



Prawle Point

No: 42

'eyes along the coast'

Summer 2012

NCI Prawle Point wins Queen's Award for Voluntary Service

On June 2nd it was officially announced that National Coastwatch Prawle Point had won the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service.

This news, kept secret by order for over a month, could then be divulged to all the watchkeepers at Prawle Point by Station Manager, Roger Barrett who described it as "a splendid achievement and great honour for which we can all feel enormously proud". The award is known as the MBE for volunteer groups and was created to mark the Golden Jubilee in 2002 to recognise outstanding contributions to local communities.

The nomination for the award was made by Councillor John Baverstock and supported by Captain Ian Gibson, Salcombe Harbour Master and Jane Payne, secretary of Friends of Prawle Point (FOPP). They considered that the NCI volunteers, who keep watch at the Prawle Point station through daylight hours every day of the year, deserve recognition for the service they provide to those who work or enjoy their leisure along this most southerly coastal area of Devon. By looking out for those in danger or distress, they are able to provide vital on-scene information, when incidents occur, to HM Coastguard who co-ordinate search and rescue. Many fishermen, sailors, divers, anglers and walkers appreciate the fact that NCI watchkeepers are looking out for them and the Salcombe Lifeboat Coxswain and crew acknowledge the usefulness of 'eyes along the coast' particularly from the 200 foot vantage point of the lookout. During the year under consideration, NCI Prawle Point assisted in 17 incidents.

Social, economic and environmental issues formed part of the rigorous assessment procedure for the award. It was noted that the 62 volunteer watchkeepers enjoy a strong social and professional bond maintained by extensive training, monthly social gatherings and in-house publications. No demands whatever are made on the public purse as the station



Watchkeepers from NCI Prawle Point at Buckingham Palace. L to R- Jenny Brown, Steve Owen, Roger Barrett (Station Manager) and David Stone.

is maintained entirely from local fundraising and donations from an appreciative public. Over £5,000 is raised each year. In addition, the local support group, Friends of Prawle Point (FOPP) raise between £2,000 and £3,000 a year at their well attended local events.

Environmental services include protecting the coastal heritage by notifying the authorities of pollution and environmental damage, dangers to livestock, sightings of dolphins, porpoises and whales, harassment of wildlife and illegal diving on historic wreck

sites. Members of the public, particularly yachtsmen, often ring the station for updates on local weather. The Visitor Centre attracts walkers and school groups with its vivid, informative displays of local history, geology, wrecks, local wildlife, search and rescue services, walking routes as well as information on frequently seen vessels. A telescope, weather station and radar monitor afford a preview to the many visitors before entering the lookout to witness the full operation.

Ongoing challenges are the maintenance of two very exposed buildings and ensuring that all volunteers are trained to meet the high standards required in maintaining DFS - an annually reviewed Declared Facility Status awarded by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency to organisations within the national search and rescue service. A Training Officer and team of 8 trainers effect this requirement.

That NCI Prawle Point was being actively considered for the award became evident last November when the Deputy Lord Lieutenant of Devon, Geoff Bush visited Prawle Point to meet Chairman, Jon Gifford OBE, Station Manager, Roger Barrett, to observe the two duty officers on watch and quiz seven other watchkeepers. Although Mr. Bush was highly complimentary and was particularly impressed by the motivation and shared common purpose of the watchkeepers, he nevertheless warned against 'raised hopes' as many volunteer groups had been nominated for the award. And so it was with much excitement

that the final, but still 'secret' result was received in April together with an invitation from the Lord Chamberlain to send representatives to a Royal Garden Party at Buckingham Palace on May 22nd. For the lucky four watchkeepers who attended, it was a wonderful experience wandering through the extensive gardens on a glorious sunny day and seeing the Queen, Prince Philip and other royals at close range.

The presentation of the award - a certificate signed by the

Queen and a commemorative crystal- was on July 24th by HM Lord Lieutenant of Devon, Mr. Eric Dancer CBE JB at County Hall, Exeter. Jon Gifford, who is the Chairman of NCI Prawle Point as well as being the National NCI Honorary President, is no stranger to awards, having received the O.B.E. this year for services to maritime safety. Both he and Station Manager, Roger Barrett congratulated Prawle Point watchkeepers for achieving this great honour in recognition of outstanding voluntary work.



L. to R: Val Turner, Derek Venables, Hugh Stanley (watchkeepers), Roger Barrett (Station Manager, NCI Prawle Point), Alan Richards (National Chairman NCI), George Pannett (watchkeeper), HM Lord Lieutenant of Devon Mr. Eric Dancer CBE JP, Cllr. John Baverstock (SHDC, 'Nominator'), John Gifford OBE (Hon. President NCI & Chairman of NCI Prawle Point)

NCI PRAWLE POINT: INCIDENTS TO DATE



10.06.12 The duty watchkeeper at Prawle Point contacted Brixham Coastguard to advise them that fishing vessel *Martlet* was trying to call them on channel 16. With the coastguard unable to establish radio contact, Salcombe inshore lifeboat was launched and, after freeing *Martlet's* prop from tangled fishing gear, the ILB towed her back to Salcombe.

26.06.12 Visibility at Prawle Point was less than 200m when Brixham Coastguard called the lookout asking whether a yacht, which had reported engine failure, was showing on our radar. The watchkeepers gave details of the 'echoes' on the screen. The Salcombe Lifeboat was launched and yacht *Robardrigail* was towed into Salcombe.



Friends Of Prawle Point

A most enjoyable and sociable AGM on May 16th was followed by an excellent lunch in true FOPP style.

No one came forward to take on the office of Chair, vacated after several successful years by Frances Leer but everyone is more than happy to continue with the roles of Secretary and Treasurer being filled by Jane and Bob Payne respectively and everyone pulling their weight in the time-honoured way without fuss or favour, efficiently accomplishing the service of support to the Prawle Point Station, so much appreciated.

A delicious cream tea will be served on Open Day at the Community Hall in East Prawle from 3 to 6pm on Wednesday August 22nd. There will be a tombola and games for children, lifts to the Lookout, a display stand and watchkeepers on hand to inform visitors about the work we do, possibly even a new recruit may wish to apply for the next training session to begin in September! Tickets will also be on sale for the forthcoming FOPP event on Saturday October 13th when Joe Stilgoe will be entertaining us with his songwriting and piano playing talents at Charleton Village Hall. A hot supper will be included and advance tickets may also be obtained by ringing Jane on 01548 531885.

Salcombe Coastal Marathon Beats the Heat - raises £1,500 for charity

On Saturday 26 May 2012, on an extremely hot and sunny day, the cooling wind meant participating in the Salcombe Coastal Marathon was bearable, though water stops were essential.

The route covered 26.2 miles of undulating terrain with 4,500 feet of ascent as part of its route, and is unique in containing a ferry crossing too! This year the two local National Coastwatch Institution watch stations, Froward Point and Prawle Point were the recipients of a substantial charitable donation from this arduous annual event.

The Salcombe Coastal Marathon isn't a race. It has a formal start time at 8am, and the participants work on the honour system, timing themselves. They're running against the terrain, not each other! The time taken during stops and the ferry crossing is deducted from the overall total. This year there were 107 participants, most of whom finished the course. Two came from Australia, so far the folk who've travelled the furthest to participate. The oldest was Noel Gould, born in 1935 and the youngest, James Dean 13. Tail End Charlie was event organiser Stewart Bondi who says he took over 300 photographs on the way round, and dropped into Prawle Point for a photo call with Station Manager, Roger Barrett. The Prawle Point watchstation was visited by several of the participating walkers, the runners, understandably, preferred to keep going and visit another time.

The National Coastwatch Institution acts as the 'Eyes Along The Coast' for those parts of the UK where it has opened 46 watchstations so far with more under negotiation. Part of those duties is to provide help and assistance on the UK's glorious Coast Paths, paths the Salcombe Coastal Marathon celebrates in its route. That help ranges from the simple provision



Roger Barrett, Station Manager of NCI Prawle Point, and Stewart 'Rambo' Bondi, organiser of the Salcombe Coastal Marathon, inside Prawle Point NCI Coastwatch station

of somewhere safe for walkers to get their bearings, through phoning a local cab company for someone who was over-ambitious on their choice of walk, all the way to working with other members of the rescue services if an accident turns into a full blown incident. As well as being on duty to help, the Coastwatch volunteers also have an impressive knowledge of the coast path and the wildlife that may be seen from it, too.

The Salcombe Coastal Marathon began three years ago and raised £1,100 for Mencap. The following year saw £1,410 being passed to Porter - a local charity for amputees. In 2012 the proceeds aren't yet finalised and are likely to top £1,500, which

will be shared between the two NCI stations. Asked for their reaction to this, station managers Mervyn Balson and Roger Barrett expressed gratitude for the generous sums raised. Each station will receive just under 8% of its annual running costs from the event.

All participants receive grateful thanks from the organisers who offer special thanks to their sponsors: to North Upton Caravan Park for free parking, Salcombe Ferry for taking everyone across at heavily reduced rates, West Exe TC Soccer Club for use of the mini-bus and Windcrest Transport of Plymouth for an excellent low cost coach. Marshals for the day - Cow Pat, Troughie, Grab, Chris Lane and Geraldine Gould are also warmly thanked for their friendly, encouraging presence at the stopping points en route.

The participants had a great day, with many already declaring their intent to enter in 2013. The last word goes to organiser Stewart Bondi. "It's a tough course, a great day out, and we raise as much money as we can for worthy causes. If you want a challenge of distance and terrain the Salcombe Coastal Marathon is for you."

SOME COMMON WORDS OF A NAUTICAL ORIGIN

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| <i>Aloof</i> | old Dutch word 'loef', meaning windward, was used to describe a ship with superior ability to windward which thus could draw away from the fleet |
| <i>Footloose</i> | when the foot of a sail is not taut it dances randomly in the wind |
| <i>Listless</i> | insufficient wind for the ship to list and drive forward |
| <i>Overbearing</i> | sailing downwind towards another ship thus stealing or diverting wind from her sails |

OBITUARY

It is with sadness that we announce the passing of Derek Martin from Stoke Gabriel who was an extremely competent watchkeeper at Prawle Point for many years.

At the noble age of 92, he was still valiantly climbing the steep path to the Lookout to go on watch.

The Eddystone Light - flashing 2 white every 10 seconds

Constant eddies around a reef of granite stones, 9½ miles south of Rame Head, almost certainly inspired the name of the lighthouse we see on a bearing of 266° T, 21 nm from Prawle Point in good visibility. Many words have been spoken, written and indeed sung about Devon's famous lighthouses built on rocks hitherto so greatly feared and rendered invisible in stormy conditions.



The present-day Eddystone Lighthouse with the stump of Smeaton's lighthouse to the right

Merchant and investor in shipping, Henry Winstanley was the first to begin erecting a light tower in 1697 having seen two ships of the fleet wrecked upon the infamous rocks. An eccentric showman he may have been to some, but others regarded him as an esteemed pioneer grappling not only with the seemingly impossible and unprecedented task of building upon a small rock in the open sea but also heroic in persisting during a period when England was at war with France. When carried off by a French privateer, Louis XIV recognised the international importance of marking the Eddystone by ordering Winstanley to be released, saying "France is at war with England not with humanity". The tower was wooden, of octagonal shape with flamboyant appendages, sending forth the light from sixty candles, lit for the first time in November 1698 by the designer himself and for five years preventing loss of life. His desire to experience a storm from within the structure was chillingly fulfilled in 1703 when, sadly, the greatest storm ever recorded destroyed the tower and all occupants.

John Rudyerd was the next stalwart to carry on this challenging project. His design, based on a smooth cone shape with projecting cornice around the lantern to deflect waves, was again built in wood but incorporated granite foundations clamped and bolted with iron. Although the timbers, being subject to rot and the boring of sea worms, needed continuous replacement and the tower creaked and shuddered in foul weather, it stood for 47 years until catching fire from the candles in 1755. A relief boat arrived eight hours later during which time the keeper, Henry Hall aged 94, driven with his fellow watchkeeper on to the rocks below, attempted to throw water upwards. Open-mouthed, no doubt from effort, Hall swallowed molten lead pouring from the roof yet stayed alive for twelve days after being dragged through the water by his rescuers. Pictures of the stomach-shaped, seven ounce disc of lead, removed during post mortem, are produced as evidence of this hardly credible story. The fire burned for five days completely destroying the lighthouse.

Mariners were, understandably, clamouring for a replacement. Trinity House obliged with a light vessel until 1759 when John Smeaton began work on a stone structure designed for strength in the shape of an oak tree, the local granite blocks for foundations and facings, being hewn by Cornish tin miners using dove-tailed joints and marble dowels. Smeaton's formula for quick-drying cement is still used today and his basic device for lifting large stone blocks to considerable heights has never been improved upon. Twenty-four, six pound tallow candles supplied the light. In 1870 cracks appeared in the underlying rocks making the tower unsafe so the major part was transferred to Plymouth

Hoe as a monument to the builder, leaving the stump still visible today.

By now developments in lighthouse construction had encompassed new ideas and engaged the ingenuity of, among others, Robert Stevenson and notably James Douglass. His design not only incorporated the dove-tailing of blocks horizontally but extended this to vertical formation with foundations bolted into the rock below low water springs in a different location from the three previous structures.

Nearly twice as tall as Smeaton's tower, it was completed by 1882 and stands at 49 metres with a light range today of 17½ nautical miles. Two sets of gunmetal doors, each weighing a ton, open to the NE and SW and, further up two more doors offered access for the winching of staff and stores in bad weather. Oil fuelled the light which was magnified by ten foot tall lenses turning by the falling weight of clockwork mechanism which needed winding every hour. Curtains protected the lens during daylight hours and an exterior walkway enabled maintenance and cleaning of the outer structure. Conversion to electricity occurred in 1956 with solar power taking over in 1999 offering an intensity of 37,000 candela. A heliport was added in 1980 and two years later the Eddystone became the first rock station in the country to be automated, monitored and controlled from Trinity House Operations Control Centre in Harwich.

History tends to champion the designers yet none of these remarkable lighthouses could have been erected without the skill and determination to overcome hardship in extreme conditions shown by the builders and boatmen employed in work intrinsically pioneering in many respects. In the early days, journeys from Plymouth could take up to seven hours in bad conditions, the sailing or pulling boats sometimes being swept off-course, coming ashore further down the coast and having to return to base before resuming efforts. Many a nightmare journey was undertaken with landing on wave lashed rocks proving just as risky as the voyage. Heavy tools and materials required extreme care and skill in manipulation and transportation. Cold, wet conditions often prevailed for long periods and the work was highly dangerous. Imagine working with heated iron, molten lead and melted wax (all used for sealing joints and holes), when the wind howled and the waves roared around you. Set backs were numerous and dispiriting.

Keepers also deserve an accolade not always accorded. During the existence of Rudyerd's tower, a bad weather lookout was posted in the tiny chapel on Rame Head to watch for any distress signal from the lighthouse. Panes of the lantern were on occasion smashed by stormy seas, even a main door was torn away creating fearsome pressure draughts as waves advanced and receded; not surprisingly, conversation proved impossible in such conditions.

As we view the Eddystone Lighthouse from Prawle Point on a glorious, calm summer day, it is worth remembering the many noble souls who endured hardships to make possible this invaluable aid to safer navigation.



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 Cheques to NCI Prawle Point