



Prawle Point

No: 40

'eyes along the coast'

Autumn 2011

FISHING VESSEL SE121 *Sarah C*

Logged by Prawle Point watchkeepers with great regularity, *Sarah C* and her crew of two, have become a familiar sight fishing for crabs and lobsters within the six mile range.

From her mooring off Snapes Point, she usually operates up to just three miles from the coast, inside the area frequented by *Salcombe Lass* and adjacent to that of the *Newbrook* to the east. Owner, Philip Cardew had long cherished the ambition of joining the fishing fraternity and began his career on board *Guillemot* in 2003 with just forty pots but, when *FV Crustacean* left the scene, he took over her licence, bought and refurbished his current boat, originally PW186 from Padstow, now renamed after his wife and given a Salcombe registration. An uncanny coincidence was discovered when Philip found a 1937 photograph of his Grandad, fishing with a former SE 121!

On a glorious day, in early October, Philip kindly agreed to take a passenger for the purposes of writing this article and a course was set on the flood towards Prawle Point by GPS plotter, locating the first marker buoy by means of the old Decca Navigator system, using precise records, (kept over the years and vital in the event of a dispute) which soon directed us to the first string of 25 pots to be hauled. Operations are conducted on the starboard side. The winch is set in motion and over the gunwale comes the buoy, then a large hunk of chain used for grounding the tackle, followed at length by the first pot from which all the crabs extracted were quickly tossed back into the sea, being either soft or too small. The pot is then slid along the rail to Philip's son, Adam who, having affixed a tray of bait to the gunwale nearby, deftly secures one whole haddock on either side within. The head of the fish is inserted into a stretched loop of rubber, cut from car inner tubes, which, when tightened, traps the fish in place. The pot is then quickly stowed aft while the two dissimilar lines - one the hauling line, the other the pot line are systematically laid out in one automatic motion. The succeeding 24 ink-well pots yielded between five and nine usable crabs apiece but it was the speed at which each of the many crabs was assessed for keeping or releasing that was impressive. This was ascertained by eye and



Adam Cardew baiting inkwell crab pots off Prawle Point

touch and only occasionally was the measuring template brought into use - hens must reach a minimum of 14cm across the shell, cocks 16cm but many good sized ones were rejected on account of the shells being soft. Whilst hauling, occasional steering adjustments were made through the forward wheel-

house window, either to keep the vessel along the pot line or to counter snagging on the seabed.

Once the last pot was baited and stowed, the corresponding end bulk of heavy chain laboriously brought on board by both members of crew and the bait tray replaced inboard, we were off to the first shooting position of the day. Then buoy, chain, intervening twelve fathom lines and pots all disappeared over the side in rapid but systematic succession as Adam steered the boat at slow speed. Each pot was placed on the rail before being whisked overboard, the crew standing back momentarily before dealing with the next until

finally there was the end chain to be manoeuvred followed by two marker buoys. Methodical stowing, well defined partnership and acute safety awareness had all contributed to safe execution of an operation that could otherwise be fraught with danger.

The second string of pots to be hauled were side entry creels where bait is secured in pockets and access to the catch is via an end door which lets down. Among the crabs were some retainable lobsters while others which were undersized, or with berry, were thrown back. Strangely a different set of rules applies to the bigger fishing vessels working outside the six mile limit allowing them to keep and sell such catches. Also caught during the day were Wrasse, a Conger Eel and Pollock of which some were retained as bait. The subsequent five strings were all of parlour pots with top entry and non-return net, the bait being secured as in ink wells. The well organised routine continued as decks were washed down at intervals with weed and debris disappearing through the scuppers, the bins full of crabs sprayed and covered with carpet to quieten the contents and the lobsters' claws clamped with rubber bands. Any pots with broken netting were swiftly repaired while in transit. The final haul and shoot must have been through an area frequented by baby soldier crabs as all equipment was covered with these tiny spider-like creatures soon to be washed back to sea.

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On the return home by ebb tide, the boat was set on autopilot at slow speed allowing time for claw nicking of every crab to prevent them attacking each other during storage; the really huge cocks having already been isolated as 'troublemakers'! A brief stop was made to off-load the catch in submerged store boxes before mooring up and returning to Fisherman's Quay. The two hundred pots had been down for three days and yielded 350 kg of crabs on this particular Sunday.

All catch figures and weights must be reported monthly. Most crabs are collected by the weekly vivier lorry for transporting to Spain via Portsmouth. Weather permitting, *Sarah C* works up to five days per week achieving an average of 200 days per year. Spider crabs appear between April and July but the best season for brown crab is between October and Christmas. They prefer areas of sand while lobsters move over rough patches closer in. During the off seasons, *Sarah C* goes net fishing for Bass, Gilt Head Bream, Mullet and Pollack, occasionally catching Cod and Red Mullet as well. Winter

maintenance is achieved within two weeks but mending, store and paper work are vital winter occupations. On the financial side, 500 pots each cost £70 on 15 strings each requiring 3 rope coils of 220m at £100 per coil and no insurance for theft or damage is available.

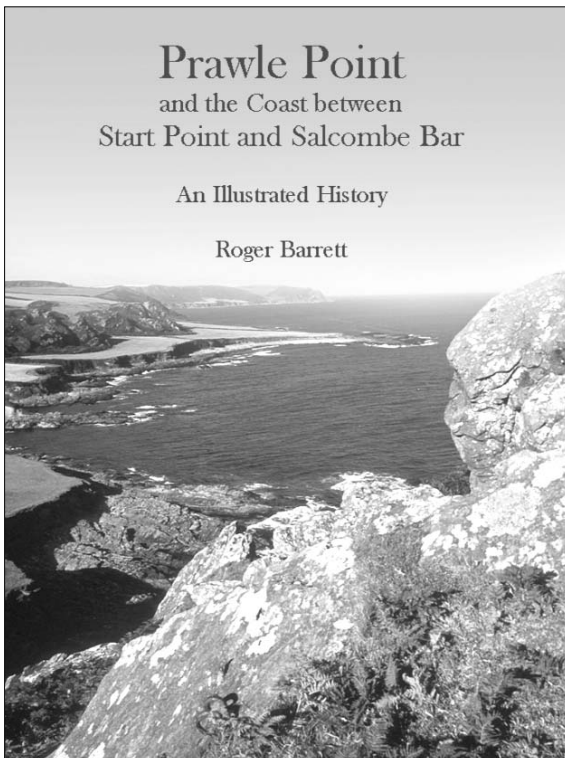
The VHF on board is normally tuned to Channel 6 and monitors Channel 16. Different signal tones alert the crew, working on deck, to the various types of coastguard communication. The boat is surveyed by the MCA at five-yearly intervals and self-certification is required each intervening year. She is powered by a Ford Sabre 80 horse power and carries a life raft on the aft gantry. Her length is 26 feet with a draft of one metre plus and a beam of 9 feet. Three training courses undertaken by the crew covered fire fighting, first aid and sea survival, and safety awareness. A five day watchkeeping course was funded by the Seafish Industry Authority.

Many thanks to Philip and Adam for a most enjoyable trip and to *Sarah C* - prosperous fishing.

NEW BOOK LAUNCH

A new book has been published as part of the Visitor Centre Refurbishment Project: 'Prawle Point and the Coast between Start Point and Salcombe Bar, An Illustrated History' by Roger Barrett.

The South Devon coast between Start Point and Salcombe Bar, with Prawle Point, the county's southernmost extremity, at its centre, is well known for its impressive scenery, geology and wildlife. It can also lay claim to a rich and eventful past.



In a new book, published as part of the Heritage Lottery Funded Prawle Point Visitor Centre refurbishment project, Roger Barrett, local historian and Station Manager at the Prawle Point Lookout, describes how people have sought, over the centuries, to defend this coast against the threat of invasion, piracy and smuggling, wrest a living from its shores and safeguard the lives of those in peril on the sea.

The threats from the sea came in many forms, from Danish longboats, the ships and galleys of the Spanish Armada, pirates and privateers, smuggling craft, mariners at risk in storm and fog, and, in the last century, German U-boats, E-boats and fighter aircraft. As a response to these threats, three coastguard stations, four lookout posts, a lighthouse, four signal stations, several gun batteries and two Second World War radar stations were built along this eight-mile long stretch of coast. The lookout at Prawle Point itself served as a Lloyd's Signal Station, a War Signal Station in both World Wars and as a Coastguard Lookout. Today it is manned 365 days a year by National Coastwatch volunteers who look out for the safety of those who venture along the coast.

All profits from the sale of the book will be used to maintain the watch. (NCI is a registered charity - number 1045645). The book is on sale at the NCI Prawle Point Lookout and in local shops, or can be obtained by post from Roger Barrett, Higher Oddicombe Barn, Chillington, Kingsbridge, TQ7 2JD (price £5.99 plus £1.50 post and packing. Cheques should be made payable to NCI Prawle Point).

Over 150 illustrations including 4 maps, 95 pages, ISBN 978 0 9568854 0 1

A great Christmas gift!

SOME COMMON SAYINGS OF A NAUTICAL ORIGIN

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| <i>Square meal</i> | Naval issue plates were square, usually made of wood. |
| <i>At loggerheads</i> | A logger was a caulking tool with a formidable head capable of inflicting severe injury if used in anger. |
| <i>Pipe down</i> | At the end of a working day the bosun's whistle signalled the time to bring down the hammocks ready for sleeping and becoming quiet. |
| <i>Skylarking</i> | Rapidly climbing the rigging to the mast heads then sliding down the back stays - procedures used both for training and exercise (often playful or mischievous) during long voyages. |

SPONSORED WALK

in aid of NCI Prawle Point and Hope Cove Life Boat



Some of the walkers resting at Salcombe before the final return leg to Malborough.

Twenty walkers including two children and five dogs set off in the rain on Sunday, September 18th. to tackle a twelve mile walk to raise funds for the Hope Cove Life Boat and National Coastwatch Institution Prawle Point. Fortunately, the weather improved during the day giving sunny intervals between the showers.

The walk started and finished at Malborough and took a circular route to Hope Cove, then followed the coastal path via Bolt Tail, Bolberry, Bolt Head and Salcombe. A magnificent sum of £880 was raised through sponsorship and donations, which has been divided between the two charities. Grateful thanks go to all who took part, the sponsors and those who provided back-up on the day.

NCI PRAWLE POINT: INCIDENTS TO DATE



24.08.11 Brixham Coastguard asked duty watchkeepers for the precise position of yacht, *Amigo* dismasted SW of Prawle Point. This was given together with on-scene details. Salcombe Lifeboat dispatched the broken mast and rigging to the seabed and escorted the vessel into Salcombe.

28.08.11 Yacht *Passana* radioed to report engine failure one mile S of Bolt Head. She was located from the Lookout and her position passed to Brixham Coastguard who later requested further information before tasking Salcombe Lifeboat to escort the vessel into harbour. This occurred during the evening watch and it was well after dark by the time the station was finally closed.

29.08.11 Motor vessel *Tormenta* reported engine failure. She was sighted by duty watchkeepers and her

position passed to Brixham Coastguard along with names of two other vessels in the vicinity who both assisted in *Tormenta's* recovery to Salcombe, the progress of which was monitored and reported as she passed Prawle Point and entered the harbour.

03.09.11 A walker arrived at the Lookout for assistance after falling on nearby rocks and injuring her knee. Rest, water and access to the first aid kit soon had her feeling better and a German doctor, who happened to be visiting just then, confirmed the injuries were not serious so 50 minutes later, she was able to continue her walk.

15.09.11 When yacht, *Breton Girl* reported engine failure, the duty watchkeepers spotted her 4 miles SE of the Lookout and advised Brixham Coastguard that the casualty was visual. Salcombe ILB was tasked and subsequently towed *Breton Girl* into Salcombe Harbour.



Friends Of Prawle Point

Open Day on August 24th was well attended by locals and visitors who enjoyed cream teas in the village during the afternoon while trying their luck on the tombola and talking with watchkeepers at the display stand. Fourteen people visited the Lookout and Visitor Centre to gain an insight into operations at the Point. A total clear profit of £455 was raised that day.

FOPP will kindly be hosting the now annual Christmas Party on December 13th.

BRITISH DIVERS MARINE LIFE RESCUE

News of large numbers of Harbour Seals suffering in the Wash of East Anglia in 1988 drew a concerted response from like-minded divers intent upon rescuing these marine mammals and thus the British Divers Marine Life Rescue team began, developing into the country's primary marine animal rescue organisation with full charity status and availability every hour of every day.



BDMLR training course on dolphin rescue at Exmouth

Since then, trained BDMLR volunteers have attended all major marine disasters from the Braer shipwreck off the Shetland Islands to the grounding of the Sea Empress at Milford Haven and dealt with numerous missions where individual marine mammals need rescue or protection around the UK coast.

This dedicated group of people form a volunteer network of trained marine mammal medics who respond to calls from the public, from the coastguards, police, the RSPCA and SSPCA. Although funded entirely through donations and training course fees, they have built up a wide range of equipment, strategically placed throughout the UK, to deal with strandings, oil spills, fishing gear entanglements and other threats to the well being of marine mammals. They have rescue boats, equipment trailers, whale and dolphin pontoon sets and medical kits with essential supplies available in all areas. In 2004 a grant from IFAW enabled the setting up of a seal relief unit near John O'Groats plus the purchase of a quad-bike useable on remote beaches. In 2008 a specialist seal hospital was opened in a remote part of the Scottish Highlands not previously covered.

No longer exclusively divers, supporters and medics include anyone with a proactive attitude towards the well being of marine mammals. Those who don't mind being wet, cold and getting physical, train on the BDMLR Marine Mammal Medic Course; approximately four hundred volunteers are trained every year. Co-ordinators closest to the South Hams are based in Newton Abbot and Exmouth. The majority of incidents involve the two species of seals resident in British and Irish coastal waters - the common, or harbour seal and the grey seal. Rescuers may, where necessary, work with specialist rehabilitation centres to ensure long term care and return to the wild but occasions arise when protection is all that is required. Such a case occurred at Hope Cove in the autumn of 2004 when a female grey seal gave birth near the slipway at Inner Hope instead of at her usual location in a quiet cove to the east of Bolt Tail. Once alerted, the BDMLR team set up a twenty four hour watch relay to monitor the pup's welfare, keep spectators at a suitable distance and ensure dogs were kept well away and on leads. Keen interested locals soon developed a happy relationship with the guardians who answered many a question, even set up information boards and a camcorder and kept the location as secret as possible. Consequently the pup could suckle undisturbed and changed from

a tiny white woolly scrap to a plump, smooth skinned juvenile at an amazing rate until it set off with its mother into the open sea.

Watchkeepers sighting marine mammals from the Lookout at Prawle Point routinely report to Lindy Hingley of Brixham Sea Watch who then monitors the situation however, as members of the public it is also important to know how to react if finding a live, stranded marine mammal or one that appears distressed close to shore. The rescue hotline during office hours is 01825 765546 with an out of hours number (evenings, weekends

and Bank Holidays) of 07787 433412. Local information such as weather, exact location, state of the tide, an exact description of the animal and any visible injuries can prove invaluable so should be noted and passed on. In the meantime it is vital to keep your distance, keep dogs away and remain calm and quiet to avoid further distress to the animal or injury to yourself, as seals, even pups, are capable of delivering a vicious bite. However, hauling out is normal behaviour, so are awkward looking movements as seals often lie and hunch along on their sides, closed eyes and lack of response could just indicate sleep and a healthy looking seal should be left strictly alone. A small pup with long, white fur may seem abandoned but the mother is likely to be swimming nearby so check the sea regularly for signs of an adult and do not approach or this in itself could trigger abandonment. If however there are signs of malnutrition such as visible ribs and hips and perhaps unduly baggy, wrinkled skin it would be helpful, if possible, to remain nearby ready to deter people and dogs and direct the rescue team on arrival. If the pup seems intent on entering the water, try to prevent this, if safe to do so, as very young seals are poor swimmers and are unlikely to survive alone at sea.

If dolphins, whales or porpoises are found stranded or injured, some advice on basic first aid may be given when contacting the above number, this could be vital until help arrives. Always look after your own safety first though and never approach an animal if it is too dangerous for you to do so. Gently rolling the animal to an upright position and keeping the creature moist are priorities, as long as water is prevented from entering the blow-hole, but keep away from the tail for your own safety. An exact description will give clues as to species and counting breaths per minute will give an indication of the animal's stress level. Remember, releasing the mammal into the sea, before the professional team arrives, can do more harm than good as it may be suffering.

BDMLR runs regular Marine Mammal Medic training courses around the UK and next year's dates are currently being planned. If you would like to join a course, please check the charity's website at www.bdmlr.org.uk for dates from February, or call the office to say you are interested in the next Devon course. The charity also welcomes support from anyone wishing to become a subscriber or wanting to donate online.



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, Hingston's Farm, South Milton, Kingsbridge TQ7 3JG
Station tel. no. 01548 511259 www.nci-prawlepoint.org Cheques to NCI Prawle Point*