



# Prawle Point

No: 46

*'eyes along the coast'*

Autumn 2013

## PRAWLE POINT COASTGUARD RESCUE TEAM

**Around the UK there are approximately 3,500 Coastal Rescue Officers who drop everything whilst volunteering to assist those in distress or danger along the coast.**

Based at the Coastguard Station in East Prawle village, eleven men and one woman, from varied working backgrounds, compose the team which may be called out by pagers at any time of the day or night by Brixham Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre in response to incidents anywhere near the shoreline between Torcross and Kingsbridge.

An initial response team, consisting of two to four personnel, respond to an emergency call using the dedicated Toyota all terrain vehicle to access the scene of

an incident. If required for the incident, the remainder of the team members make their own way as soon as able. Should a team require back-up, pager alerts can be sent to the flanking stations of Dartmouth and Hope Cove in which case up to sixty rescue officers could, if necessary, be on scene within the hour.

Incidents can vary from walkers suffering broken bones having fallen on the coastal path and needing evacuation to hospital to vessels in difficulty off the shoreline. Casualties will initially be assisted by the rescue team who are trained to give all necessary first aid, to prepare the casualty for transport and to direct a helicopter to a prepared location for landing. People can often get into difficulty using kayaks and surfboards, and even those with considerable experience and expertise can get into difficulty. The team also assist, in immediate first aid of beach casualties.



*Sean Jeffery at the cliff edge, Dave Halsall on the end of the rope with 'casualty' Steve Wonnacott during a training exercise at Prawle Point.*

Personal protection equipment carried by each Coastguard Rescue Officer consists of blue overalls, steel toe-capped boots and safety helmets, as well as lifejackets. Equipment stored in the vehicle includes rope rescue tackle, first aid kits, search equipment and water rescue gear. They also have a trailer carrying further equipment such as a winch for rope rescue recovery and a generator with lighting for emergencies during the night.

Fortunately, very few cliff rescues of humans have occurred in the area within the last twenty years; dogs are more frequently reported and owners should be reminded not to attempt to rescue their dogs, as this could create a far more serious incident.

The Kingsbridge Estuary can be a hotspot for people getting caught out by the tide. Whether a rescue is required, or monitoring

people stuck on their vessels until they safely re-float, the team will always remain on hand in such a situation. Emergency calls from the public often require a response from the team to locate and assess an incident, becoming the eyes on the coastline for the search and rescue coordinator at Brixham Coastguard. Each incident attended provides valuable hands-on experience for the team meaning that if you are in any doubt someone requires assistance on the coastline, you should not hesitate to dial 999 and ask for the coastguard.

Two hours of training each month plus courses in equipment maintenance, first aid and CPR are undertaken by all Prawle Point Coastguard Rescue Officers. All equipment is provided by the Maritime & Coastguard Agency; however the team members are all volunteers. The hard work put in by the team and readiness for immediate response is reliant upon individual initiative, support from their families and, cooperation from employers.

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Steve Wonnacott, the Station Officer at Prawle, lives just 3½ miles, or five to six minutes from the station. On his team he has a Deputy, Officers in Charge, Technicians and Operators all within a command structure. They currently enjoy good relations with Prawle Point NCI and are happy to use communications and facilities enjoyed at our lookout particularly the wide vista enabling overview of vessels, Lifeboat responses and the monitoring of divers.

The Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre in Brixham, commonly referred to as Brixham Coastguard; maintain a VHF Ch16 & DSC listening watch 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. As the name suggests, search and rescue coordination is a major part of the job at MRCC Brixham; however routine traffic reports and radio checks are becoming far more common practice.

**In an emergency on the coast, dial 999 and ask for the Coastguard.**

## COMPLACENCY IN BOATS

**Last summer, Jane and I planned a cruise in the Channel Islands. Jane did not want to do the long Channel crossing, so Odile, a French friend of hers and a very experienced yachtswoman, joined me for the passage.**

We had to motor-sail on to Guernsey. The passage was pleasant and uneventful, although I had really wanted to sail, and we berthed at 0030. The next morning, in Victoria Marina, I decided to take advantage of Odile's presence to go to the top of the mast to take down the spinnaker halyard, which had jammed in its block at the top.

I had often been aloft on the bosun's chair, using the spinnaker halyard. It was all very easy, and it was to become apparent that I had become over confident about working aloft.



*Michael in St Peter Port, Guernsey, sitting on the rolled-up dinghy which saved his life!*



*Samantha in Chichester Harbour*

I lowered the jib and just bundled it up on the fore deck. I tied the jib halyard to the steel ring at the top of the bosun's chair, and tested it by bouncing up and down on the chair.

Odile pulled me readily to the top, and I took the spinnaker halyard off easily enough.

About a minute later something gave, and I started to fall. I tried to grab anything I could, but it was clearly too

late. I remember thinking that I was probably going to die, and could do absolutely nothing to save myself – and felt suddenly very calm. I think that was one of the reasons I got away so lightly. In a real emergency, it is amazing how adrenaline kicks in and how clearly and quickly one thinks.

The next thing I was aware of was a woman saying, "Don't move him, he may have broken his spine!" I said, "No I haven't – look, I can move my feet!" – which I could.

I am a very, very lucky man: I had bounced off the baby-stay and onto the foc'sle, where the rolled up deflated dinghy took my fall, together with the jib (now marked for ever with my blood) over the foc'sle mooring cleat. I suffered concussion and nothing more than a nasty cut on my arm and extensive bruising, and I have now fully recovered.

Why did I fall? Instead of securing the halyard to the steel ring on the bosun's chair with a bowline, I thoughtlessly used the same knot that had attached the halyard to the head of the jib: the knot which I had only recently discovered in PBO. This knot – for yachtsmen – was simply the end of the halyard, with a figure of eight knot 6" from the end being pushed through a bight previously through the ring. The ring was just too big, and I guess the figure of eight knot simply slipped through. It's a great knot for sails!

That was a silly mistake: always use a bowline. I now know that I should have had a safety line, as well as the halyard; and possibly another assistant handling it.

*Michael Sturdee*

# The Ropewalk at Chatham Dockyard

Among the wealth of maritime treasures awaiting visitors to The Historic Chatham Dockyard, can be found a brick building, 346 metres in length, housing a Victorian Ropery still in production using nineteenth century methods and machines.

The vast uninterrupted scale within creates a staggering first impression further endorsed by the sight of a master ropemaker pedalling his old bicycle into the distance one quarter mile to the far end.

The earliest ropery buildings were erected on this site in 1618 when raw hemp, imported from Russia, provided material for the vast quantities of rope required by naval vessels of that era - each ship using around 20 miles of rope for rigging alone. HMS Victory required 30 miles. Bales of hemp were stored in wood-lined hemp houses to keep it fresh and the first process, known as hatchelling, involved combing the raw fibres to straighten them and remove foreign objects prior to spinning into yarn. Before the invention of spinning machinery, the hemp ends were attached to a frame rotated manually by a wheel-turner while the highly skilled spinner walked backwards paying out hemp fibres evenly from a bundle wrapped around his waist. Rot-proofing of the resultant yarns was achieved by pulling them, using a horse drawn winch, through hot tar then hanging them to dry. Workers were requested to deposit any personal smoking materials at the beginning of each day in the interests of fire prevention as hemp dust forms an explosive mixture; arson, considered as treason, was a hanging offence. The building we see today was constructed in 1728-9 as single storey with an upper floor added in 1812 housing the machinery which took over the processes of hatchelling and spinning and, at the beginning of the twentieth century hemp was replaced by manila and sisal as hardier raw materials which could be preserved with chemicals, instead of tar, at the hatchelling stage.

Bobbins of yarn progressed to the ground floor ropewalk for rope making and it is at this final stage of production that the visitor is invited to witness the remarkable and complex processes in original, historic surroundings. Yarn from many rows of bobbins, mounted on wooden frames, are fed through register plates and connected in pairs to hooks on a forming machine which is mechanically drawn the length of the ropewalk, twisting the yarns through forming tubes as it goes, to produce strands. The strands are then hooked



*The Ropewalk in action*

on to laying machines via wooden guiding cones ensuring the strands twist together at the correct angle. The cart carrying this laying machine with attendant ropemaker hitching a lift, progresses on rails along the whole length of the building, propelled by the tensioning action of the twisting, with rope as the finished product. Meanwhile, an attached sledge bearing weights, acts as a drogue to maintain correct tensioning, thereby preventing undue acceleration of

the cart. Three strands create a 'hawser' laid rope, four make 'shroud' laid and three hawser ropes twisted together produce a 'cable'. Originally forming and laying operations were powered by hand-operated winches and, for the manufacture of large cable, over 200 men were mustered from elsewhere in the dockyard. Steam power was introduced in 1836 to be replaced by electricity in the twentieth century driving an endless belt.

The finished or 'closed' rope is then coiled on a spinning wheel with a ropemaker's hand keeping tension while his cycling colleague brings up the far end of the rope already sealed. The coil, once removed from the wheel is tied up for transporting. Trestles at regular intervals along the ropewalk prevent the rope from drooping during manufacture and, running the length of the wooden beams overhead, is a system of ropes some of which are attached to bells for long distance communication of when to stop or start. From this ropewalk originates the saying "pull the other one, it's got bells on".

Master Ropemakers is the only working traditional ropewalk to survive anywhere in the world and those employed there now continue this unique history with every indication of pride, skill and the easy confidence of long experience. Their rope products are sold commercially world wide, are used by London tugboat companies, by theatres for rigging, have featured in many films including *Gulliver's Travels*, the opening scenes of *Les Miserables*, in *Call the Midwife*, which was also filmed there, and in the forthcoming film, *Heart of the Sea*.

Rhythmic, clanking sounds of ancient, heavy machinery pounding purposefully along iron tracks, footsteps echoing on solid timbers from the floor above, now an archive department, and the smells of oil and rope fibres all contribute to an amazing glimpse into the past.

*Editor*  
*September 2013*

# NCI PRAWLE POINT: INCIDENTS TO DATE



**17.06.13** At 12:25 watchkeepers were contacted by a local farmer to advise them that a quad bike had overturned in a nearby field but nobody was hurt. The farmer would be recovering it and asked NCI to contact the Coastguard giving the position

**24.06.13** At 13:41 watchkeepers heard a radio call from yacht Magic Touch reporting she was stuck on Salcombe Bar. They contacted Brixham Coastguard to say Magic Touch was in sight and that yacht Firefly was close by. At 13:56 Magic Touch was towed clear by a harbour launch.

**04.07.13** At 17:56 the duty watchkeeper was contacted by Brixham Coastguard with a request to look for a sailing dinghy possibly in trouble south of Salcombe Bar. The boat was visible and her position was passed in turn to Salcombe Inshore Lifeboat. A casualty from the dinghy was taken by the lifeboat into Salcombe where an ambulance was waiting. The dinghy was subsequently towed back to Salcombe.

**20.07.13** On Saturday afternoon, with an easterly wind against the tide, there were severe overfalls off Start Point to the east of the lookout. At 13:22 a small motor boat was seen travelling east entering the overfalls where it was lost from sight. The water was too disturbed to be certain the craft had safely rounded the headland. The next

watch station to the east, NCI Froward Point was contacted also Brixham Coastguard. At 14:08, Froward Point reported that the craft had safely entered the River Dart and the Coastguard closed the incident.

**06.08.13** Watchkeepers heard the skipper of yacht Golden Otter calling the Coastguard to say he was drifting in extremely light winds off Bolt Head with engine failure. He hoped to fix the engine before proceeding. Brixham Coastguard asked Prawle Point NCI to keep Golden Otter under observation and the boat was monitored for the next two hours. Having failed to restart the engine, the skipper accepted a tow, from a passing yacht, into Salcombe Harbour. This was reported to the Coastguard who closed the incident.

**10.08.13** A member of the public reported a paddle-boarder possibly in difficulty between Bigbury and Salcombe. At 15:00 Brixham Coastguard contacted Prawle Point NCI asking a lookout be kept for the paddle-boarder. At 16:16 a craft matching the description was sighted off Bolt Head to the west of the lookout and Brixham Coastguard was notified; at 16:31 they were further notified that the paddle-boarder had entered Salcombe Harbour. The Coastguard was now able to close the incident.



## Friends Of Prawle Point

**Cream Teas were served in Chivelstone Community Hall at East Prawle on Wednesday August 21st from 15.00 until 18.00, raising £434 profit. Several visitors were also welcomed to the Lookout and Visitor Centre at the Point.**

On Saturday September 21st the Mike Cox New Orleans All Stars gave a sell-out jazz concert at Charleton Village Hall in aid

of Prawle Point NCI. An excellent two course meal was included in the ticket and a bar was available. The band played to enthusiastic acclaim and the evening raised £800.

We are indebted to the FOPP committee for their very generous support.

A Christmas Party is planned for all watchkeepers and partners on December 10th.

## SOME COMMON SAYINGS OF A NAUTICAL ORIGIN

<i>With flying colours</i>	A ship returning to its home port after a successful voyage will proudly display all its distinguishing flags, otherwise known as colours.
<i>Nail colours to the mast</i>	A damaged ship, determined not to surrender, will nail its flags to the mast as an unequivocal statement.
<i>Showing your true colours</i>	Genuine flags demonstrating real identity or intention.
<i>A clean bill of health</i>	A ship left port with a document or bill from the port authority declaring it free from infectious diseases. A return to port without this would necessitate waiting offshore for 40 days (latin <i>quaranta</i> ) or quarantine by which time it was assumed any infection would have run its course.
<i>Quarantine</i>	



**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](http://www.nci-prawlepoint.org) Cheques to NCI Prawle Point**