearances, differing seabed areas favoured for echo location by different mammals, noted optimum times for giving birth and became sensitive to so many aspects of life at sea.

She also discovered that funds were available for research and post mortem yet, without publicity or awareness, dead sea mammals were habitually removed by councils to land-fill and indifference prevailed. Lindy initiated action without delay. She contacted DEFRA, awakened interest at the Natural History

Museum and London Zoo to release money for practical research by collecting carcasses for assessment and post mortem. She inspired local fishermen, yachtsmen, coastguard services, NCI volunteers, walkers and bird-watchers to become involved. Regional television, radio and news press were also drawn in by Lindy's zeal and passionate concern. The live sighting scheme she established requested such data as time, lat and long, date, direction of travel, period of presence, estimated number of adults, and juveniles, species, sea state, even water temperature and details of anything unusual such as injuries or scarring.



*Dolphin stranded on Bantham beach, February 2016
Photo by Christopher Timmermann*

Distressing evidence accumulated. Post mortem reports attributed 80% of deaths to the more intensive fishing methods. While it is impossible for dolphins to be trapped in the heavy, chain encased nets dragged along the sea bed by slow moving beam trawlers on account of the small aperture and the associated, deterrent noise, they may swim into the nets of fast moving pelagic trawlers, feel unaccustomed water pressure and escape, though, while engaged in feeding, may leave it too late to exit. Pair trawling is much more deadly, wide mesh at the trawl mouth gives little

clue as to pressure and if undetected, consequences are catastrophic, the animal suffering perhaps twenty minutes agony fighting for its life while being crushed in the hauled nets, trying every means of escape before dying of suffocation. Injuries are horrendous both internal and external, so much goes on unseen and wittingly concealed - on land such brutality would meet with criminal investigation and public outrage. Animals are thrown overboard, sometimes tied together, punctured or cut into pieces, even while alive, in attempts to avoid detection. Entanglement in abandoned fishing gear can potentially cause horrific injury, prolonged suffering and slow death. No apology for distress is made to the reader as these facts need to be known and addressed. Fortunately most of our local fishermen are engaged in sustainable fishing of little threat to cetaceans, they endorse the aims of Brixham Seawatch and contribute valuable information over the focus area between Plymouth and Exeter. Their observations, records and photos, unavailable from any other source, would be lost without this voluntary reporting.

During the mid and late 1990s, dolphins in thousands were reported off Land's End 'as far as the eye could see', excitedly chasing mackerel, in the channel a fishing boat steamed gently for an hour through pods of pilot whales in family formations.

Such sightings no longer occur, while records of dead creatures washed on shore have become all too familiar. In 2001, for instance, 18 dolphins, in one day, were found on Leasfoot, a small beach at Thurlestone. People say there has been a decrease in numbers found but sadly this only correlates to reduced population.

Positive ideas to remedy the slaughter include attaching audible scarers to nets which will be effective only if switched on and integral batteries maintained. A limit on horsepower could be an effective way of prohibiting excessive net use. One sinister discovery from initiated research is the incidence of cervical cancer in bottle-nosed dolphins, thought to result from human waste passing via water courses to the sea, and the accumulation of nitrates and organophosphates in liver and other tissues leading to increased mortality.

It's a great thrill watching these beautiful creatures from our elevated vantage position at Prawle Point where watch

keepers log all sightings of sea mammals and pass details not only to Brixham Seawatch but also to our flanking stations at Rame Head and Froward Point when appropriate. When Lindy attended our monthly meeting recently giving an illustrated talk on her work, she thanked us and all south Devon stations for regular information of vital importance to research. Alerts from watchkeepers one day enabled her to track a pod of bottlenose dolphins from Prawle to Teignmouth.

In 2001, Lindy was awarded the MBE for services to marine conservation. Evidence of the alarming rate of decline in cetacean numbers enables pressure to be applied to parliamentarians and others to achieve more effective control of those whose activities endanger lives. Her research and commitment has had a positive impact on our understanding of these wonderful mammals.

Reports of sightings can be submitted online via Brixham Seawatch websites or made direct to Lindy Hingley on 01803 771092 or 07712587799.

LONG SERVICE AWARDS



Photo by Sarah Procyk

Medals and certificates were presented by Jon Gifford OBE, to Terry Martins, Rob Roberts, Colin Small and Hugh Stanley for 15 years service, Lesley Austin, David Hemming, Malcolm Waite and Chris Wood for 10 years service.

Back row, left to right- Rob Roberts, Malcolm Waite, Terry Martins, Chris Wood, Jon Gifford OBE (Hon.President), Colin Small, Hugh Stanley, Andy Thomson (Station Manager).

Front row- Lesley Austin, Alan Richards (Chairman of Board of Trustees), David Hemming, Mark Jennings.



Friends Of Prawle Point



The Friends of Prawle Point was set up around ten years ago as a support group for NCI Prawle Point, raising funds and awareness of the work of watchkeepers.

The committee meets every two to three months. They have provided valuable equipment including telescopes and weather stations by organizing events such as concerts, coffee mornings and quizzes.

The next event will be an evening of jazz, 1950s blues and rock'n roll on 23rd April at Charleton Vilage Hall from 7 pm to 10.30 pm when the Gazunder Band will be performing with noted blues

singer Becky Brine. "An awesome voice, impeccable delivery, wide repertoire and great verve" are the kind of comments she attracts. Tickets are on sale from Jane for £15 to include a two course supper with bar and raffle.

A favourite annual event is the Station Open Day with Cream Teas served in the Community Hall in East Prawle village, to be held this year on Wednesday August 24th.

New members are always welcome. For more information, please contact FOPP Secretary, Jane Payne 01548 531885

MARK JENNINGS

Facilities Manager Retires

At the Prawle Point AGM last year, Mark Jennings was presented, by President Jon Gifford OBE, with a wooden shield bearing the NCI logo, in recognition of outstanding service at the station.

He was thanked by watch keepers who are grateful for the many onerous tasks he tackled at the lookout with cheerfulness, an upbeat attitude to daunting problems and a dedication costing many hours on the roof, in awkward, confined spaces, in demanding circumstances and often in adverse weather. During his years as Facilities Manager, Mark

effected a complete rewire of the station, installed Vessel Tracker and associated aerials, devised an ingenious computer rack, a bespoke radio console and an improved chart stand and relined the much used worktop. New locks were fitted throughout. In the visitor centre, he installed touch screen equipment within a designed wooden cabinet and built a set of wooden steps, complete with hand post and final any library would covet! Congratulations and many thanks to Mark who retired from office with reluctance for personal reasons but continues regular watch keeping.



Photo by Sarah Procyk

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT

March 13th 2016

All was ship-shape up at the Point for the arrival of Eddy Stephenson, Station Manager at NCI Teignmouth and Assessor for the day, who arrived early to put watchkeepers through their paces.

Crews of both Salcombe lifeboats had kindly agreed to exercise with us and the boats were soon crossing the Bar, checking radios and deciding on positions for dropping the 'casualty'- a danbuoy with flag. In addition to the two on duty maintaining a routine watch, two others were assigned to lifeboat communications while on board the Baltic Exchange III, all weather Lifeboat (ALB) were two further watchkeepers observing, offering guidance as to positions and generally enjoying the ride!

With maximum visibility of only two miles, the first drop, by the ALB, was just over one mile from the Lookout. Watchkeepers directed the Joan Bate (ILB) by radio, first to a transit line from Prawle Point to the casualty then guided her to the target. Boat roles were reversed for the second exercise,

thereafter the ILB answered the following two missions with deliberate error thrown in for extra challenge. Lifeboat crews were appreciatively thanked for their cooperation which gave rare beneficial practice. Keeping an eye on the buoy while handling radio and binoculars proved difficult but the exercises were pronounced excellent and seamless by Eddy, the Assessor. Later he unleashed an impromptu recorded MayDay to test quick responses from the duty officers, also sneaking outside to ask for a radio check on the dedicated NCI channel 65. Thanks to all participants, Prawle NCI was awarded Declared Facility Status for another year.



Photo by South Hams Newspapers

NCI PRAWLE POINT: INCIDENTS TO DATE

06.01.16

We rang Solent coastguard in response to a radio call to the Tug *Hanfast*. There had been a 999 call regarding a white flare seen in the vicinity of *Hanfast*. *Hanfast* reported that a fishing boat close by was showing white deck lights. We confirmed to the Coastguard that we also had the bright lights visual. Solent Coastguard thanked us for the information.

02.02.16

Grenville House Coaster attempting to call Falmouth Coastguard with no response. After the second attempt we rang Falmouth CG who had not heard the call. They will contact Solent CG to see if they had heard it.

11.02.16

Yacht *Sea Shanty* called solent Coastguard twice and Falmouth CG once with no response. *Sea Shanty* then called Prawle NCI on Channel 65 for a radio check which we gave. We telephoned Solent Coastguard to appraise them of the situation and they then contacted *Sea Shanty*.

25.02.16

Fishing boat *Me-Jelie* reported fuel problems on Channel 67. We reported to the Coastguard that we had the vessel visual and gave position. Salcombe Lifeboat was tasked and, after attaching the tow, took her into Salcombe Harbour.



BOOK REVIEW

The Salcombe Lifeboat Disaster by Roger Barrett Published by Salcombe RNLI, price £7.99

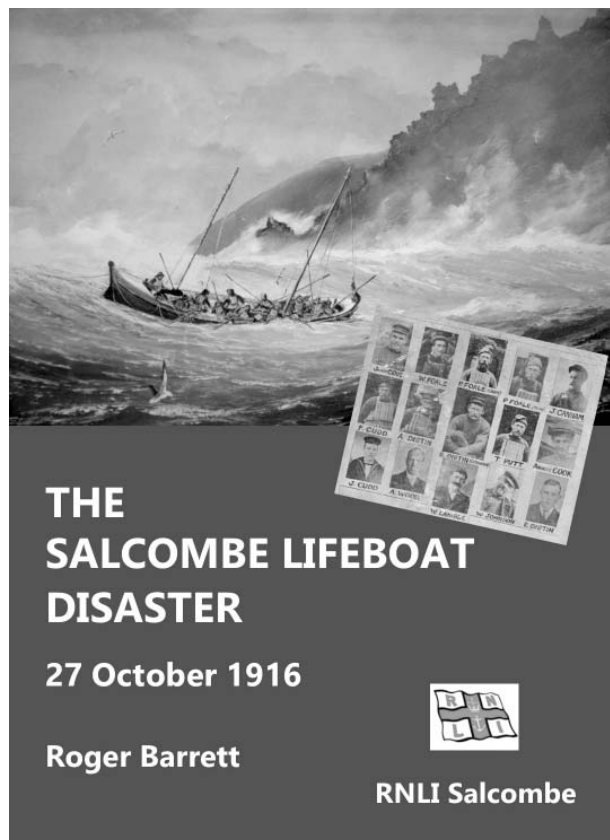
Commemorated this year is the hundredth anniversary of one of the worst disasters in the history of the RNLI when, on October 27th, 1916, the William and Emma lifeboat capsized with the loss of thirteen crew members. A respectful sympathy for those lost and families bereft is threaded throughout the text; the whole being dedicated to "ordinary people who do an extraordinary job risking their lives for the safety of others" - lifeboat crews both past and present. This truly gripping account achieves its impact through a skilled author allowing recorded facts to tell a tragic tale and eye witness reports from the two survivors to focus the reader's attention on the immediate horror of an experience endured.

The scene is set with all the highly pertinent details of weather and tide conditions, local hazardous areas, communications initiating the launch to save lives from the Western Lass, stranded near Meg Rock and the subsequent, disastrous absence of communications, on account of the severity of the storm. At the Coastguard Lookout on Prawle Point was Chief Officer May whose reports also contribute immediacy of dramatic reaction. The lookout, now run by NCI, overlooks the whole stretch of coast referred to in the book so is of particular interest to all present day duty volunteers.

Technical information, on boat specification and handling, rescue methods and provision, is detailed and fully researched contributing greatly to an understanding of the mission, while a chapter entitled 'The Unlucky Wave' reminds us vividly of the potentially merciless power of the sea no matter how prepared and expert the seafarers. Passages dealing with recovery of bodies, rescue of survivors, distressing subsequent events and descriptions of Salcombe - a town in mourning, are written with great sensitivity. The Board of Trade Inquiry reveals and endorses the stoic confidence maintained in the William and Emma, despite the consequences. Within an astonishing two weeks, a new crew had volunteered to man the replacement lifeboat with survivor Eddie Distin as Coxswain, aged 26.

The book is a timely tribute, richly illustrated with archive images from local museums, photographic collections and Lloyds of London, excerpts from Admiralty Charts and OS maps, diagrams by the author, paintings by local artists and sundry recent photographs. Of particularly poignant reference are pictures of the drogue anchor, used to help steady the lifeboat in attempting to cross Salcombe Bar on the return voyage, the watch worn by Eddie Distin, stopped at the time of capsizing and the only remaining hull fragment.

At the launch of this book, on October 27th last year, held at the Winking Prawn restaurant in North Sands, chosen for its



location overlooking the sea area where it all happened, granddaughters of the crew joined invited guests drawn from a wide range of people contacted by the author and acknowledged for their varied help and contribution. Research has been meticulous and far-reaching with many relatives consulted and primary and secondary sources exhaustively investigated.

Throughout 2016, Roger will be giving illustrated talks on the Salcombe Lifeboat Disaster complementing and supplementing the book through further research and a most moving film sympathetically attempting to recreate parts of the event. Keep an eye on local information regarding these and other commemorative activities in and around Salcombe.

All proceeds from the sale of this book will support Salcombe Lifeboat Station.

Roger Barrett is the Curator of Salcombe Lifeboat Museum, Chairman of Salcombe Maritime Museum and a former Station Manager at NCI Prawle Point. Previous works are *Start Point and its Lighthouse* and *Prawle Point and the Coast between Start Point and Salcombe Bar*.

SALTY SUPERSTITIONS

Dolphins

Dolphins swimming with a boat are believed to offer protection and bring good luck. Sailors thought a dolphin swimming north forecasts good weather while one heading south portends the opposite. There are many stories of dolphins saving humans from drowning.

Renaming a boat

A change of name was considered unlucky and an insult to sea-gods so crews would be unwilling to serve on a renamed ship. *Endurance*, the ill-fated vessel of Shackleton's Antarctic voyage, began her life as *Polaris* and is often cited in this context.

Whisky plank

Also appropriately known as the shutter plank, this was the last to be fixed in a wooden hull thereby suggesting a good reason for celebration.



Please help us to maintain this valuable service by making a donation and becoming a supporter of NCI Prawle Point or becoming a watchkeeper.

Please contact: The Secretary, PO Box 58, Kingsbridge TQ7 2QZ

Station tel. no. 01548 511259 www.nci-prawlepoint.org Cheques to NCI Prawle Point