



# Prawle Point

No: 54

*'eyes along the coast'*

Summer 2016

## TRINITY HOUSE

**“Safety of shipping and the well-being of sailors have been the prime concerns of Trinity House since being incorporated by Royal Charter in 1514”.**

So ancient an origin may come as a surprise. That year Henry VIII wished to improve shipping on the Thames by giving Royal Charter to a fraternity of mariners called The Guild of Holy Trinity - thereafter known as Trinity House. In 1566, his successor, Elizabeth I, added responsibility for coastal buoys and beacons to protect seafarers and in 1604, James I initiated rights concerning compulsory pilotage of shipping including the licensing of Thames pilots. Historical documents contain a succession of ‘firsts’ - first lighthouse at Lowestoft in 1609, first light vessel at Nare Sands in the Thames estuary in 1732 followed, from 1858 onwards, by first technical innovations: introduction of electricity, relief by helicopter, automation, solar power and the ongoing developments of e-Navigation concepts. Inevitably a few ‘lasts’ became notable - removal of the last old burning light as recently as 1977 and the final manning of light vessels at the Channel Station in 1989 with North Foreland being the last lighthouse to lose its keeper in 1998.

Imposing neo-classical headquarters in Tower Hill house executive and archive organisations while the department in Harwich performs as the operational powerhouse staffed from a broad range of disciplines to include, engineers, IT specialists, seagoing personnel, naval architects, administrators and technicians all working together for marine safety of vital importance since 90% of goods to and from the UK are seaborne.

Trinity House controls more than 60 operational lighthouses in England, Wales, the Channel Islands and Gibraltar and oversees the maintenance of 500 buoys and light vessels in the interests of maritime safety. Such huge commitment is financed by “light dues” paid at 38p per net registered tonne, subject to a maximum charge of £15200 per voyage, of all commercial vessels calling at ports in the British Isles. Tugs and fishing vessels are liable for annual payments based on registered length of vessel.

Trinity House acts as a hub ensuring power supplies by remote control to all lighthouses. For general maintenance work the majority are accessible by road, others are serviced by helicopter operating from land bases or from two Trinity House vessels, *Galatea* and *Patricia* both of which have been logged passing Prawle Point. The numerous buoys - cardinal

and isolated danger marks and lateral marks defining navigable channels are all inspected every year for wear and tear. Their colour patterns, marks and symbols, so crucial in communicating specific information to mariners, must all be maintained for visibility, so rugged design and durability are essential -the oldest is over 70 years in service. Buoy yards at Swansea and Harwich are responsible for manufacture, construction and supply while *Galatea* and *Patricia* are tasked with transport and on-scene maintenance assisted by helicopters modified for carrying heavy underslung loads. *Galatea's* sophisticated



dynamic positioning system giving precise, automatic manoeuvre in all directions, enables her to remain steady within 20cms of a desired location - quite an accomplishment for an 84m long vessel with a beam of 17m and 4m draft! Routine inspections involve lifting on board for jet washing and cleaning, effecting necessary repairs and repainting if a paint depth check requires this. Also in need of checking is each buoy's automatic identification system as transmitted to passing ships as well as any lighting and sound signals. Some buoys also collect meteorological and hydrological data. Buoys maybe 15m in height, weighing over 10 tons with a stabilising tail tube held on the seabed by cast iron sinkers weighing up to 5 tons so the whole process including return to sea is enormous. Trinity House also inspects buoys maintained by port and harbour authorities, by utility companies and those used by oil and gas rigs and wind farm operators.

THV *Alert* was commissioned in 2006 as a Rapid Intervention Vessel covering the SE coast for the emergency marking of wrecks. Trinity House has a statutory duty under the Merchant Shipping Act of 1995 “to mark and, if appropriate, remove wrecks which are a danger to shipping”. She is tasked with locating new wrecks and leaving an emergency buoy until a more permanent one can be deployed or the wreck is removed.

Trinity House is also the UK's largest endowed maritime charity donating £4 million annually to maritime charities, educating and training Sea Cadets, training deep sea pilots, promoting safety at sea and the welfare of former mariners. Corporate events and weddings can be hosted at Tower Hill, you can spend a holiday on a lighthouse cottage or even take a week long cruise on *Patricia* when your duty Captain may be Richard Eagleton from Dartmouth who is a member of Dart lifeboat crew and relief Captain on sail training vessel *Stavros Niarchos*. The itinerary may be changeable as she carries out her duties, but the luxury is assured.



# Friends Of Prawle Point



A highly successful evening was organised by FOPP in April featuring local Gazunder Band with vocalist, Becky Brine.

Their jazz and 1950s rock and roll proved very popular raising a clear profit for the station of £1015. A superb two course supper was served during the interval after which many were inspired to dance to the finish. Thanks and congratulations are due to our

great band of supporters.

Cream teas will be served in the community hall at East Prawle on August 24th when visitors are also especially welcome to Open Day at the lookout that afternoon.

Jane Payne and her willing committee welcome anyone interested in joining them - just ring 01548 531885.

## BOOK REVIEW

**'Down to the Sea in Ships' by Horatio Clare**  
**Published in paperback by Vintage Books Price £9.99**

"Just beyond the horizon there is another world"- so writes Horatio Clare by way of introduction to his account of seafaring life aboard two Maersk container ships crossing the globe. Inspired by the opening lines of 'Moby Dick', he applied and was accepted as writer in residence on *Gerd* then *Pembroke* as they made their routine voyages conveying some of the 18% of the world's container trade handled by Maersk. Subtitle "Of Ageless Oceans and Modern Men" gives the clue as to Clare's quest to discover the world of men at sea, their interrelationships of crew, captain, vessel, engines and sea amid the vastness of oceans. His style of writing, with immediacy of description and location draws the reader into an accompanying role with the author to enjoy his generosity of spirit and intense powers of observation. If you have watched distant cargo vessels traverse the horizon and wondered about the life of those on board, this book will appeal.

Embarking from Felixstowe's Trinity Terminal on board the mighty, modern *Gerd*, Clare became accepted by captain and crew. Daily routines, familiar to the twenty crew, were studied with enthusiasm and curiosity by this supernumerary, much to their bemusement, yet gradually he earns a place within the ship's company. The vast dimensions of this vessel - 367m in length with a beam of 42m - are vividly conveyed, not by statistics but by impressions. Too enormous to be seen in entirety, the writer views a vastness of hull towering above the dock, a glimpse down into just part of the cavernous hold, the many deck floors accessible by lift, the seemingly endless corridors.

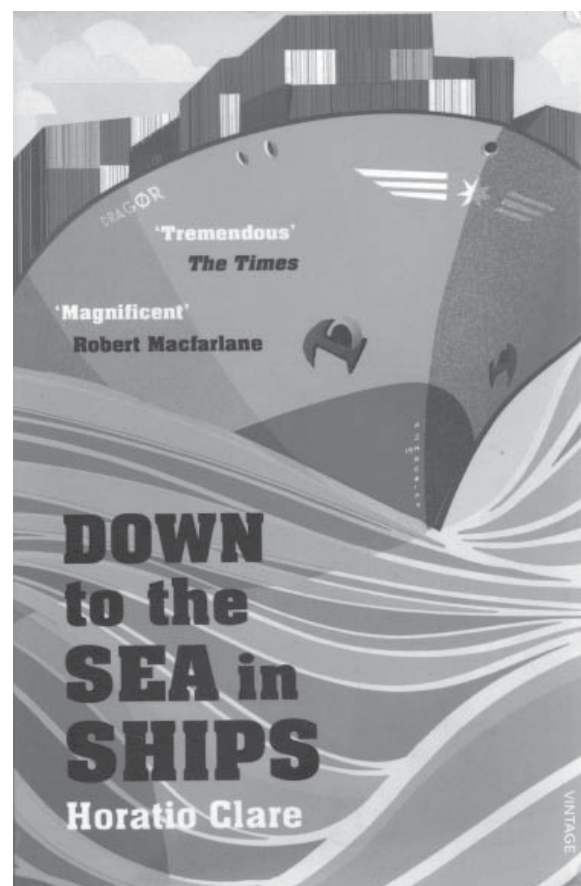
He is fascinated by the logistics of container stowage-"the multitude of couplings in correct sequence", the priority given to dangerous cargo and refrigerated containers, known as reefers, and the moans, screams and whirrs as they all move and grate together under way. The continuum of sea-miles, when the next way-point for change of course may be 260 miles distant, inspires study and wonderment about seabed topography, he observes changing colours of the water, the passing of whales and dolphins and the sojourns of stowaway birds; all are recorded with episodes of exquisite writing. When *Gerd* is in self-steering mode, an alarm on the bridge every ten minutes must be silenced by the watchkeeper thus ensuring wakefulness.

Idiosyncratic details bring alive the characters of Captain and crew while snatches of conversation on watch or the exchange of worst experience tales give some insight into the lives of men separated from family and home. No alcohol may be consumed on board or ashore and social life is limited, spare time being spent on messaging and watching DVDs in the privacy of one's cabin. Of concern to the author is the disparity

of pay, Filipinos being paid less than one third of the crew rate for comparable work on the 'justification' of currency going further at home - a fact that is presently hard to believe.

Horatio, or Horace as he was called on board, was obliged to leave after Suez, fly to Singapore and rejoin ship there. Dangers of piracy within a triangle between Suez, Madagascar and Sri Lanka dictate only crew may be carried, the ship shows no lights, maintains double watch, proceeds at top speed and remains in close contact with NATO throughout. The intricacy of leaving Singapore Harbour makes exciting reading as *Gerd* sets off for Los Angeles. Shanghai is the world's busiest port but LA is the biggest by area and it is here the author's first voyage ends. Two months and ten ports after setting out, the Captain brings his ship into LA, the estimated arrival time being achieved with astonishing accuracy to the very minute!

By choice, the author then began his second voyage on the much smaller, older *Maersk Pembroke* and the adventure rolls on through storm and ice to sign off in Montreal. Passage through the Western Approaches would be of particular interest to Prawle Point watchkeepers.



# NCI PRAWLE POINT: INCIDENTS TO DATE



## 07.04.16

Casualty in capsized rib called the Coastguard on Channel 16. One person in water and the other on upturned hull, just south of Salcombe Bar. We reported that we had the casualty visual and a passing dory stopped to help. The ALB was tasked and took the casualties into Salcombe.

## 12.04.2016

Angling vessel *Illusion* called the Coastguard with engine failure. We reported to the Coastguard that we had *Illusion* visual. Yacht *Freia* stood by *Illusion* and she was eventually towed to Salcombe by the ILB.

## 16.04.16

Fishing vessel *Lloyd Tyler* called Falmouth Coastguard twice with no response. We relayed message to CG who later spoke to *Lloyd Tyler*. She had engine failure but eventually managed to restart her engine and motored to Brixham for repair. Two other vessels stood by in case required.

## 04-05.16

We were asked by the Coastguard to monitor and report on a possibly vulnerable yacht due to leave Salcombe on passage to Norway. The craft was eventually reported as under way by Salcombe Harbour Master. We saw a yacht heading due south but were unable to confirm her identity.

## 08.05.16

Just after mid-day we saw yacht *Jessica Anne* making difficult progress against force 6 easterly winds and a spring tide. In conjunction with our colleagues at NCI Froward Point we kept her under observation while she struggled in the tide race at Start Point before turning and heading safely back into Salcombe at 17:00.

## 22.05.16

Mayday from Yacht *Tomia*. Fire in engine room on leaving Salcombe. We informed the Coastguard that we had her visual. Salcombe ALB launched to her assistance and towed her into Salcombe. The fire was out when they arrived.

## 26.05.16

We were telephoned by Solent Coastguard asking us to watch out for a 60 foot Barge reported to be dropping items into the sea, a toilet, bedding etc. at 15.50. At 1702, we spotted the vessel rounding Start Point and at 1755, reported her 2 miles west of Prawle Point heading for Plymouth.

## 31.05.16

Dutch Yacht *Evenaar* issued a *Securité* saying she had a fouled propellor in the entrance to Salcombe Harbour. We informed Solent Coastguard that we had the yacht visual off Maceley Cove. Solent advised the Salcombe ALB launch to her aid. The yacht subsequently freed herself, but the Lifeboat escorted her into Salcombe.

## 03.06.16

Single-handed motor boat *Megan* called us twice on Channel 16, but then on Channel 65. She was between Bolt Head and Prawle Point with engine failure and drifting. We telephoned Solent CG and gained further details on Channel 65. MFV *Tenacious* took *Megan* in tow into Salcombe Harbour.

## 05.06.16

Telephone call from Solent CG asking us to look out for kayakers reported to be in trouble off Start Point as reported by the Lighthouse. We could not see them with visibility of only 3 miles. Salcombe ILB passed us, but were later told by Solent that the kayakers had been taken to Beesands.

## 18.06.16

Fishing boat *Noah Gil* reported engine failure to Coastguard. We alerted CG *Nemo* was in the area. *Noah Gil* tried to anchor but was drifting towards rocks. Another vessel repositioned her and finally FV *Hustler* towed her into Salcombe.

## 02.07.16

We were contacted by the HM Coastguard regarding an elderly person injured at Langerstone Point. We had the casualty visual and gave Lat and Long. The casualty was picked up by Prawle Point Coastguard Rescue Team and transferred to an ambulance.

## 03.07.16

Spotted outboard launch with two people waving oars half a mile from lookout off Maceley Cove. Telephoned HM Coastguard and reported position. Later reported that launch was now tied to a buoy. ILBL arrived and towed them into Salcombe.

Cetaceans were seen and reported to Brixham Seawatch on March 31st, May 11th and 22nd.

Members of the public reported a distressed seal on April 24th and a deer stuck in mud on May 20th. A flock of sheep was seen loose on the coast path. All were reported to appropriate contacts.

## SALTY SUPERSTITIONS

### Albatross

A lone bird will often follow a ship for days and was considered an omen of good times and protection. It was believed that bad luck would follow the killing of an albatross as they embody the immortal souls of sailors lost at sea.

### Sharks

To be followed by a shark was a sign of impending death. When entering shark infested waters, sailors would hang a shark fin from the bowsprit hoping to deter them.

### Rats

Rats on board were not considered unlucky however sailors believed they could predict disaster so rats seen leaving the ship before departure was cause for concern.

# TEIGNMOUTH NCI

Situated just 9.6 metres above the sea wall, offering a vista from the Ore Stone in Torbay to the South, towards the mouth of the Exe, Beer Head and, in good visibility, Portland Bill to the North, an ex-coastguard lookout was rescued from ignominious use as beach hut and store for the nearby East Cliff Cafe and adopted by the NCI to begin watches on August 1st 2004 during weekends and school holidays.

By April 2005, the station was fully operating and officially opened, achieving DFS (Declared Facility Status) in May 2007. Achievements of subsequent development, research and organisation have been spectacular. Now Watchkeepers at Teignmouth enjoy the fruits of many labours - a brand new station, built to their own specification, designed primarily by an inhouse team led by retired Surveyor, Project Manager, Graham Wilks and Station Manager, Eddy Stephenson. It was opened on September 20th, 2015 by the High Sheriff of Devon, Admiral Sir James Burnell-Nugent KCB CBE. A wooden fragment of the original roof, discovered during rebuilding, is preserved behind glass as an interesting relic bearing an inscription - "This hut was built by A.W. Sloman and G. Tapp, June 12, 1931", builders from the local shipyard who were employed to construct the original coastguard station. A fascinating sequence of photos on the Station website records the radical rebuilding process.

The Lookout is well equipped with two Swarovski telescopes plus binoculars, a pelorus mounted with a small telescope and a Raymarine radar. A computer screen displays data from the weather station, AIS, radar and webcam images; two radios monitor channels 16 and 65 while a third offers continual scanning of nine other appropriate channels. A certain resident of Teignmouth has developed a habit of waving to the webcam at a certain time most days, the gesture, by arrangement, being watched by a relative in Australia! An additional pole mounted webcam transmitting to a counter-top screen and operated by joy-stick, is particularly useful in enabling close up viewing of the Teign estuary, the mouth of which would otherwise be obscured by the town pier. A set of mobile radios allows scope for watch keepers to rove the surrounding area, the roof top next door being an excellent added vantage point, in fact daily duties include unlocking a gate to the roof at start of watch and ensuring it is securely locked each evening; by thus cooperating with the local authority, free access is available in emergency. Designated parking for two vehicles immediately behind the station is a huge asset as is the copious cellar beneath.

The whole sea area immediately in front of the lookout is a designated site for vessels to anchor, free from harbour dues, for shelter or for awaiting either orders or pilot. There were up to 14 tankers anchored at a time during the oil crisis. A common sight is the uniquely designed dredger *Teign C* which drops a rake astern on the outward passage from the estuary thus dislodging and dragging sand and silt seawards for dispersal in the current further out. The rake is then raised while the vessel turns back into the estuary for repeat procedures. This work is supplemented twice yearly by the *Manim* a conventional dredger from Padstow. A few Teign registered fishing boats work out in the bay together with those from Brixham but



*Teignmouth NCI lookout*

beach and leisure craft activities demand the main focus of surveillance particularly in the summer season when constant watch-keeping takes precedence over logging. They have seen it all at Teignmouth - every kind of leisure craft both suitable and inappropriate, every kind of bravado and dangerous lack of seamanship but also holiday makers, swimming, walking and enjoying themselves responsibly.

In 2014, when the rail track at Dawlish was undermined and left dangling, Teignmouth NCI did not close, even for part of a day. Throughout this period, waves regularly washed over the wall, walkways were strewn with deep sand and the lookout vibrated. Obvious new railings and coping of the seawall tell a dramatic tale.

Viridor Credits Environmental, a charity that distributes land fill tax locally, contributed and took an interest in the enlarged station while stipulating the inclusion of a visitor facility which is accommodated along the back wall and contributes a steady income from the many passers-by. Favourably situated at a point where two coastal paths diverge, close to a popular beach and between a cafe and roof top public amenity space above the yacht club next door, the station enjoys a flow of visitors all year round. The visitor area offers items for sale such as notebooks, mugs, pens with torches, an in-house cookbook, guides to the South West Coastpath, colouring sheets for children and a rack of visitor pamphlets, while outside, a second hand book stall attracts browsers.

There are 63 active watchkeepers, with 8 in training and currently 12 awaiting introduction prior to possible training. With such a prominent position, Teignmouth NCI is seldom short of new recruits. Station Manager, Eddy Stephenson is an NCI Assessor taking over from Ex-Assessor, Ann Channing, also from this station. Meetings occur every month apart from January, an annual dinner is held at the local golf club and an in-house newsletter is issued monthly.

Development of the Lookout is an ongoing process. Windscreen wipers, a radar repeat monitor have been added to the original setup, an improved chart table will follow.

Visitors are made very welcome and encouraged to experience a little watch keeping through binoculars dedicated to their use.



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

