



Prawle Point

No: 39

'eyes along the coast'

Summer 2011

HOPE COVE LIFEBOAT Saving lives in Bigbury Bay

A stone's throw from the beach at Inner Hope, one finds the Coastguard Station housing both Hope Cove Rescue Team and the Hope Cove Lifeboat in its new black and red livery.

These shared facilities give a clue, if one was needed, of a common purpose shared among local volunteers through the last two years of uncertainty, with personnel interchanging duties between both concerns.

From 1878 until 1930, a succession of RNLI lifeboats, all named *Alexandra*, were stationed in the traditional boathouse above the slip. During this period many rescues were made and many lives saved. Thereafter duties were taken over by the Salcombe and Hope Cove Lifeboat stationed in Salcombe, although from 1960 a rescue boat, managed by the MCA, was kept at the Coastguard Station, one of just four such craft in the UK whose days were numbered when Michael Penning, the Government Undersecretary for Transport, confirmed that water-borne coastguard facilities were no longer required. This decision caused such consternation among crew and villagers that a fraught period of transition resulted in the very satisfactory arrangement we see today. It took a year of negotiations between locals, MPs, the MCA and government officials until finally an agreement was reached whereby the boat (similar to sixty three others around the coast) would be independently owned, administered and operated for saving life at sea yet fully co-operating and working with the RNLI and MCA. A Memorandum of Understanding was duly drawn up with the coastguard service.

Galmpton village hall was packed for a public meeting last October when support for the boat's retention was carried unanimously and Hope Cove Lifeboat together with trailer, kit (excluding radios) and dry-suits, were sold for a nominal sum and the boathouse made available at a peppercorn rent. The new fully volunteer group registered all as a limited company by December 2010 with charity status being granted the following month. Chairman, Directors and Trustees were elected and, on May 21st 2011, the boat became fully operational with tests

completed, MCA requirements met and Declared Facility Status conferred. New radios were purchased and a users' licence obtained from Ofcom. Livery of red and black make clear the boat is under new ownership. The mission statement - 'To protect and save lives in Bigbury Bay and surrounding coastline'

underlines a necessity and reflects the significant increase in recreational craft in the area over the last fifty years. Up to two hundred craft may be counted in Hope Cove during a busy summer. The area of operation stretches from Soar Mill Cove to the Erme and up to two nautical miles offshore with assistance given to Salcombe or Plymouth Lifeboats beyond this area as requested.

The boat is a BMW, Deep Sea 18 rib, powered by twin Mariner 40 engines capable of 25 knots or 30 in calm conditions, has GPS, radio and AIS. The three crew

members wear bump hats fitted with radio, dry suits and lifejackets of the highest specification. Several years ago the boat capsized temporarily trapping crew underneath. A self-righting bag, tested regularly, has recently been fitted to the stern with automatic CO2 inflation. Dead man's handles and footholds are other safety features. The tractor, which has always been voluntarily funded, is a Same Leopard 90 turbo. Due to frequent submersions in salt water, this will soon need replacing.

The responsibility of launching is shared between the Launch Authority and his Deputy plus three senior coxswains who must reach a unanimous decision, within set guidelines, regarding weather conditions on scene and wind speed, the upper limits of which may differ between day and night. Deciding not to launch, when conditions are beyond the capability of the boat, is, they all agree, a far harder decision to make! Requests for launching are usually made by Brixham Coastguards but autonomous decisions may also result in a launch. Pagers announce that a 'shout' is imminent so crew and tractor drivers can make ready, then, on receipt of a positive decision, a second pager sends all into action.

Incidents, so far, both occurred in May. On the 30th a small pleasure boat, with 5 people on board, developed engine problems off Bolberry Down. The vessel was towed into Hope Cove.



Hope Cove Lifeboat with Liaison Officer, Steve Baguley (left) and Ray Staff, Harbourmaster

On the following day a fishing vessel with prop fouled by nets, was towed towards Plymouth until the Plymouth Lifeboat took over the tow. Three other incidents caused alerts but the crew was stood down in each case.

All crew have seafaring experience and are trained to the highest standards with six new recruits currently undergoing training regimes. They liaise regularly with the RNLI and beach lifeguards through training and casualty transfer practises. Special insurance can be obtained to enable practice operations with naval and helicopter SAR teams. Boat practice is held on Tuesday evenings; coastguard rescue drill on Thursdays so, as many belong to both services, volunteer commitment is impressive. With a view to the future, local schools and youth groups are encouraged to visit the station.

All this needs financial backing - another huge commitment being organised by a fund-raising committee. Ongoing requirements include maintenance of boat and tractor, equipment and clothing renewals, insurance of £5,000 per annum, rent and training costs. The boat is twenty years old so will need to be replaced, at a cost of around £60,000, in two years time but local enthusiasm is high and inspiration is not lacking. An amazing total of £40,000 has been raised since that inaugural meeting. The boat was on display during an Open Day on May 1st, when it was blessed by local clergy, and again in the gardens of Spray Cottage where cream teas raised over £600. Incidentally this ancient cottage is noted for 100 years of supporting local charities in this way. A 50/50 club has attracted over 50 members donating to a draw where proceeds are shared between the winner and the boat. Casual clothing and wrist bands, all bearing

the Hope Cove Lifeboat logo, are on sale at local events and in the Hope and Anchor pub. The biggest fund-raising event of the year is the Hope Cove Weekend during Bank Holiday at the end of August. Examples of some spontaneous, individual offers of help include a monthly donation of £100 towards fuel costs and a request for lifeboat Christmas certificates to be issued as gifts to her near adult children, the equivalent cost of presents being presented as a lump sum. All such gestures are so encouraging to this highly motivated group of volunteers.

10 Year Medals Awarded



10 Year Medals were presented by NCI President Jon Gifford to 3 Prawle Point watch keepers, left to right Roger Barrett, Station Manager, Neville Higgins, Chester Wallace, Jon Gifford and John Leer.



Friends Of Prawle Point

Thanks again to our loyal FOPP team, yet another jazz evening with the incomparable Antique Six was enjoyed on the evening of June 18th.

As always the music was of the highest quality and the evening went with a real swing tempered with nostalgia as this was their eleventh and final concert in aid of NCI Prawle Point. The players were presented with bottles of wine and an individually designed card as a token of thanks.

At the FOPP AGM, Frances Leer thanked her hard working committee and submitted her letter of resignation from the



Frances Leer

post of Chair while wishing to remain as one of the team. As no one relished taking on the job and, being a relaxed, sociable yet highly efficient group, they decided to carry on regardless. Frances was thanked by FOPP and the Station Committee for all her hard work, energy and enthusiasm raising funds over the last five years.

The next FOPP event will be on August 24th in Prawle village. There will be cream teas, tombola and an NCI pictorial display coinciding with Open Day at the Lookout.

NCI PRAWLE POINT: INCIDENTS TO DATE



07.24.07.11 One hour after dive boat *Woodpecker* dropped five divers in the water near Prawle Point, duty watchkeepers saw a lone diver surface some distance from the dive boat, apparently unobserved by its crew. The watchkeepers notified Brixham Coastguard who radioed *Woodpecker* but received no reply. One watchkeeper went to the cliff edge attempting to attract the dive boat crew's attention using both lamp and arm signals. This appeared to have the desired effect as the diver was recovered shortly afterwards. Watchkeepers then duly informed Brixham that all was well and the boat returned to Salcombe.

22.07.11 A VHF Channel 16 call from yacht *Orienteer* reported she had hit a submerged object five miles from Prawle Point. The duty watchkeeper informed Brixham

Coastguard that he had the casualty visual and gave details of a nearby passing yacht. This yacht, when called by Brixham, reported she was reluctant to offer assistance. *Orienteer* subsequently regained steerage and the watchkeeper was asked by Brixham to monitor her progress. He was able to report her safely over Salcombe Bar.

30.05.11 When the duty watchkeeper heard anxious calling of names in the area behind the lookout, investigation revealed that two children aged ten and six had gone missing. A report was made to Brixham Coastguard who called out the Prawle Point Coastguard Rescue Team. The children were eventually found unharmed but tearful when they learned of the distress caused to their mother and the rescue alert set in motion.

The Antique Six Jazz Band

This popular Midlands jazz band first came to play in support of NCI Prawle Point in 2001 when invited by close friend, Joan Gross who, at that time, was a founder member of the station as well as committee member for public relations and newsletter editor.

Since they stunned the South Hams jazz scene on that first occasion, appreciative audiences have packed Charleton village hall for their annual appearance spanning eleven years during which an amazing total of nearly £6,000 has been raised. In 2002 the concert was held in Malborough Village Hall but the band expressed a preference for Charleton and made loyal appearances there ever since. Their contribution has been invaluable to the running of the station and we shall be forever grateful to them for their generosity and enthusiastic support as well as their infectious good humour. A lively entrance of folks in striped blazers always heralded a thoroughly good evening.

The band was founded in 1994 by trombonist and antique dealer, Keith Hockin, soon progressing to a successful touring and festival status. They play an eclectic mix of music influenced by Louis Armstrong, Jelly Roll Morton, King Oliver and the Revivalist bands of the forties. Strong New Orleans influence as well as more



The Antique Six Jazz Band performing outside NCI Prawle Point

modern numbers and party jazz are also important parts of their repertoire. Prawle Point has been privileged to host this top quality band and is immensely grateful for their valuable support through superb entertainment.

Sadly this year's concert was their swan song as the group intend to disband at the end of 2011. On every occasion watchkeeper, Jim Bennett has compered the evening with lively humour and zest adding anecdotes and comments which cleverly underlined the established bond between the Antique Six and NCI. Tragically it proved to be Jim's swan song with the band too, but not before he had invited them all up to the Lookout where

they performed their very last tribute to Prawle Point.

Jim had intended to write this article in honour of the band so it is fitting to use his words as published in the local paper. "On the following day the band visited the lookout station at Prawle Point; for many it was their first visit, where they were given a tour of the facility and the visitor centre, which ended with the band giving an impromptu gig outside the lookout in bracing conditions. 'We've never played on a cliff top before', was their closing comment".

Sincere thanks are owed to the Antique Six and to their champion, Jim.

JIM BENNETT

The untimely passing of Jim Bennett has dealt a sad blow to watchkeepers at NCI Prawle Point. Jim was a well liked and much respected colleague and an invaluable key figure since the inaugural days of the Station in 1997 when he became Treasurer for the Committee, a post he held for eleven years.

A true Devonian, born in Plymouth, his love of birds began at the age of ten months when the family home was destroyed by German bombs enforcing temporary accommodation at a house full of birds in glass cases. The fascination started then and the passion for birds began a lifelong hobby. Biology shaped his future career. On leaving school he worked in a local hospital laboratory before moving to the Foot and Mouth Research Institute in Surrey. Seven years later he married his wife, Dina and moved to Pfizer, a pharmaceutical company. He became a Member of the Institute of Biology, and subsequently gained a MSc. degree in virology at the University of Birmingham. A post with Wellcome, a pharmaceutical company in Beckenham, followed when Jim joined the virus vaccine production management team, in particular working on Yellow Fever vaccine which, through his efforts became the 'Gold Standard' for vaccine production. A later position as a bio-engineer with extended periods in Spain and America, may have started his joy of travel.

Returning to Devon on retirement in 1995, he continued to pursue his favourite hobby of watching and photographing birds and became a Council member of the Devon Birdwatching and Preservation Society. His two daughters, Sarita and Kaycia, of whom he was so very proud, now married and living in Perth, Australia and San Francisco gave Jim and Dina further opportunity for regular globe trotting and, for Jim to expand his bird watching interest.

He openly confesses that joining Coastwatch enabled access to a prime site for bird observation! Those who have had the privilege of sharing a watch with Jim will know that alertness of eye contributed hugely to his watchkeeping abilities and the instant identification of passing birdlife only enhanced the pleasure for those working alongside.

He was a vigilant and highly experienced watchkeeper and, of course, a knowledgeable adviser in the purchase of optics.

When volunteers were needed for maintenance work, manning stalls at local shows and sundry other tasks which cropped up, Jim's willingness could be relied upon and his abilities were diverse. He may especially be remembered as compere and special friend of The Antique Six jazz band during their eleven performances in support of Prawle Point. His love of jazz, cheerful, outgoing disposition and friendly interest in his fellow men, added a humorous zest to each occasion and made their ultimate appearance last June particularly special when he invited them to the Lookout. Jim's enthusiasm had rubbed off- they brought their instruments and serenaded watchkeepers and passing vessels from the cliff edge!

Sadly this proved to be one of Jim's last generous gestures. Tributes from the many who mourn his passing reflect the character and stature of this remarkable man. At his funeral service, the chapel was full with many standing and the departure music, 'Canal Street Blues' played by the Antique Six brought a smile and many good memories.



DRUMBEAT OF DEVON

In addition to her function as a fishery protection vessel, from April 1st, *Drumbeat of Devon* took on a marine conservation role when Devon Sea Fisheries Committee became the Devon and Severn Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (IFCA).

Her area of patrol extends from the Eddystone to Lyme Regis up to six miles offshore and, on the north coast, from the Devon and Cornwall border up river to Gloucester Docks and back to Chepstow on the English Welsh border then following the median line out to sea including Lundy Island.

Drumbeat of Devon was built in Holland in 1991 to a Dutch police boat design known as Damen Stan Patrol 2200 and based in Brixham. She is powered by two Cummins KTA19 engines developing 1200hp giving a cruising speed of 12 knots and a capability of 18 knots. Although she can accommodate eight persons in four twin cabins, she normally carries a crew of five - skipper, Bill Lawrence, mate, engineer and two other members.

Other vessels are stationed around the British Isles, each following the same pattern of survey and protection work under the IFCA Mission Statement- "to lead, champion and manage suitable marine environments and inshore fisheries by successfully securing the right balance between social, environmental and economic benefits to ensure healthy seas, sustainable fisheries and viable industry".

With her new conservation commitment, staff from other conservation agencies are regularly taken on board to assist in her new role. Exchange of information is of benefit to all. On order and shortly to be installed, is a replacement Hiab crane sporting a twin winch; one for launching the rib, the other for lowering grab sampling equipment used in seabed survey operations and for handling the underwater video camera used for ground 'truthing'. A three bore deck wash, with controlled flow, has also recently been installed to allow seabed samples to be processed prior to scientific analysis. With this increased commitment to conservation and biodiversity, *Drumbeat of Devon* uses underwater video cameras and other seabed mapping equipment to record seabed data from which detailed bathymetry maps can be produced. These are very useful in the management of fisheries and protection of underwater features.



Six hundred registered fishing boats, of varying sizes, are based in Devon employing 1,800 persons afloat and 3,000 in support jobs giving £40 million turnover at first hand sales. Therefore conservation of fish stocks, by adhering to EU and UK legislation and Devon Sea Fisheries byelaws, is patently in everyone's best interest and *Drumbeat of Devon* carries the necessary high-tech equipment for enforcement where necessary.

An Avon inflatable RIB is located on the after deck and is used for boarding fishing vessels at sea. A new piece of enforcement equipment is the Omega electronic net measuring gauge. This has highly sensitive jaws which not only measures net size but records the findings. Any offences are often dealt with on the spot, the skipper being cautioned and interviewed. Depending on severity, penalties can be from a written warning to a court summons. Under the recent Marine and Coastal Access Act, I.F.C.A also has the power to issue fixed administrative penalties, these can save a lot of time and costs, and certainly focus attention for offenders. New Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) are policed including Lundy. Consultations regarding the proposed zone between Prawle and Start Point, currently in progress, could be of future interest to watchkeepers while knowledge that no mobile gear is allowed in potting areas and that larger fishing vessels work only outside the six mile range already establishes a working link between NCI and Devon and Severn IFCA.

Officers from the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) also use *Drumbeat* to board foreign vessels further off shore.

In addition to *Drumbeat*, I.F.C.A. officers operate a larger RIB which is stored ashore and can be transported anywhere in the district to enforce fisheries legislation on rivers and estuaries. Main enforcement issues here are the policing of Bass Nursery Areas and restrictions on netting.

Officers also make regular inspections of fish landings, converse with fishermen and discuss their problems. A policy of good public relations seasons the legislation enforcement capacity with plenty of respect, common sense and understanding.

Last May a small group of watchkeepers enjoyed an informative trip between Salcombe and Plymouth on *Drumbeat of Devon*, thanks to organiser Chris Wood. It is hoped that another such opportunity will be forthcoming soon.

SOME COMMON SAYINGS OF A NAUTICAL ORIGIN

- Sweet Fanny Adams* She was an 8 year old girl, brutally murdered and dismembered. Two years later the Royal Navy began issuing tinned mutton which was not popular among sailors who mused over its possible origin!
- Slush fund* The ship's cook was allowed to collect residual fat from cooking meat (known as slush) and sell it to the purser or bosun for candle making or greasing of ropes.
- Piping hot* On large ships, the bosun's whistle would call the crew at meal times.



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