



Prawle Point

No: 41

'eyes along the coast'

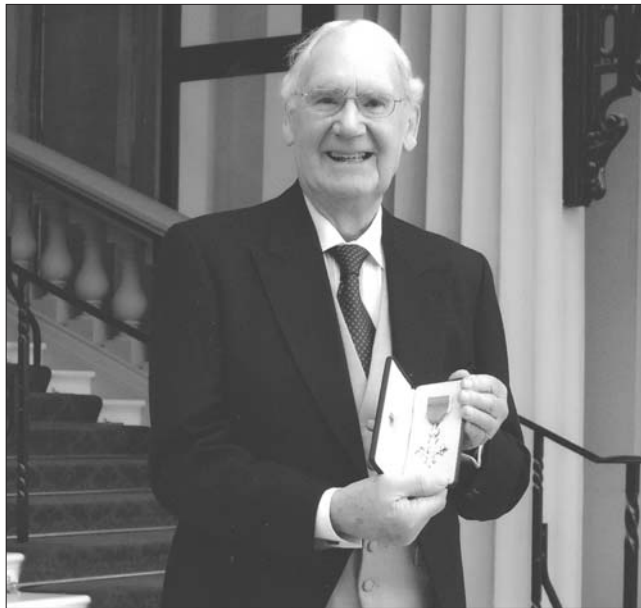
Spring 2012

Jon Gifford awarded NCI's first OBE

In March 2012, NCI President Jon Gifford was summoned to Buckingham Palace to receive an Order of the British Empire medal for services to maritime safety. He recounts the occasion as a very happy and memorable day remarking on the gentility and congratulatory friendliness of all who officiated throughout the event.

Accompanied by Rosemary, his wife and children, Alexander and Jane, who were escorted to the visitors' seating area, Jon then joined a number of other honour recipients who were given advice on procedure before entering the ballroom. An orchestra played, everyone was duly seated and the Queen made her entrance up the aisle accompanied by Yeomen all splendidly attired. Names and citations were formally announced and Jon soon found himself shaking hands and being congratulated as Her Majesty clearly recognised the importance of our work around the coast.

Jon began his long and rewarding association with NCI as a volunteer watchkeeper at the Prawle Point Station in 1999 soon after the official opening. His management and organisational skills, together with exceptional abilities in leadership and motivation, led to a rapid rise through local and national levels to become Chairman of NCI in 2002 - a full time occupation undertaken with tireless energy and enthusiasm. At the time, watchkeepers numbered around 700, manning



Jon at the Palace

Photograph: Charles Green

23 lookout stations, but, thanks to Jon's personal drive and commitment, there are now some 2,000 volunteers operating 46 stations in England and Wales. Such an achievement involved many miles of travelling in search of prospective new stations followed by legal negotiations, fundraising, recruitment and training of personnel all fired by Jon's passionate belief in the necessity of a visual watch along the coast. His wife has been an unflinching support throughout these twelve years. Simultaneously, he has devoted much time toward strengthening links with HM Coastguard, the RNLI and the UK Border Agency as well as the National Trust, councils and landowners of adopted lookout sites.

All this time Jon continues to serve as Chairman on the Prawle Point committee of management, but last year he stepped down from the position of National Chairman to become the first Honorary President of the charity thus giving him more time to resume duties as a watchkeeper at his home station. He has been welcomed back with much affection and pride but, being a professional in all matters, Jon has taken very seriously the necessary retraining to bring him up to date with so much technical upgrading and to refresh his watchkeeping skills. His close friend, Derek Venables has ensured such episodes at the Lookout have been both effective and enjoyable.



Retraining the President

Photograph: Val Turner

Jenny Brown

The Lifeboat Headquarters at Poole

Dominating the waterfront, as you approach Poole from the west, is the RNLI College aptly designed with architectural motifs reminiscent of the bows and bulwarks of a ship thrusting skywards.

Red and blue bricks echo the lifeboat livery, many windows are circular and materials within have been selected with modern boat building in mind- polished wood, stainless steel, glass and rope. The Foundation Stone was laid by Olympic Gold Medalist, Ben Ainslie MBE in July 2003 and, just one year later, Her Majesty the Queen made the official opening to which were invited one representative from every lifeboat station in the British Isles.

Many and varied are the differing classes of all weather and inshore lifeboats laid up within the huge compound and afloat alongside harbour walls and pontoons where groups of trainee crews, all kitted out in full gear, assemble for instruction then hurry on board their designated craft to launch for yet another exercise. Among the familiar blue and orange lifeboats were three Hardy and Nicholson Class fishery patrol vessels painted an inconspicuous grey for a reason. Not only do they serve as floating classrooms, they also provide experience for trainee crews on their way to full competency. Being unidentifiable as lifeboats, they save embarrassment while skills are still being acquired! Trainees become acquainted with the impressive versatility of lifeboats as they perform slaloms round a series of marks, steer figures of eight and turn a full circle within the boat length.

On entering the five storey building, the visitor is welcomed at reception and immediately becomes aware of an upbeat, purposeful ambience. History and function of the RNLI are displayed on attractive panels below a quote by its founder in 1824, Sir William Hillary - "With courage nothing is impossible". While crew training sessions occupy many of the classrooms, which are well equipped with AV and IT facilities, others may be hired out to visiting corporate organisations. In addition there are two engine workshops and rooms set up for radar and radio training. The ten function rooms, restaurants, café and bars catering for in-house needs, can also be made available for conferences and weddings by appointment providing useful revenue. A unique brew of beer - Lifeboat Ale - is available solely in the Slipway Bar and the Riggers Restaurant down below; both have superb views and are connected by a spiral stairway around the central column of which is wound one kilometre of rope. There are sixty bedrooms and the elevated waterfront suite will accommodate two hundred people who,



Capsizing an Atlantic Class ILB in the Pool

Photograph: RNLI

no doubt, enjoy the views across Holes Bay.

Historically lifeboat volunteers hailed from seafaring families, now less than one in ten comes from a maritime background. Crew training is intensive, thorough and demanding. They acquire navigation and communication skills, complete a licensed VHF course, learn how to look after a lifeboat, care for casualties from the moment of rescue,

deal with fire on board and practice sea survival procedures. To gain an insight into these initiations it was necessary to cross the high, glass enclosed bridge into an adjoining building in which is found the largest tank in the UK measuring 25 by 12 ½ metres with a depth of 4 metres. The water stays at an ambient temperature of between ten and twenty degrees and is kept clean with powerful filters. The task is to leap from a high platform in full survival gear and climb into a life-raft in cunningly induced metre high waves to which can be added rain, and sounds of thunder and lightning! They also practice capsize recovery and experience being winched out of the water, helicopter style, after 45 exhausting minutes.

Another daunting experience can be found in a navigation simulator featuring the controls of a Severn Class lifeboat where sea sickness can threaten and holding tight becomes the natural, if futile, reaction. Various scenarios may be presented and, on this occasion, we set off to rescue crew from a burning tanker adrift in the Straits of Dover as the weather, visibility and sea state changed from fair to horrendous and passing vessels loomed from the mist and spray, speeding past all too fast and close. Think we were given the full works just for fun, certainly no rescue was achieved.

Surrounding the RNLI College are longer established buildings - the Sir William Hillary Building, the location for operations, communications and fund-raising departments. Next door is the Lifeboat Support Centre where the various components and equipment used by the RNLI are stored within a computer controlled warehouse before distribution to the coast. The Bill Knott Building, named after its donor, houses a printing department and a centre where the RNLI Choir and the Poole Band practice for lifeboat naming ceremonies. A separate building in the Lifeboat Maintenance Centre is devoted to storing the South Division training flood rescue team's equipment so they can deploy quickly in response to flooding incidents. The Cokermouth flooding in the Lake District recently demonstrated the RNLI's skill and professionalism when dealing with such incidents. Elsewhere in the Centre, lifeboats can be found in various stages of repair and de-commissioning.

A small area is set aside for a most moving memorial to those lost while on service. Designed by Sam Holland, the National Lifeboatmen's Memorial depicts a figure reaching out from a tiny boat to grasp the hand of a drowning man. Stainless steel is used for the sculpture and for the inscriptions of every name from their respective stations. Verse by Nick Jenkins written in 2009 reads:-

Brave best of Neptune's crew lost
Stealing wind and greedy sea
Heroic in sacrifice
Moored fast in memory.

New saviours ride their foamed wake
Steel strong arms pass duty on
Guardians of the dark wedged deep
Fear to face, honour won.

College Discovery Tours for the general public are run throughout the week and cost £6.50 per person. Bookings are essential through RNLI College Reception on 0870 833 2000. Larger groups can arrange visits by contacting tours@rnli.org.uk



Friends Of Prawle Point

It was high time for some tangible gesture of thanks from NCI Prawle Point to FOPP, the nine hard working ladies who continue to support us at the lookout in the most generous and practical way.

Thus it was decided that the station committee should take them out to lunch in gratitude for their kindness and

commitment over so many years. Hence, on February 28th, seven FOPP members and six PQ committee members sat down to enjoy a convivial meal during which Chairman, Jon Gifford paid tribute to their outstanding loyalty over the years- since 2003 the total amount raised by them is a staggering £28,545.56 from which many essential items have been purchased.

Three FOPP events are being planned for 2012 - the cream tea on August 22nd, a musical event with Joe Stilgoe on October 13th and the Christmas party on December 11th.



NCI PRAWLE POINT: INCIDENTS TO DATE



Apart from being asked by two visiting Police Officers to look out for a missing person on

17.04.12 there have been no incidents since those recorded in the Spring Newsletter.

Keeping In Touch

On account of our Declared Facility Status (DFS), it is important for watchkeepers to maintain links with colleagues within the Search and Rescue network, so, in furtherance of this aim, visits were made recently to local Coastguard and Lifeboat stations.

Our Liaison Officer at the MCA station in Brixham, Jeremy Linn made everyone welcome and gave a thoroughly informative tour of the operations room as well as showing a video displaying a broad overview of their work. He explained the rationale of forthcoming changes in the Coastguard service and introduced the personnel whose voices have become so familiar over the phone when daily logging on and off. Most impressive was the thorough professionalism of everyone on the staff and the amazing technology available for their use. The long twelve hour shift system and the programme of two days and two nights in an eight day shift pattern (48 hours in 8 days) seems arduous but appears to be undertaken without a problem. Not surprisingly it takes six months to train a Coastguard Watchkeeper to the exacting standard they maintain.

In Salcombe, nine watchkeepers visited both the All-weather and Inshore Lifeboats in their designated berths. They were welcomed and shown around by the Coxswain, Chris Winzer and Deputy Coxswain and Engineer, Andy Harris, both full time members of the crew who were evidently dedicated to the job and utterly professional. A full crew is 7 on the ALB and on the ILB 3. They expect to be at



In the Ops Room

Photograph: Roger Barrett

sea, fully toggled up within ten minutes- those lifejackets were really heavy, never mind the suits and boots! Newly trained watchkeepers were gradually gaining an idea of how it all operated and beginning to understand the commitment of time and awe-inspiring expertise of each crew member in handling the vessel and effecting rescues. A lifeboat passing Prawle Point is indeed impressive but, once on board, the full extent of the technology at the disposal of the Search and Rescue service became a reality. In the event of an emergency

involving many people, a huge number could be taken on board without the self-righting capability being compromised. Watchkeepers were encouraged to try out the high-tech seats and experience the functions of the screens available in front of each position. The boat was extremely clean, tidy and well organised - a very technical vessel with two huge 1,000 hp engines which can attain maximum power in a matter of seconds. A few tales were told of rescues and discussion ensued on how we can best respond in incident situations.

It was really encouraging to realise the respect the crew have for the members of NCI and the work we do. This respect is most certainly reciprocated- a truly valuable visit in so many ways.

Thanks to Malcolm Goddard, Roger Hardiman, Roger Ingall, Vivien Plews, Sarah Procyk and Michael Sturdee for their contributions to this article.

Editor

SOME COMMON SAYINGS OF A NAUTICAL ORIGIN

<i>Hard and fast</i>	Firmly beached on land - hence rigidly adhered to
<i>Shake a leg</i>	Order given to put a foot out from the hammock and get up
<i>Keeping the log</i>	Early form of measuring progress was by casting overboard a log of wood attached to a string knotted at intervals.
<i>At a rate of knots</i>	Rate at which string paid out was measured by counting time between knots



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*