

ISSUE 598  
WINTER 2011-12



# the lifeboat



## STRENGTH AND DEPTH

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A HURRICANE 30 YEARS AGO

PLUS

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LIFEGUARD GALLANTRY

WILD IS THE WIND  
WHERE DOES IT COME FROM?

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### WINTER 2011-12 ISSUE 598


Cover photo: Former St Peter Port Crew Member John Webster pictured in the kit he and his fellows used during their dramatic rescue of *Bonita* in 1981. See pages 20-29. Cover and Welcome photos: RNLI/Nigel Millard

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**Chairman:** Admiral the Lord Boyce KG GCB OBE DL  
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### Dear Reader

It's time to celebrate! We're past the Solstice and the sun is returning. Predicting the weather is tricky (p10) but our Patron will be celebrating whatever the weather (2). She has demonstrated 60 years of extraordinary commitment to duties. And the RNLI has mirrored this, investing in the right buildings and boats in the right places (4) and maintaining them wisely (34). Thirty years ago, two crews faced a hurricane. Their extraordinary commitment was of body, mind and soul. The first won

the day; the second, Penlee, never returned. The stirring story of St Peter Port's Gold Medal service to the *Bonita* faded from widespread knowledge so it is with great pride that we tell it here (20-29). Now, who do you know who has shown extraordinary commitment during the last 60 years of RNLI life? I'd love to hear your stories of unsung heroes and add them to the celebrations.  
Liz Cook, Editor



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Photo: Brian Green

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Photo: Scottish Sun

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Photo: Natalie Bealme

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### 2012: A Jubilee year!



 **Lifeboats**  
CELEBRATE EXTRAORDINARY COMMITMENT

We're proud to call HM The Queen the RNLI's Patron. In this, her Diamond Jubilee year, we're celebrating extraordinary commitment – Her Majesty's commitment to the RNLI, our volunteers' commitment to saving lives at sea, and *your* commitment to helping us fund a world-leading search and rescue service.

The new Tamar class lifeboat due on station in Eastbourne, East Sussex, this year will be named *Diamond Jubilee* in honour of this special occasion. Two generous legacies have got the fundraising for this £2.7M lifeboat off to a flying start, and we are appealing for a further £700,000 to reach the total.

We hope the Eastbourne Tamar will join the Thames Diamond Jubilee Pageant on 3 June. We're also planning a series of skydiving events around the UK – RNLI Jump for Jubilee. Visit [rnli.org.uk/jump](http://rnli.org.uk/jump).

At a local level, lifeboat stations will light celebratory bonfires as part of the Commonwealth-wide Diamond Jubilee Beacons event on 4 June. On 3 June, local fundraising branches and guilds around the UK will take part in the Big Jubilee Lunch – communities will get together to break bread, have fun, and raise money for the RNLI in honour of our Patron's big year.



### Vellum awards

Brighton Helm Mark Smith has been accorded the Thanks of the Institution Inscribed on Vellum for his part in saving a man's life in near-gale conditions on 26 May 2011.

The man had gone overboard from the yacht *Lady Cilla* while wearing a safety line, and found himself tethered to her starboard side, being repeatedly submerged as she rolled heavily.

Mark decided to put a lifeboat crew member aboard the yacht, to help get the man back on deck. It took all his seamanship and boathandling skills to get the 7.4m inshore lifeboat close enough to the pitching yacht to make the transfer. At one point, a huge wave lifted the yacht so that she crashed down onto the lifeboat's sponson.

Crew Member Marcus Morris, who went aboard the yacht and orchestrated getting the man back over the side, received a Framed Letter of Thanks, while Crew Member Conrad Levy was sent a Letter of Appreciation.

Thanks of the Institution Inscribed on Vellum have also been accorded to Lifeguard Marcus Lascelles for saving the life of a bodyboarder at Porthtowan Beach on 10 September 2011. Read the story in full on pages 18–19.

Meanwhile, Kirkcudbright and Tynemouth Lifeboat Stations have both been awarded Anniversary Vellums to mark 150 years' service with the RNLI.

### AGM date set

The RNLI Annual General Meeting and Annual Presentation of Awards will take place on 17 May at the Barbican in London.

RNLI Governors will be contacted individually and invited to request tickets to both events. All other supporters will be able to request tickets online at [rnli.org.uk/agm](http://rnli.org.uk/agm) from February, or by post using a form in the next issue of *the Lifeboat*.

St Abbs Helm Darren Crowe will be presented with his Bronze Medal for Gallantry on the day. Darren swam to the rescue of an angler who had slipped into the sea and got trapped in a cave on 6 June 2011 (see *the Lifeboat* Autumn 2011). Staunch supporters from around the UK and the RoI will also be honoured.



### A year with the Yorkshire

The RNLI is Yorkshire Building Society group's Charity of the Year for 2012. Staff and customers at more than 200 branches of Yorkshire, Chelsea and Barnsley Building Societies will raise money for lifeboat crew and lifeguard training. The partnership is expected to raise around £100,000.

The society is also our UK national safety partner this year, helping us reach new audiences with our vital safety messages. There are more than 3M members and more than 3,500 employees.

Look out for events throughout the year at a branch near you!



### MOB Guardian

European subsidies for MOB Guardian, the RNLI-developed fishing safety system, will cease from March. Therefore, we have decided to end production of MOB Guardian, but will continue to support the system for at least another 5 years.

Introduced in 2007, the MOB Guardian man overboard alert system has now been fitted to more than 450 UK fishing vessels. To date, it has saved five lives and provided peace of mind to hundreds more fishermen and their families.

A number of similar commercial products have since appeared on the market, and the decision to cease production takes these into account, as well as the investment required to fund future development of MOB Guardian, and the reduced likelihood of fishermen to buy the system without the European Fisheries Fund subsidies.

### Good buys

What's the best way to beat the January blues? Why, to hit the January sales of course!

If you shop online, use Give as you Live and the retailer will make a donation of up to 5% of the purchase price to the RNLI. It costs you absolutely nothing.

Visit [giveasyoulive.com/rnli](http://giveasyoulive.com/rnli) to download the app, and every time you visit a partner website, you can raise money for the RNLI. Give as you Live does all the admin, while the retailers (including Tesco, iTunes, Domino's Pizza, hotels.com and Dixons) do all the giving. Happy shopping!



### SSE support

We are now entering the third and final year of the RNLI's partnership with Scottish and Southern Energy (SSE).

SSE is committed to supporting the communities in which it operates. When work began on the Greater Gabbard wind farm off the coast of East Anglia, the company donated £300,000 to cover crew training costs for 3 years at Lowestoft, Southwold, Aldeburgh and Harwich Lifeboat Stations.

Since then, SSE's staff have been raising funds, helping us save energy and collaborating with us on training exercises off the coast of Lowestoft.

SSE Director of Corporate Relations Julian Reeves says: 'We're really pleased to support training – the key to helping crews bring rescues and themselves home safely.'

**COAST REVIEW**

**Despite being nearly 188 years old, the lifeboat service never stands still**

How do you decide where to locate a lifeboat station and what kind of craft should be housed there? That's the job of the RNLI's Coast Review team. They assess the ever-changing maritime life of these isles and decide what part the RNLI should play. They consult widely and visit each existing station every 5 years, to ensure we're meeting search and rescue needs while making best use of donations.



In the past 20 years alone, the RNLI has established 45 new lifeboat stations and closed 3. Most recently, in November last year, South Broads Lifeboat Station in Suffolk closed. This year, new stations are to open for a trial period at **Leverburgh**, Isle of Harris (photo 1) in the Outer Hebrides and Lough Ree on the River Shannon. The location of stations is inextricably linked with the lifeboats available – their range, speed and capabilities – compared with the type of incidents encountered.



RNLI Operations Director Michael Vlasto explains: 'We don't take the decision to close a lifeboat station lightly but our review clearly showed that, by closing South Broads and reinforcing Great Yarmouth and Gorleston, introducing an Inshore Rescue Boat, we can improve our lifesaving service to the public. The main launch sites will be more accessible, meaning we can extend cover to a much wider area.'

The Inshore Rescue Boat (5) is a boat more familiar to lifeguards than lifeboat crew. It maintains speed and manoeuvrability in shallow and confined waters. Light in weight, it is easier to handle and can be deployed rapidly from a towed trailer. The decision has the support of Yarmouth Coastguard Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre, and The Broads Authority, which implements the Port Marine Safety Code there.

Meanwhile, formal representations were made to the RNLI by the Inland Waterways Association of Ireland, with support from lake users and various statutory bodies including the Coast Guard, for a 'declared' search and rescue asset on Lough Ree. RNLI Inspector for Ireland, Martyn Smith, comments: 'We were impressed with the level of interest and engagement from everyone we encountered.'

'Lough Ree is the only major lake on the Shannon that lacks a dedicated search and rescue presence. It has a significant amount of marine traffic passing through, as it's an intersection on the Shannon–Erne navigation route.'

'We will initially operate a B class Atlantic 75 lifeboat from temporary facilities. The lifeboat will come from the relief fleet and a decision will be taken following the year-long trial whether to establish a permanent station.'

The Scottish trial will involve a Mersey class all-weather lifeboat, to improve the cover between Stornoway, Barra and Portree. Volunteers are already coming forward to crew the lifeboat, operate the station and raise funds for operating costs.



Work to update stations and lifeboats in 2011 included:

**Red Bay's** new Atlantic 85 lifeboat (B-843) was officially named *Geoffrey Charles* on 28 May 2011. She was funded by Roger and Judith Colmer in memory of their son who saved many lives when a tsunami struck the Phi Phi islands in Thailand during 2004. Roger and Judith's grandson, Edward, is shown 'Christening' the new lifeboat (3).

HRH The Princess Royal named **Bembridge's** new Tamar class *Alfred Albert Williams* (ON-1297, 16-17) on 10 August. A couple from Oxfordshire made a significant donation to fund this lifeboat in memory of their close friend.

Construction of a new Atlantic 85 boathouse at **Queensferry**, under the Forth railway bridge, is nearing completion. The new lifeboat (B-851) was named *Jimmie Cairncross* by HRH The Duke of Edinburgh on 11 August 2011.

Atlantic 85 *Tony and Robert Britt* (B-849) went on station at **Burnham-on-Crouch** on 11 August. Mrs Patricia Britt officially named the lifeboat after her sons on 15 October. B-733 has been withdrawn.

Relief lifeboats *James Dugdale* (B-845) and *Edna May* (B-850) were named at **RNLI College** on 31 October 2011 and D class *Myway* (D-745) joined the relief fleet on 30 August.

Planning consent was granted for **Baltimore's** forthcoming Tamar class lifeboat to be moored afloat. It's hoped that dredging work for her berth will begin in January 2012.

On 8 September, *Random Harvest* (B-852) went on station at **Brighton** (B-737 has been withdrawn) and D class *Laurence and Percy Hobbs* (D-744) went on service at **Eastbourne**. D-605 has been withdrawn.

Tamar class *Rose* went operational from her new home under the cliffs at **The Lizard** (2), on 6 October. This is the ninth and most challenging to date of the 13 Tamar slipway stations to be commissioned. The remaining four at **Moelfre**, **Porthdinllaen**, **St Davids** and **The Mumbles** are planned for construction in 2012–14.

**Hunstanton's** new lifeboat station extension was officially opened on

22 October. The station's new B class lifeboat (B-848) was named *Spirit of West Norfolk* by Gerry Tan and Melissa Derby (6), in recognition of the local community that raised the funds.



The first of a new generation of E class lifeboats was officially named *Hurley Burly* by donor Kay Hurley at **Tower** Lifeboat Station on 31 October (4). The Mk2 design updates the existing class, which has been in operation at three lifeboat stations on the Thames since they were established in 2001.

The pontoon berth and shore facilities at **Montrose**, the **Aran Islands** and **Castletownbere** are progressing. A new floating boathouse for the **Fenit** D class lifeboat is complete (7).



Construction of a new hovercraft ramp adjacent to **Southend-on-Sea's** famous pier is pending. This will be followed by the rebuilding of the station's boathouse.

We look forward to featuring facilities for the Shannon class lifeboat, due to enter operational service in 2013. Meanwhile, you can keep up with developments in *RNLI Compass*, on our website at [rnli.org.uk](http://rnli.org.uk) and via Facebook and Twitter (see page 41).

The journey is just the start of the *adventure*



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a wine cooperative in Valpolicella to sample the renowned reds with dinner.

**Day 6. A day at leisure.** Enjoy market day in Sirmione and perhaps take a boat to lakeside Bardolino or Gardone.

**Day 7. Venice.** Travel by train to Venice and take a private boat along the Giudecca Canal to magnificent St Mark's Square. See iconic sights on a walking tour and enjoy an afternoon exploring at leisure.

**Day 8. Malcesine.** See the 14th century Scaligeri Castle on a guided tour through the cobbled streets and pastel-painted houses of lakeside Malcesine, leaving free time to take the spectacular Monte Baldo cable car. Return by boat, passing charming lakeside towns.

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*Lifeboat Heroes* is available from Amazon and other good stockists, with a recommended price of £9.99. A percentage of the proceeds (10% of the supplier's gross receipts) will



come to the RNLI.

Sign up for RNLI on TV email alerts at [rnli.org.uk](http://rnli.org.uk) and we'll let you know when we're going to be on the box.

### They've done us a flavour!

What could be better after a hard day's work, whether at sea or on land, than a hot bowl of soup?

This March, New Covent Garden Soup Co launches a new flavour – Chunky Chipotle Chilli Bean and Chorizo – sales of which will generate donations for the RNLI. The soup was created by Robin Goodlad and was the winning entry in a competition run by New Covent Garden to find a

restoring and nourishing soup suitable for a cold and hungry lifeboat crew after a long and arduous shout.

Look out for it in UK branches of Sainsbury's, Tesco and Waitrose during March. In the meantime, the company's Smoked Haddock Chowder will still be available until June. Launched in 2010, the chowder has raised over £17,000 for the RNLI so far.



### Top image

Tobermory Lifeboat Press Officer Sam Jones is the RNLI Photographer of the Year 2011. Sam's winning photo shows the crew of the Hebrides station having casualty care training onboard the Severn class lifeboat *Elizabeth Fairlie Ramsey*. She says: 'The guys are quite used to me taking photos and are certainly no longer camera shy!'

The competition also included subject categories and the winners were:

- Lifeboats: Steve Taylor, Aldeburgh.
- Lifeguards: Andrew Lean.
- Seas: Rob Inett, Poole.
- Rescues: Dave Parry, Gravesend.

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# Wind is the Downd

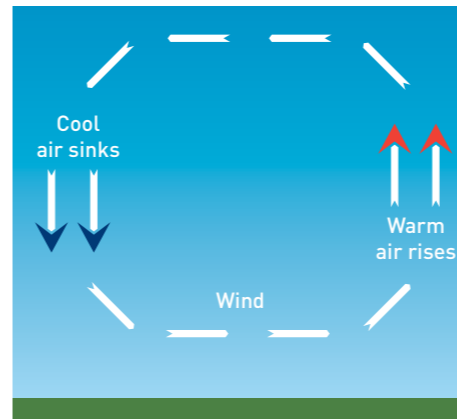
The wind brings us clear blue skies and storms, makes a sailboat sail and chills us to the bone. But have you ever wondered where it comes from? Here *the Lifeboat* gives you a beginner's guide to wind and its extreme effects

The wind brings changeable and sometimes wild weather to the UK and Rol. By understanding a bit about wind, it can help us all predict the weather. And who can resist the chance to beat Michael Fish at his own game?

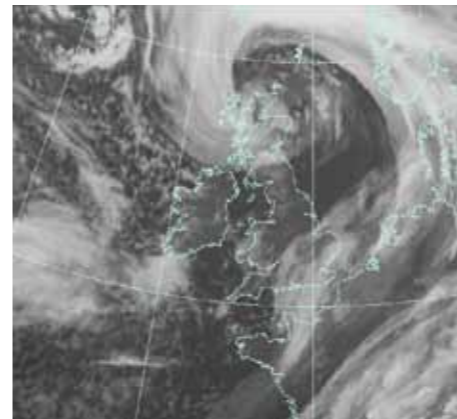
Wind is moving air. It's created by differences in air pressure – that's how hard the air is pressing on the surface of the earth. Air is a gas, so when it warms up, it becomes less dense, lighter and rises, and when cooled, it becomes more dense, heavier and sinks.

If a packet of air becomes warmer and rises, new air is sucked in behind it. That air must in turn be replaced. The replacement air will ultimately have sunk from higher levels, creating a cycle. Air is flowing across the surface of the earth from areas of higher pressure to areas of lower pressure.

We'll feel the wind rushing faster the greater the difference between the focus of high and low pressure and the closer they are to each other. And the biggest differences in pressure will be found where temperature differences are the greatest – for example



The circulation of warming and cooling air, forming winds



Satellite image of the cloud spiral of a low pressure system

between the equator and higher or lower latitudes, and between land and sea.

But air moves in all dimensions, not just in a simple up and down cycle, as there are many local and global factors at play.

On a small scale, the speed and direction of the wind is affected by natural features such as mountains and even by architecture. Most of us will have experienced the wind whipping down a street with high buildings either side.

On a large scale, in the northern hemisphere, winds spiral clockwise out from areas of high pressure and anticlockwise into areas of low pressure. These pressure systems can be localised or the size of a continent. Low pressure systems are usually associated with strong winds, cloudy skies and wet weather.

On a global scale, entire spiralling systems move too, affected by the prevailing wind and the rotation of the earth. Weather

forecasters often talk about 'a weak (or deep) low coming towards us from across the Atlantic'. Then you'll experience the wind coming from different directions as each section of the spiral reaches you.

Wind swirls around you throughout the day. It'll blow your whirligig around to dry your washing, it'll keep you tacking in a yacht, it'll lift a kite up high in the sky and make it twirl.

### How wind helps us predict the weather

For centuries, people have watched, and to some extent predicted, the weather by the direction and speed of the wind:

- Weathervanes and weathercocks tell you which way the wind is blowing. The arrow/beak points to the direction that the wind is coming from.
- Windsocks indicate the direction and force of the wind, with the smaller end pointing towards the direction the wind's going to. >>

0 Calm	1 Light air	2 Light breeze	3 Gentle breeze	4 Moderate breeze	5 Fresh breeze	6 Strong breeze
Smoke rises vertically	Wind shown by smoke but not by wind vanes	Wind felt on face; leaves rustle; ordinary vanes moved by wind	Leaves and small twigs in constant motion; wind extends light flag	Raises dust and loose paper; small branches are moved	Small trees in leaf begin to sway	Large branches in motion; whistling in telegraph wires; umbrella use difficult
Wind <1mph <1 knot Wave height 0m	Wind 1–3mph 1–3 knots Wave height 0.1m	Wind 4–7mph 4–6 knots Wave height 0.2m	Wind 8–12mph 7–10 knots Wave height 0.6m	Wind 13–18mph 11–16 knots Wave height 1m	Wind 19–24mph 17–21 knots Wave height 2m	Wind 25–31mph 22–27 knots Wave height 3m
Sea like a mirror	Ripples with the appearance of scales	Small wavelets; crests look glassy and do not break	Large wavelets; crests begin to break; foam looks glassy; perhaps scattered white horses	Small waves, becoming longer; fairly frequent white horses.	Moderate waves, taking a more pronounced long form; many white horses are formed; chance of spray	Large waves begin to form; the white foam crests are more extensive everywhere; probably some spray

7 Near gale	8 Gale	9 Strong gale	10 Storm	11 Violent storm	12 Hurricane
Whole trees in motion; inconvenience felt when walking against wind	Breaks twigs off trees; generally impedes progress	Slight structural damage; chimney pots and slates removed	Seldom experienced inland; trees uprooted; considerable structural damage	Very rarely experienced on land; accompanied by widespread damage	Countryside devastated
Wind 32–38mph 28–33 knots Wave height 4m	Wind 39–46mph 34–40 knots Wave height 5.5m	Wind 47–54mph 41–47 knots Wave height 7m	Wind 55–63mph 48–55 knots Wave height 9m	Wind 64–72mph 56–63 knots Wave height 11.5m	Wind 73+mph 64+ knots Wave height 14+m
Sea heaps up and white foam from breaking waves begins to be blown in streaks along the direction of the wind	Moderately high waves of greater length; edges of crests begin to break into spindrift; foam blown in streaks	High waves; dense streaks of foam; crests of waves begin to topple, tumble and roll over; spray may affect visibility	Very high waves with long overhanging crests; foam blown in dense white streaks; sea looks white; heavy and shocklike tumbling; visibility affected	Exceptionally high waves; sea covered with long white patches of foam; edges of wave crests blown into froth; visibility seriously affected	The air is filled with foam and spray; sea completely white with driving spray; visibility very seriously affected

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- Since 1805 sailors have used the Beaufort Scale to estimate wind speed from observing the wind's effect on the sea.
- Anemometers make more precise measurements of wind speed and direction.

Since about 1860 meteorologists have been able to get one step ahead and forecast the speed and direction of wind before it reaches us by measuring air pressure with barometers – nowadays of great sensitivity.

But so many factors are at play at once that many different outcomes could develop from any snapshot of measurements. This is especially true at the north west tip of Europe, with such varied landscapes and with so many air currents from across the continents meeting within a relatively small area. The more stable the situation, such as a large strong high pressure system, the more certain the forecast. The more complex the situation, the more imprecise the forecast, despite the power of giant computers to process the probabilities.

### High winds and high risk at sea

At sea, strong and prolonged winds create swell and waves. The wind can also add to or fight the effects of the tide. Predicted tide heights can appear inaccurate in very strong winds, and wind against tide can create rougher conditions.

Out at sea there's no place to hide, no friction to slow down the wind, and no shelter.

In tropical storms or hurricanes, winds can reach up to 200mph, spiralling around a calm centre of low pressure – the eye of the storm. We don't get them around the British Isles because they can only form over very warm water (surface temperature of 26.5°C or more), but these remnants of ex-hurricanes can bring gales and high waves – as we saw when *Katia* passed close to the UK at the start of September. At high tide, high winds can cause destruction with storm surges.

We're reminded in pages 20–29 of this magazine of the dangers of extreme wind >>>

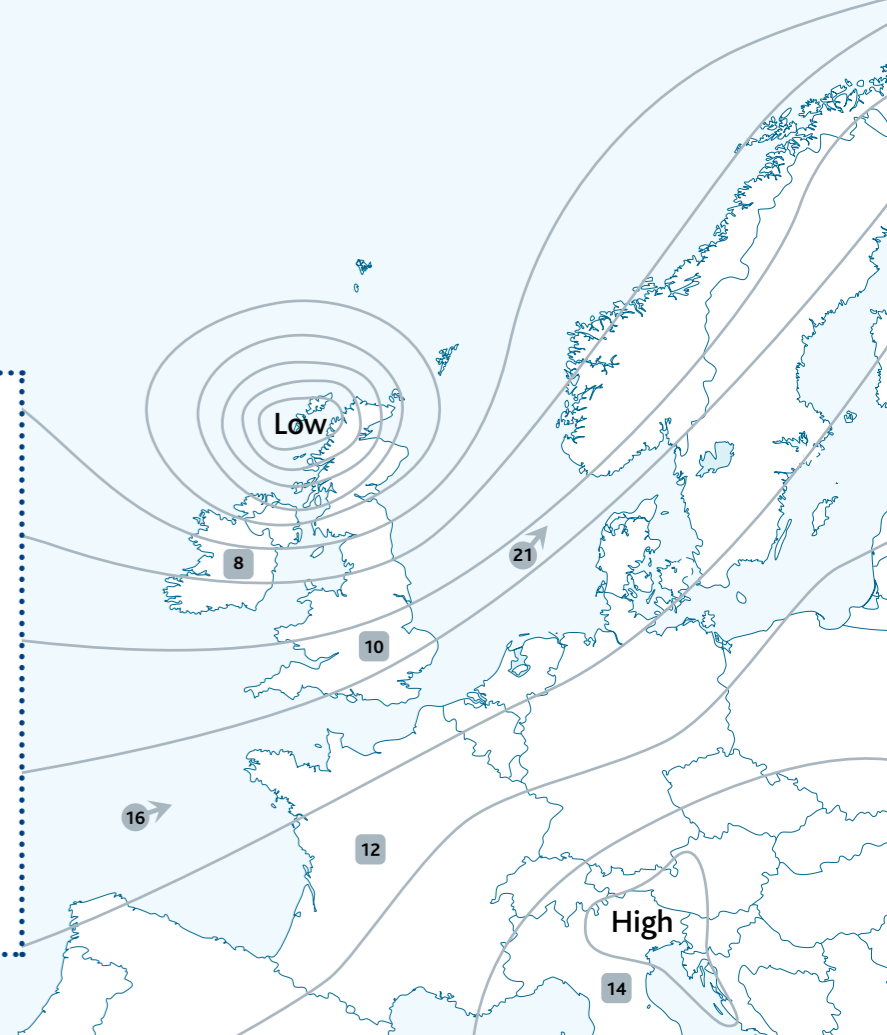
Do you remember the winds in October 1987, known as The Great Storm? Gusts of wind were more than 100mph. But the strongest wind ever recorded in the British Isles was in February 1989 when a gust of wind at the Kinnaird Lighthouse, Fraserburgh, Aberdeenshire, reached 142mph (123 knots). It was a storm at sea in 1854 that led to the establishment of the UK's Met Office.



### Demystifying the weather forecast

Key

- 12 Temperature in degrees Celsius.
- 16 → Wind speed and direction in miles per hour. The arrow points the same way as the wind is blowing.
- Isobars – lines joining points of equal pressure, like contours on a map. The tighter the lines, the stronger the winds travelling along them.
- Depression – another name for a low pressure system.
- Prevailing winds – the background overall direction of the wind: south west at the north west edge of Europe.
- Jetstream – a band of very fast moving air, about 6 miles above ground. There's one in each hemisphere and they can stretch around the earth. They move major air masses and affect weather considerably.





» and weather at sea. Loss of life through capsizing is a major threat in high winds with high breaking waves and wind heeling – the effect of the wind blowing on the side of the boat and pushing it over.

RNLI all-weather lifeboats are, as the name suggests, able to go out in all weathers. They're made of sterner stuff than your average leisureboat and wind heeling alone will not capsize an all-weather lifeboat. But if a capsizing does happen RNLI Staff Officer Neil Chaplin affirms: 'All-weather lifeboats are capable of surviving, protecting the crew and carrying on.' In high winds helicopters can be grounded, but the RNLI volunteers launch to save lives at sea when no one else can help. In 2010 there were 107 lifeboat launches in gale force and storm force winds.

RNLI lifeguards also save lives when the wind wreaks havoc on the beach. High winds create huge waves that knock swimmers and surfers for six, and offshore winds blow unsuspecting inflatable users out to sea and make it harder for those

on the water to get back to shore, as RNLI Coastal Safety Programmes Manager Ross Macleod explains: 'Offshore winds can feel deceptively light behind you on the way out. You only realise how strong they are when you're exhausted from struggling back to the beach against the wind.'

Deep low pressure systems bring high winds and intense downpours that cause flash floods. The flood water's too fast flowing to be affected by the wind, but the lifesaving efforts of the RNLI Flood Rescue Team can be hampered by fallen power lines and trees, torn down by the wind.

It bites, it whips and it screams. We understand it better and measure it more precisely than ever, but we cannot pacify the wind. Lifeboat crews and lifeguards will always fight the extreme effects of wind to save lives, but it will forever be untamed.

Words: Bethany Hope  
Photos: EUMETSAT/Met Office, Gary Kinch  
Illustrations: Jonathan Lotriet

**In the know**

A wind is described by the direction it comes from: a north wind blows from the north.

**Downwind** – in the same direction as the wind is blowing towards.

**Upwind** – in the same direction as the wind is blowing from.

**Lee** – shelter from the wind, provided by, for example, an island or ship.

**Wind chill** – wind passing over you causes your body to lose heat faster than standing air so temperatures will feel colder than actually measured.

**Famous winds**

All over the world there are local winds with particular characteristics:

- The Mistral, a cold, dry wind in France
- The Doctor, a daily refreshing breeze in Fremantle, Australia
- Santa Ana, a strong, dry offshore wind in California, USA.

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# RESCUE

## 1 AN EARLY DETOUR

Torbay lifeboat crew were called from their beds at 1am on Monday 19 September 2011 to evacuate a sick passenger from a New York-bound cruise liner. The liner altered course to meet the Severn class lifeboat *Alec & Christina Dykes* at around 2am. The woman and her family were transferred to the lifeboat and brought to shore. The liner's Captain, Neil Turnball, says: 'As always, it was a pleasure working with them to effect an efficient transfer.'



## 3 CAUGHT BY CONDITIONS

3 September 2011: Porthcawl's B class lifeboat *Rose of the Shires* was called out to rescue two kayakers who'd got caught out by a sudden change in conditions. The crew had just finished a fundraising bike ride when they got the call.

## 4 ALL ADRIFT

22 October 2011: Eastbourne all-weather lifeboat crew responded to the call for help from a cruiser with engine failure. She was drifting quickly and her crew suffering severe seasickness in the turbulent seas. The lifeboat towed her to Newhaven, returning to Eastbourne 4 hours after the original call.



## 2 STUCK FAST, THEN FOOTLOOSE

Hartlepool crew battled to save a 16-year-old boy stuck waist-deep in sand with a rapidly rising tide on 30 September 2011. The boy had got his foot caught when helping two younger members of his family from the water. The crew used a hose as a waterjet to loosen the sand around him, and dived under the water to loosen his foot. RNLI Mechanic Garry Waugh says: 'He's a very lucky boy – the tide was coming in fast and he was really stuck. This wasn't a run-of-the-mill rescue for the lifeboat crew, but everyone worked together brilliantly and fortunately we were able to free him in time.'

## 5 A STABLE PARTNERSHIP

14 September 2011: This disabled trawler had been under tow in gale-force winds by another fishing vessel for several hours, before Lochinver lifeboat was requested to stand by astern and stabilise the tow for safe entry to harbour.



## 6 DOUBLE GROUNDING

17 September 2011: Hayling Island lifeboat crew assess the situation at the scene of a grounded yacht. The yacht's crew were taken back to the station to await the rising tide. This was Hayling Island's second call out to a grounded yacht that morning.



The RNLI's lifeboats and lifeguards carry out thousands of rescues every year (see Launches on page 42). Here are just a few caught on camera and see below for more in-depth reports:

- 7 St Peter Port, pages 14–23
- 8 Porthtowan, page 24

Words: Mairéad Dwane  
Photos: *Hartlepool Mail*, RNLI/(Steve Jones, Nigel Millard, Rachel Pratt, Andrew Stewart)

# Rock and roller rescue

During a surfing competition, one bodyboarder got more excitement than he'd bargained for

## The setting

During the Volcom surfing contest on 10 September 2011, there were hundreds of eager spectators on Porthtowan Beach in north Cornwall, while the competitors showed their prowess on the waves. The RNLI lifeguards on the beach certainly had their hands full keeping watch.

Tom Durrant, his girlfriend and her sister, who were on holiday, were not taking part in the event. The three had spent the previous day at the beach and sea without incident but on this day the waves were much bigger and the shoreline busy with people. The women decided to stay close to the beach and Tom ventured off with his board.



## The lifeguards

Lifeguards Marcus Lascelles (pictured), Chris Lowry, Ben Sowter and Adam Bunt were on duty that day. Lifeguard Supervisor Josh Ward, who was *not* on duty, was nearby helping at the surf

competition. Josh takes up the story: 'I looked across and saw Marcus start paddling out. On the right-hand side of the beach there is a fixed rip [current] that some surfers and bodyboarders use to carry themselves along. It often takes them to the back of the rocks and some people *do* get caught out by it.'

It was around 3.30pm, cloudy with impressive dumping waves up to 3.5m high, a flooding tide, and force 5–6 winds. Checking the sea, the lifeguards spotted a man [Tom] struggling on his own, away from the surfing competitors. Marcus ran to the water and paddled as quickly as he could with his rescue board to where the bodyboarder was trying to keep afloat and Chris Lowry fired up the inshore rescue boat (IRB). Nevertheless, because it was so windy it was hard going with just him and Ben onboard. Josh hurried across to help out and swapped over with Ben. His extra weight would help in stabilising the small boat but they still couldn't get close enough with the IRB in the very rough conditions and were concerned it might hit the rocks or flip over.

Marcus, meanwhile, was forced to ditch the rescue board as conditions became more dangerous and he and Tom were swept towards the rocks.

The lifeguard risked serious injury to himself by putting his own body between Tom and the rocks and then using the waves to drag Tom up onto them. They were overpowered by the waves and washed back into the water on more than one occasion. Ben, who had arrived to help, assisted Marcus in getting Tom across the sharp rocks until they all eventually reached the beach. It was a slow and painful journey. Because of the rough conditions and rocks, the IRB had been forced to go back to a safer standing-by position before returning to the beach.

Bodyboarder Tom was taken back to the lifeguard hut where Chris Lowry carried out casualty care, assessing his condition and cleaning up his wounds. Tom had sustained nasty cuts and bruises on his legs, hands and feet.

Lifeguard Marcus had cuts and grazes too – mostly to his hands and feet, which he was able to treat himself. His full wetsuit had protected him from further injury. The plucky 21-year-old then went straight back on patrol.

Supervisor Josh Ward is full of admiration at how the lifeguards responded that day, particularly Marcus: 'He's a very experienced lifeguard. A lot of people would have been really shaken up afterwards but he kept a clear head and carried on with his duties regardless.'

## A day later ...

The next day as Hurricane Katia swept across the Atlantic, the huge surf swells continued to build. The beach was red-flagged and the surfing competition was moved to another location.

Marcus has been awarded the RNLI's Thanks of the Institution Inscribed on Vellum for his part in this rescue. There is video footage of this rescue, which can be seen at [rnli.org.uk/porthtowan10sep2011](http://rnli.org.uk/porthtowan10sep2011).



## A grateful rescuee

Tom says: 'I have been surfing and bodyboarding for many years. I set out intending to avoid the surf competition. I made reasonable progress but it was a challenge and I did not realise I had begun drifting to the right. I had

seen the strong current sign but it had not been so strong the day before and so I had not taken enough heed of it – a mistake! I tried to compensate by paddling at 45° away from the rocks but the waves and current were too strong and after another 15 minutes I was tired. I did not like the thought of climbing up the rocks.

'The lifeguards spotted me and came to my aid. I just saw Marcus who tried to get me onto the rescue board but the sea was too rough. We kept capsizing and I couldn't hold on. He then guided me through the rocks and helped me up onto them as I was struggling from fatigue and still wearing fins.

'I am fairly used to being out in rough seas but generally on more familiar beaches and on a surfboard. This situation caught me out. I feel very bad that I have caused others to risk their own safety. I am very grateful to Marcus and the others for their daring rescue. It could have ended very much worse had they not been there.

'I have since joined the RNLI as a member and will be much more careful in the future. My heartfelt thanks and respect go to all those who are very willing to risk their own lives to save others.'

Words: Carol Waterkeyn

Photos: RNLI/(Nathan Williams, Stephen Berriman)

1 Marcus photographed during a reconstruction of the rescue

2 The waves and rip current at Porthtowan can be extremely challenging

3 The mussel-encrusted rocks that Marcus and Tom had to cross

4 The area off Porthtowan beach where the rescue took place



## STRENGTH AND DEPTH

In the English Channel, there are breaking swells higher than houses. Shrieking winds whip up a storm of snow, sleet and spray. Amidst it all, a huge cargo ship named *Bonita*, with 36 people onboard, has rolled onto her side. She will never come up again. As the hurricane rages, it's the beginning of a week of courage and loss that will always be remembered by the RNLI



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January  
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Coxswain and Gold Medallist Mike Scales:  
'The sea can knock you around like a cork so that lifeboat did well. It's impossible to predict what the sea is going to do next in those conditions.'



The Ecuadorian cargo ship *Bonita* left port for the last time on 10 December 1981. She had been loaded with fertiliser in Hamburg, and had 36 people aboard: Ecuadorian crew members, plus engineers and an electrician from Spain and Norway. Two of the crew – the Captain and the First Engineer – had their wives and children with them.

Norwegian John Aicher was the Chief Engineer of the 8,400-ton ship. 'On Sunday 13 December, we hit a hell of a weather front. We had 9m waves by lunchtime. The ship was rolling so heavily that nothing remained on the shelves in my cabin.'

On Guernsey, St Peter Port RNLI volunteers were summoned to move their lifeboat *Sir William Arnold* to a safer position in the harbour. 'I said to my wife "this shouldn't take long – hold lunch as long as you can,"' says Peter Bougourd, who was then Second Coxswain. Some 40 miles offshore to the north, *Bonita* was getting a pounding. At 1.10pm, two giant waves hit her port side, causing her to list heavily to starboard. Then came the killer blow. A third wave caused the ship's cargo to shift, and she was unable to right herself. The Captain decided to try and run the ship aground off France, and asked John to increase power.

John had just entered the engine room when the ship lost all power. Without her engine holding any sort of course, *Bonita* quickly turned so that her flat bottom faced

the huge waves, making the rolling even worse. John was covered in oil and had to tackle a torrent of seawater in order to get out of the room. 'My fear and frustration turned to rage after the thought that I could be drowned like a rat,' says John. 'That was probably why I managed to climb out.'

Up on the bridge, the Captain was still trying to steer the ship to safety, but John staggered in and told him that they had lost engine power. With his ship now at the mercy of the sea, the Captain sent a mayday alert. This was relayed to St Peter Port signal station, and the town's lifeboat crew.

The volunteers were aboard the lifeboat, preparing to move her to a safer position in the harbour, when they heard they were needed mid-Channel and immediately headed out to sea at 1.23pm. 'The conditions were quite horrendous, and the further we went, the worse it got as we left the lee of the island,' says Peter Bougourd, who had the task of navigating. He used the given position of the ship and her likely drift in a force 12 to plot a course.

Meanwhile, a Royal Navy rescue helicopter had headed to the scene, and Winchman John Spencer braved the 100-knot winds and rolling ship masts to take four people off *Bonita*, including the Captain's wife and 2-year-old child. But then the helicopter's rotor blades began to ice up. The aircraft crew could not risk lingering. >>

» At 4.30pm, the *Sir William Arnold* reached the *Bonita*. 'I was very pleased because I gave an estimated time of arrival as 4.20pm and we were only 10 minutes later,' recalls Peter Bougourd. 'That was important, being on time, because once hope goes, people start to go downhill.' The scene that greeted the lifeboat crew will always stay with Mike Scales, who was Coxswain.

'I saw that ship on its side, knowing lots of people needed to come off and that the helicopter had done as much as they could. And I was thinking "How the hell are we going to do this?"' says Mike. He battled 15m waves to take the lifeboat around *Bonita*, which was by now listing at 45°.

The lifeboat volunteers spotted most of *Bonita's* crew assembled on the high side of the ship. But Mike knew that there would be no way to get the survivors off from that point – he needed them to move to the stern of the ship if he was going to get near enough without risking his own crew. Struggling to be heard in the shrieking hurricane, the lifeboat volunteers managed to usher the *Bonita* crew towards the stern using a combination of directing the searchlight, pointing and radio messages.

Aboard the ship, reaching the stern proved difficult and dangerous for the crew. 'We were freezing, in shock and exhausted,'

recalls John Aicher. 'With what strength they had left they walked on hands and knees along the outside of the hull to the stern.' John also faced the difficult task of moving a casualty who could not walk. The Second Engineer had broken both his legs in a fall and John helped him to the main deck with the help of the Electrician. 'The poor soul was in excruciating pain,' recalls John, who noticed that another member of the crew, a motorman, had also fallen and broken his leg. He was on one of the ship's hatches, which were being hit by waves. Next to him was the ship's steward.

'The Steward was totally motionless with shock,' says John Aicher. The Steward later fell and was killed instantly when he hit the side of the ship. His body floated in the sea, watched in horror by *Bonita's* crew. Meanwhile, the injured Motorman clung on for his life.

Mike Scales brought the lifeboat's port side alongside the ship's transom, and two men jumped aboard from the stern. In the falling swell, a third man jumped unexpectedly. He mistimed his leap, fell head first on the lifeboat and suffered a serious head injury. Crew Members Alan Martel and John Webster carried him into the wheelhouse, where Mechanic Bob Vowles tended to the wound. The other two men sheltered below in the fore cabin. »



Second Coxswain Peter Bougourd  
**'My wife said I wasn't worth a brass farthing in the garden for a fortnight after that rescue.'**



Annie Bougourd  
**'They had confidence in the lifeboat and each other. So I thought there was no point in worrying.'**



**'Being islanders we've all grown up with boats. So it's in the blood.'**  
 Crew Member Richard Hamon is pictured over breakfast in a St Peter Port cafe. The photographs on the wall – both taken by Brian Green – show Richard and the crew arriving back at Guernsey after the *Bonita* rescue (top left) and their lifeboat at the time, the Arun class *Sir William Arnold* (top middle).



The late Peter Bisson [pictured in 1992]. **'Pete had not been on the lifeboat for very long then. But he thoroughly enjoyed it. Pete was very quiet. Not shy, but he wouldn't boast about what they had done. He just loved being on that lifeboat.'**

Pauline Bisson, Peter's widow

Crew Member John Webster: **'There was real strength and depth. Peter Bougourd, John Bougourd, and Peter Bisson all became coxswains after Mike Scales. That's four coxswains, present or future. A great team.'**

Mechanic Bob Vowles [pictured in 1982]. **'Bob was in the wheelhouse, giving first aid. Plus he had to restart the engines when we stalled, and was in charge of communications. Not easy in a hurricane!'**

Coxswain Mike Scales

» Concerned that more attempts to get alongside would risk his crew and lifeboat, Mike Scales formed a new plan.

Peter Bisson operated the searchlight. Mechanic Bob Vowles was based in the wheelhouse, in charge of communications and first aid. John Webster, Richard Hamon, John Bougourd and Alan Martel were on deck, preparing to pull people aboard and take them inside. Peter Bougourd went to the foredeck.

'Peter probably had the hardest job standing on the bow,' says Mike Scales. 'I asked him to stand there because he was our rocket launcher – he could throw the line the furthest.' The plan was to approach the transom head-on and throw a line to

the ship, which people would attach to themselves, jump into the sea and then be pulled aboard. It would take great skill to hold the lifeboat in position in such conditions. One moment the lifeboat would be on the crest of a wave, level with the top of *Bonita's* stern, the next she would be in a trough, below the propeller. 'Mike Scales showed wonderful boathandling,' says Peter Bougourd.

The wife and two daughters of the First Engineer were among the first to receive the heaving line from Peter, wrap it around themselves and jump, despite the risks of impact and immersion in the ferocious, cold sea. They were quickly pulled aboard, but not all transfers went so smoothly.



The *Bonita*, pictured on her side in the English Channel. A liferaft is just visible (circled), which no one could safely reach in the conditions

'There was a fellow in a white jumper who let go of the heaving line,' says Alan Martel. 'I just saw this dark patch in the water, so I hung out of the boat and pulled him by his hair.' With the help of the other lifeboat crew, Alan pulled the man aboard. He had stopped breathing, but the volunteers resuscitated him.

After 16 people had been successfully rescued using a line, Mike Scales drew away from *Bonita* to give his crew some respite. They had been working for hours in sub-zero temperatures, hurricane-force winds and three-storey seas. 'For me it was a chance to bring my trousers back up because they were down around my knees inside my oilskins – most uncomfortable!' smiles Peter Bougourd. After 10 minutes, the lifeboat returned to the stern of the ship, much to the relief of the ship's crew, who thought they had been abandoned. During one approach, the lifeboat's engines stalled, and she was trapped under the ship's transom. Peter reached out and pushed against the ship's hull. 'We were stuck. It was only when a wave came behind us and the engines restarted that she popped out backwards.'

By now there were several rescue helicopters on scene, but it was still too dangerous for them to send a winchman down to *Bonita*. However, the ship's crew

managed to get a message to a rescue helicopter that there was no way that the injured Second Engineer would be able to jump. Risking their lives, the helicopter crew hovered low enough to dangle a strop. After three attempts, it was secured to the injured man and he was airlifted to hospital.

John Aicher was wondering if his turn to jump would ever arrive. 'I felt the urge just to slide into the raging sea just to get away from this nightmare,' he says. When his turn did come, he jumped with the Electrician and both were pulled safely aboard. That just left three men: the Captain, the injured Motorman (who had by now been lashed to a hatch to avoid him being swept away) and a panic-stricken crew member who was afraid to jump.

The frightened seaman eventually tied the line around his wrists, jumped, and the lifeboat crew hauled him to the *Sir William Arnold*. Then the Captain was safely taken aboard too.

Although he did not want to leave the injured Motorman alone on the ship, Coxswain Mike Scales reluctantly decided to head to shore. He had hypothermic, exhausted people aboard. The man who had suffered a head injury was unconscious and needed urgent medical attention. The crew decided that Brixham, Devon, was their

best destination – by now it was only 27 miles away, while Guernsey was around 60 miles to the south. At the same time, the Torbay lifeboat was heading in the opposite direction. Her crew had been occupied rescuing a yacht crew when *Bonita* first called for help, but now they were available and were heading to the ship.

Before the Torbay lifeboat arrived at the *Bonita*, the crew of a French tug managed to get the injured Motorman off the hatch and to safety. St Peter Port Mechanic Bob Vowles heard the good news on the radio and passed it on to the *Bonita* survivors in the lifeboat's fore cabin. 'I could not resist bursting into tears,' says John Aicher.

Although they had made it off the *Bonita*, the survivors were not home and dry quite yet. They faced a rough journey back to Brixham, and the inside of the lifeboat resembled a toilet in parts: many casualties were suffering from seasickness, shock and injury. The lifeboat finally reached Brixham at 11.13pm, after more than 10 hours at sea.

Three decades on, John Aicher says he owes everything to the St Peter Port lifeboat crew. 'If these men had not been there I would not be here today. They gave me 30 more years.'

See overleaf for the aftermath of the rescue. »



Crew Member John Bougourd: **'I remember the calm there was when we went down the troughs of the waves. It was dark and quiet. The spray made it especially difficult to work in because it gets in your eyes. The lifeboat was the star. She was a beautiful boat.'**



Assistant Mechanic Alan Martel: **'We had all been out when it was rough in our own boats. So it was just a bit more weather. Of course we were happy to go. And at the back of our minds we knew that the lifeboat would get us home.'**



John Aicher, First Engineer on *Bonita*: **'I was quite sure I would never come home. These men gave me 30 more years to live.'**

To see a short film on the *Bonita* rescue, and hear the St Peter Port crew and rescuee John Aicher speak, go to [rnli.org.uk/bonita](http://rnli.org.uk/bonita).

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## Medals and tears

The St Peter Port crew were not the only RNLI lifeboat volunteers who battled violent storms in December 1981.

When the *Bonita* had first begun to list heavily at lunchtime on 13 December, the Beaumaris lifeboat headed into a gale and blizzard to rescue a fishing boat off Anglesey. Coxswain David Gallichan managed to get close enough for his crew to take two men off the stricken vessel before it was wrecked on the shore.

Off the Yorkshire coast, the Humber lifeboat was also called into action. Humber Coxswain Brian Bevan and his crew went to the aid of another ship that had suffered a shifting cargo. Facing storm force winds gusting to force 11, Coxswain Bevan took the lifeboat alongside eight times, taking off three men. The ship's Captain and Mate decided to stay aboard their vessel, so the Humber lifeboat slowly escorted them through the storm into the Humber Estuary.

On the morning of 14 December, the St Peter Port lifeboat crew woke up in a Brixham guesthouse and set off for home after a hearty breakfast. Second Coxswain Peter Bougourd took the wheel while Coxswain Scales rested. Although she had hit the *Bonita* several times, and battled hurricane conditions, the Arun class

*Sir William Arnold* was mechanically sound, and made short work of the journey to Guernsey in large swells and gale force winds.

Of the 29 people brought back to Brixham, all survived except the man who had suffered a head injury. Sadly, he died from his wounds in hospital. *Bonita* Chief Engineer John Aicher faced a busy few days in England. 'I had to help get people home to Ecuador, and I had to make a statement about the ship. I was not able to think what I had been through. I had lost everything, including my clothes and passport.'

The St Peter Port crew members were still coming to terms with all that they had seen and done when, on 19 December, the crew of the Penlee lifeboat launched off the Cornish coast. The lifeboat *Solomon Browne* headed to a coaster, *Union Star*, which was being battered towards the shore in a hurricane. The crews of both vessels were all lost. It was the worst lifeboat tragedy in living memory. In typical understatement, Peter Bougourd said: 'It took the shine off Christmas.'

In May 1982, the St Peter Port crew headed to London. It was the day of the RNLI's Annual Presentation of Awards – a day so often associated with celebration. But this year it was to be tinged with sadness.

No fewer than 29 Medals for Gallantry were awarded at the ceremony. They included a Bronze Medal for Beaumaris Coxswain David Gallichan and a Bar to Bronze Medal to Humber Coxswain Brian Bevan, for the courage and skill they showed on 13 December. As for the St Peter Port crew, Coxswain Mike Scales received the Gold Medal, while the crew all received Bronze Medals.

The wives and mothers of the Penlee crew received posthumous Medals for Gallantry on behalf of their husbands and sons. 'It was very tearful – it could so easily have been the wives from Guernsey that were up there instead of the Penlee ones,' says Pauline Bisson, wife of the late Peter Bisson. 'It was a really sad but special night.'

For *Bonita* survivor John Aicher, there is no award or gift that can sum up his gratitude: 'We survived,' he says, 'thanks to the tremendous efforts and great gallantry of the crew of the St Peter Port lifeboat.'

Words: Rory Stamp.  
Photos: Brian Green, RNLI/(Mike Lavis, Nigel Millard, Nathan Williams).  
Painting: Dave Jory



The journey is just the start of the *adventure*



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**REVIEW**

**Valentia Lifeboats – A History**



by Dick Robinson  
Review by Carol Waterkeyn

Dick Robinson is a former Crew Member of Valentia Lifeboat Station, President of a fundraising branch, RNLI Sea Safety Adviser and a member of the Lifeboat Enthusiasts' Society. He is passionate about lifeboats and it shows in this well-researched book.

*Valentia Lifeboats – A History* is an account of the life of the Co Kerry station since its foundation in 1864. I found the passages about the harrowing recovery of passengers from the 1985 Air India Disaster, and an excerpt 'What makes a lifeboatman?' taken from the local paper, particularly poignant. But Valentia Lifeboat Station is not unique. The sentiments expressed and the dedication of crews recorded throughout would probably ring true for every one of the RNLI's lifeboat stations. Given the fact that Dick has taken the time and trouble to thoroughly research and record every detail of Valentia, and include photographs of the many crew members and boats, I salute him.

You can listen to Dick's podcast on Valentia lifeboats at [goo.gl/mHghi](http://goo.gl/mHghi).

Paperback book  
Published by The History Press Ireland  
ISBN 9781845887070  
Price €19.99/£16.99

**Stop press:** Edward Wake-Walker's outstanding book *Lifeboat Heroes*, as reviewed in the Summer 2009 issue, is now available in paperback priced €9.99. The publishers will donate £1 to the RNLI for every copy sold.

**The Mousehole Cat**



By Antonia Barber and Nicola Bayley  
Review by Bethany Hope

Tired of reading *The Gruffalo* to your children/grandchildren?

Are your kids too young for Harry Potter? Then as a mother of two, I recommend you treat yourselves to *The Mousehole Cat*. It's a timeless classic that appeals to adults and children alike.

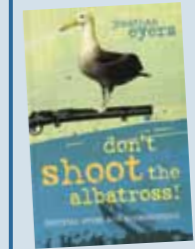
This heartwarming story of friendship, the wild sea and bravery, is seen through the eyes of Mowser the cat and her brave old fisherman owner Tom. The Great Storm Cat prevents all the fishermen going out of the harbour and the villagers of Mousehole are getting hungry. Together Tom and Mowser risk their lives for the sake of their community. Will Mowser tame the Great Storm Cat?

Rich illustrations combine beautifully with poetic language, great detail, and the whole thing's written with warmth and humour. You'll notice something new every time you read it. I first read it when my daughter was 3. Years later, it's still remembered as a firm family favourite.

For me, the fisherman epitomises the selfless bravery of generations that head out to sea in a storm for the sake of others. (Mousehole is also where the Penlee lifeboat is now stationed). By the end of the book, there won't be a dry eye in the house.

Hardback book  
Published by Walker Books Ltd  
ISBN 9780744523539  
Price: £10.99

**Don't Shoot the Albatross!**



by Jonathan Evers  
Review by Beth Grew

This informative book of 'seadog' tales is a great read. Evers's accounts of different myths and superstitions held by past

and present sailors are both funny and well researched. Organised in bite-sized chunks, it is easy to dip in and out of.

It is clear that Evers has a strong interest in all things nautical and a thirst for knowledge of the weird and wonderful, with evidence in almost every sentence. Inside you'll discover the terrors of the Bermuda Triangle; the secrets of *The Flying Dutchman*; and just why you shouldn't shoot an albatross!

Evers's mix of old and new superstitions, evidence and eyewitness accounts make for a diverse and entertaining read. It would appeal to adults with an interest in the folklore of the sea and also children, thanks to the use of cartoons to explain some of the more peculiar and extravagant superstitions.

Paperback book  
Published by Adlard Coles Nautical  
ISBN 9781408131312  
Price £7.99

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**How to order:**

Unless other details are stated, all books/CDs reviewed here are available from good bookshops and online from Amazon via the RNLI website at [rnli.org.uk/amazon](http://rnli.org.uk/amazon). Amazon will

donate a minimum of 5% of the value of all such orders to the RNLI but you must access Amazon via the RNLI website and not go direct.

The Review section is compiled by Carol Waterkeyn.

Photo: RNLI/Nigel Millard

# LIFEBOAT LOTTERY

## AUTUMN 2011

Congratulations to Miss Foster of West Sussex who scooped the £5,000 first prize in the Autumn Lifeboat Lottery. Miss Foster recently enjoyed a VIP tour of Shoreham Harbour Lifeboat Station to celebrate her win. Shoreham's then Coxswain Peter Huxtable MBE is pictured. He retired after 43 years in December.

The other cash prize winners were:

2nd prize: £2,000; Mr D Cole, Devon

3rd prize: £500; Mrs K Chapman, East Yorkshire

4th prize: £250; Dr P Webb, Derbyshire

Five prizes of £100 each: Mrs E Lawrence, Middlesex;

Mrs S Gray, Fife; Miss M Woodhead, Lancashire;

Mrs T Flynn, Berkshire; and Mr G Gough, Lancashire.

## SPRING 2012

Why not try your luck with the Lifeboat Lottery this Spring? Not only will you be helping to save lives at sea but you'll be in with a chance of winning £5,000 or one of the other eight cash prizes.

Tickets will be mailed to supporters on 23 January. If you don't usually receive tickets and would like to, please call 0845 121 4999 or email lottery@rnli.org.uk.

Please note that due to tax and gaming laws, Lifeboat Lottery tickets are only available in England, Scotland and Wales. For full details (including terms and conditions) please go to [rnli.org.uk/lottery](http://rnli.org.uk/lottery) or see your Lottery letter.

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# Heart and home

Behind the scenes, a lifeboat station mechanic must be both meticulous and creative to keep the service running – and his fellows safe

Mark Blatcher is poring over wiring diagrams. He's trying to pinpoint a fault on the Tamar class lifeboat's automatic firefighting system. Then, as a volunteer tries to make a coffee, the kettle cuts out. Could Mark help? This vignette reveals the full-time Mechanic's role: Mark is responsible for maintaining *everything* at RNLI Shoreham Harbour.

This impressive yet functional building replaced a 78-year-old structure that finally succumbed to the elements in late 2010. Inside, the boathall dominates, rising three storeys from the pit beneath the slipway to the high-arching roof. Wrapped around this huge space are public viewing galleries and a shop, crew changing facilities, a kitchen, training room and office – and four rooms known by only a select few.

One houses an engine bigger than some bathrooms. It powers the winch that hauls the 32-tonne *Enid Collett* up the slipway after a shout. Another is home to the ground-source heat pump that keeps this station at a comfortable temperature all year round. The third is filled by a tank of marine diesel, ready to top up the Tamar for the next launch. The last is the Mechanic's lair.

The workbench of this Land Rover enthusiast and former diver carries clues to a recent task. He's been mending the underside of the Tamar's daughter Y boat, worn from repeated entry and exit through the rear of the all-weather lifeboat. Just a pace away hangs Mark's personal lifeboat kit, for he's a trained and experienced crew member too.

Yet he understands like no other the vessel that the crew rely on in their most testing moments. 'My engines always start first time,' asserts Mark. 'We look after them. They're kept warm with block

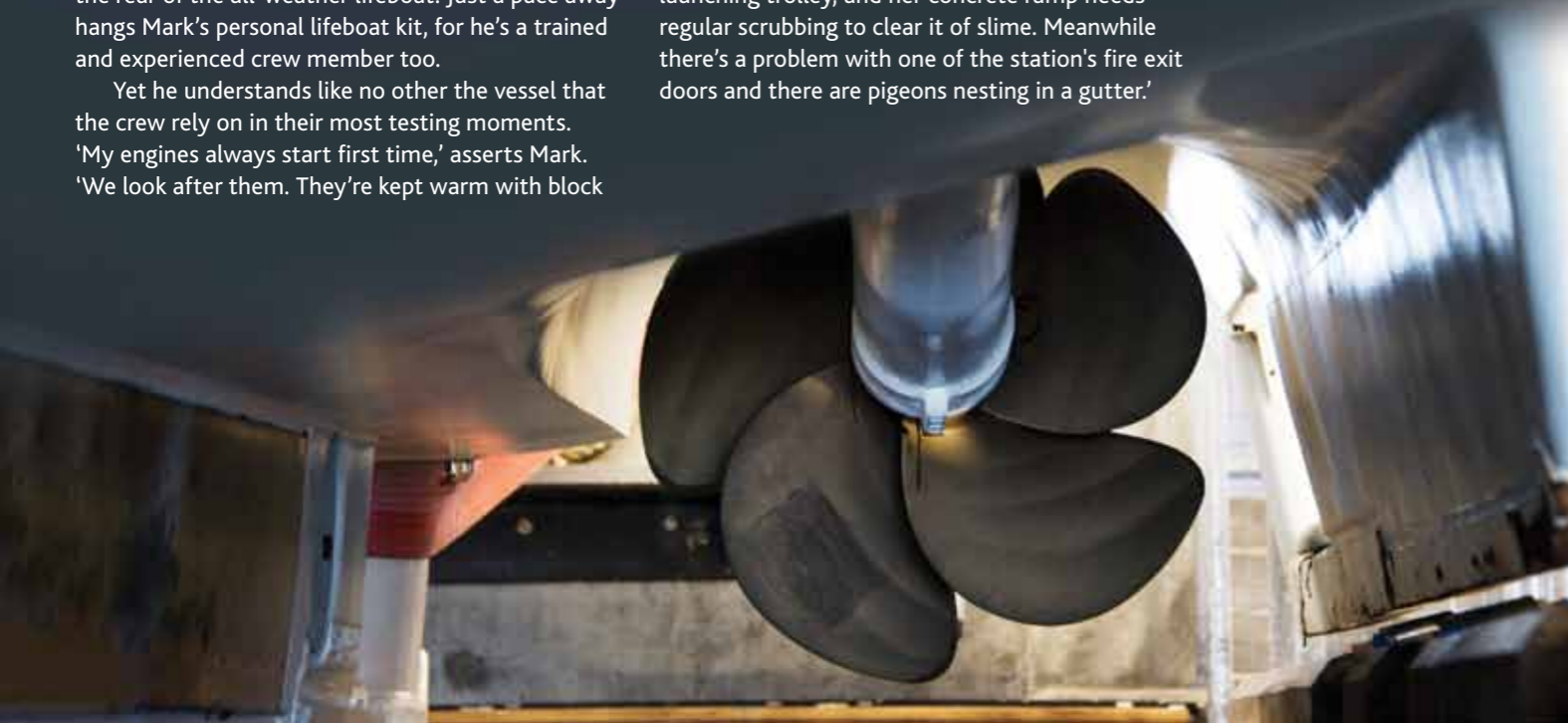
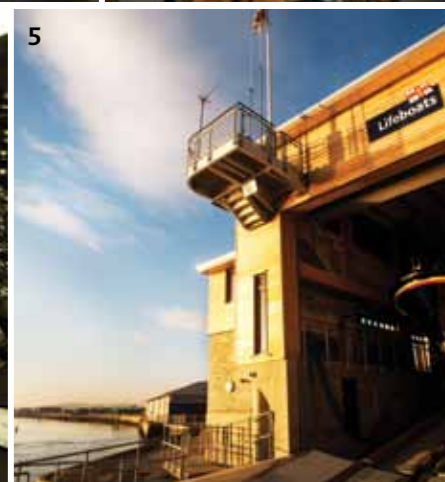
heaters when ashore, then during every shout I'll be down checking that everything's running ok. It's the sound, the feel ...

'Being in the bowels of the boat while she's at sea – that's my favourite place. After every shout I'll check straight away for leaks, anything loose. Even without a shout, I'll spend about 4 days in every fortnight working round the Tamar, inside and out. I'll catch anything well before it becomes a problem.'

Mark is at home in this environment. Moving quietly but swiftly around the warren-like building and boat, he knows exactly where to find anything. But then he spends all the working week here, plus training sessions on Wednesday evenings and Sundays – and that's before any rescues. 'There's always something to do,' he explains.

'Everything's still so new that jobs are only just coming to light, but there'll always be faults to fix – it's inevitable with such a complex lifeboat.' What's on the list at the moment? 'Well there's the belt tensioner in the alternator; the starter motor solenoid; white noise on Channel 31 (the private VHF channel between lifeboat and boathouse) and at one particular rev, there's a vibration that makes the camera footage unusable ...'

But he reminds me that that's just *Enid Collett*: 'I give about a day a fortnight to the D class's launching trolley, and her concrete ramp needs regular scrubbing to clear it of slime. Meanwhile there's a problem with one of the station's fire exit doors and there are pigeons nesting in a gutter.'



Fortunately, Mark's not alone, as the publicity that accompanied the regeneration of the station attracted more volunteers. 'All the crew share station cleaning duties on a rota. Then I'll nominate individuals to take on certain maintenance tasks. I've also got a volunteer Second Mechanic to deputise for me, and engineers at the Divisional Base and Headquarters in support.'

Everyone helps with an essential ritual after each service: 'The hose is on fine mist for the D class but full blast for the Tamar. There's gallons of salt water pouring out of the back of her and soaking the tipping table mechanism once she's back up the slipway, so we take a lot of care washing down and greasing everything. It's the only way it'll not rust to destruction.'

And what's Mark's role when the pagers go off? 'As soon as I know we're going to launch, I close the lifeboat hatches, open the slipway door and turn on the radio. I'll talk to the Coastguard and find out what

kind of incident we're heading to so I can pack any specialist kit. I'll work with the Coxswain to pick a crew and plan who's to do what, then I'll throw my kit onboard and away we go.'

This man's eye for detail ensures that everything onboard is ready for action – from the oxygen cylinders in the casualty care kits, to the bank of fly-by-wire computers, to the lifejackets. Mark explains quietly: 'I unpack, check and repack every lifejacket every 3 months. Well, that's your friends' lives there.'

Thank you to everyone who responded to our Christmas appeal in aid of lifeboat maintenance. If you've not had the chance to donate yet, or to find out more, have a look at [rnli.org.uk/maintenance](http://rnli.org.uk/maintenance).

Words: Liz Cook  
Photos: RNLI/(Liz Cook, Mark Blatcher, Nigel Millard)

- Above:**  
A few of the Mechanic's responsibilities ...  
1 The daughter boat  
2 Hand-made by Mark, launch attachment  
3 Corner of workshop  
4 Fly-by-wire computers  
5 Boathouse and slipway  
6 Winch engine  
7 Tamar held secure  
8 Adjusting the bow thruster  
9 Tamar engine room  
10 Crew kit and D class

# RNLI shop



## Lifeboats

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'The lifeboat station is at the centre of the community here – it's only right that people support the crew'



# A taste for lifesaving

He owns a string of top eateries in London – so what is it that keeps restaurateur, chef and food writer Mark Hix coming back to the seaside?

There's a force 7 off the Dorset coast, and breaking waves are slamming into The Cobb in Lyme Regis. The historic, curved sea wall protects a few moored yachts, their flags flapping in the gusting wind. Tourists hold onto their hats and head into the RNLI gift shop at the corner of the harbourside lifeboat station. Inside, the volunteers are doing a roaring trade.

It was 8 miles east of here, at West Bay, that Mark Hix grew up. After heading to London to work as a chef at the age of 18, he quickly earned his catering stripes. Head chef roles led to a directorial position where he oversaw several prestigious restaurants – including The Ivy – before he struck out on his own, writing cookbooks and opening his own eateries. Four of the Hix restaurants are in the capital, but one venture has taken him back to his roots. Perching on a steep hill that overlooks The Cobb, the Hix Oyster & Fish House serves food that arrives fresh off the local boats.

'Whenever I've got some spare time, I'm out there fishing myself,' says Mark, gazing at the rolling ocean from his sheltered restaurant terrace, before grabbing a fork and tucking into one of his own dishes: crab, peas and duck egg. The award-winning chef has been championing the use of crab, hosting a themed festival over the Summer that raised more than £3,000 for the RNLI. 'I made crab dishes down on The Cobb and sold them off in aid of the charity,' explains Mark, who also held a crab recipe competition as part of Lyme Regis Lifeboat Week. In another fundraising venture, Mark worked with Palmers, a Dorset brewery, to sell two specially brewed ales in aid of the RNLI. The project raised £600 for the charity by the time it ended in 2011.

'The lifeboat station is at the centre of the community here – it's only right that people support the crew,' says Mark, whose late father organised lifeboat fundraising events such as the West Bay Raft Race. These days, Mark spends weekends in Dorset and works in London during the week – and he is acutely aware of the charity's lifesaving work wherever he goes. 'I see the lifeboats racing up the Thames sometimes – people in London are taking more notice of that,' he explains, adding that Marcus Verberne – Mark's Executive Chef at London's HIX at The Albemarle – was rescued by the West Mersea lifeboat in Essex in 2010. As a thank you for saving Marcus, Mark raised £2,500

at a cooking demonstration with Australian TV Chef Bill Granger. They donated the money to West Mersea Lifeboat Station, Essex.

Unlike Bill and many other high-profile chefs, Mark has kept his television appearances to a minimum. 'There's so much time involved in TV work. I tend to turn it down – it's like another career altogether. I did enjoy doing the *Great British Menu*, though,' Mark smiles as he recalls the BBC series in which chefs competed for the chance to cook for the Ambassadors Dinner at the British Embassy in Paris. He won the South West England heat and two of his dishes made it onto the ambassadors' plates: a crayfish and rabbit stargazy pie and a perry jelly dessert with elderflower ice cream.

The winning recipes summed up Mark's passion for locally sourced food and a focus on simple, tasty dishes rather than fine dining. 'It's a tough business – you have to keep ahead of the game. My approach is to keep things simple. The minute you start messing around with fish, for example, your customers are in danger of not getting what they are expecting,' says Mark.

While he hasn't got the time for a television career, Mark's return train journeys to London offer plenty of writing opportunities. He has netted a host of awards for his food columns and cookbooks, including the 2011 Guild of Food Writers Cookery Journalist of the Year.

'Next I'm publishing a new book about baking – not just desserts, but anything you put in the oven,' says Mark, who has also scooped several chef and restaurateur awards. They include a clutch of Great Taste Awards, the *Tatler* Restaurateur of the Year, Catey's Chef of the Year, *GQ* Best Chef and an Academy Award for Outstanding Contribution to London Restaurants.

It's time to get back to work. 'I've always got something on the boil,' grins Mark. As he heads to the kitchen, waiting staff lay tables, and the sun begins to set. Like the food served here, the restaurant looks simple and comforting. And taking pride of place on the mantel is something very close to Mark's heart: not an award certificate, trophy or rosette, but a lifeboat collection box.

Words: Rory Stamp

Photo: Jason Lowe

# Your shout

Some of my best and most exciting memories have been stirred by your feature Then and Now.



Then: I lived in Hastings as a small girl in the 1950s, and remember the sound of the maroon followed by the footsteps of Coxswain Jack Edmunds running down our hilly passage to the shore. If it was a daytime rescue I was allowed to help push the lifeboat [pictured below] across the shingle (no mechanical help then).

Most of the crew were fishermen and everyone appeared to be related to someone else on the boat, and that made it a close community. As a girl guide, I played my recorder for the annual Blessing of the Sea service: *Eternal Father Strong to Save* is a hymn I have always been in awe of and the words made you respect the power of the sea.

Now: Two years ago, four of us went on a boating holiday tackling the Caledonian Canal and Loch Ness. My friend and I both belong to the RNLI and were so excited to follow a lifeboat that was going for an overhaul. I couldn't believe the size of the vessel [it was the relief Severn class *Roger and Joy Freeman* pictured above] and the equipment it had onboard, but the crew were just as friendly as I remember as a little girl. I just know that I would have been of little use trying to push this one into the sea!

Regards  
Patricia Pilgrim  
Bunny, Nottinghamshire

What stories of **Then and Now** can you share with us? Perhaps relating to royalty, in this year of our Patron's Jubilee, or the *Titanic*, lost 100 years ago – or an event that no one else knows about ...

I am writing to say how very much I enjoyed the Autumn 2011 issue. The new format makes the magazine a lot easier on the eye and I love the improved organisation of items. I also much appreciate the current mix of content – in the past I have written to comment on this and I applaud the recent changes. Thank you for a most entertaining and informative read!

Yours sincerely  
Stuart Francis

I enjoy the magazine but I consider it is not worth using three pages to list lifeboat launches. That information is probably of only very limited interest and details could be put on your website. As an ex-crew member I would like to see more articles about developments in lifeboat construction and the new types of lifeboat.

Best wishes  
Christopher Hansen

What do you think? Should we keep our listings of launches? If not, what would you like to see in their place? Let us know.



As well as sending us your letters and emails, you can get in touch with the RNLI through our Facebook and Twitter accounts.

If you've ever wondered what social media is all about, doubted its relevance to you or assumed that you wouldn't enjoy the experience anyway, you may be in for a surprise!

Following us online is one of the best ways to hear about rescues as they happen. For example, just before we went to print with this issue of *the Lifeboat*, five RNLI crews were out searching for survivors from the cargo ship that sank in the Irish Sea. We kept supporters informed online and they were able to leave their comments (see image top right).

Also in November last year, we told our Twitter followers about the collapse of the gangway to HMS *Belfast* on the River Thames before it was reported in the mainstream media, and followed up with live updates.

Via Facebook, you can watch dramatic video footage as soon as it's received from our lifeboat stations, and even share your own treasured photos and anecdotes. When you post or tweet a message, thousands of like-minded people are able to read what you're saying straight away: we have about 40,000 Facebook fans and about 15,000 Twitter followers. You can chat with like-minded folk in the RNLI community about historical events too, coming together to celebrate and commemorate, share thoughts and memories.

**Apologies** to Alan Wilson of Colchester, Essex, and anyone else who was misled by the contact details we printed in our last issue for recycling in aid of the RNLI. Details are correct on page 45 of this issue.

We also understated Peter Joiner's fundraising success: through sponsorship of his running the London Marathon he donated £6,400, which he elected to Gift Aid, bringing his total to around £8,000. If you're a UK tax payer and pay sufficient Income or Capital Gains Tax, you too can boost your donations to the RNLI in this way, at no extra cost to yourself. Find out more at [rnli.org.uk/giftaid](http://rnli.org.uk/giftaid).

Lifeboat crew members are frequent visitors to our Facebook page – they report on rescues from their own stations and answer supporters' questions. In October, Chief Executive Paul Boissier took over the reins of the RNLI Twitter profile for an hour and received more than 100 questions. And sometimes it's we who ask the questions of you. It's a great way for us to find out what supporters think straight away.

If you're tempted to try out any of this, you don't need your own computer – most public libraries and modern mobile phones provide access. And as you get more confident, you'll discover not only the official RNLI sites but also more than 150 lifeboat station pages and those run by individual RNLI-loving people.

There's a world of lifeboating out there, just waiting to be explored. Enjoy!



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To add your shout, write to the Editor at [thelifeboat@rnli.org.uk](mailto:thelifeboat@rnli.org.uk) or RNLI Headquarters, West Quay Road, Poole, Dorset, BH15 1HZ. Be sure to include your full name and address. Letters may be edited for length or clarity.

**Congratulations** to: Mr R Gillard of Torquay, Devon, and Mrs M Stephens of Perth whose postcards were the first two pulled out of the hat in our draw for signed copies of the book *Mayday! Mayday!* See page 7 for news of more RNLI on TV.







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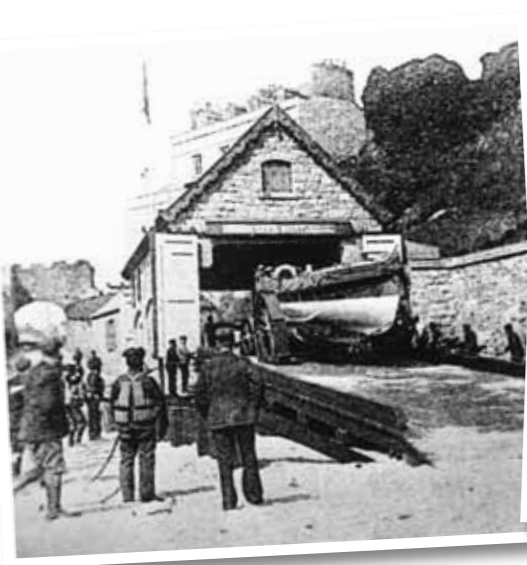
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# Grand designs for a lifeboat station

There's been a lifeboat station in the picturesque town of Tenby, in south west Wales, for 160 years – but it's not always been in the same place

**Left: Lifeboat station on the beach built in 1895**

**Centre: The 1905 station – now a very unusual home**

**Right: The current lifeboat station built in 2005 to house the latest Tamar class lifeboat *Haydn Miller***

The station was established in 1852 by the Shipwrecked Mariners' Society and handed over to the RNLI 2 years later.

The first RNLI building for storing and protecting the lifeboat was built in 1862 at a cost of £190. It was replaced by an improved boathouse nearer to the beach in 1895 that was later adapted to accommodate the new 12-oared Watson class lifeboat, *William and Mary Devey*, that arrived on station in 1902.

In 1904 work started on a new lifeboathouse and slipway for deeper water alongside the now demolished Victoria Pier. It was completed in 1905 at a cost of £3,872 and later adapted for the first motor lifeboat, *John R. Webb*, which arrived on station in 1923.

An additional D class lifeboat was sent to the station in 1972 so a new small boathouse was constructed for her in 1976.

The slipway boathouse was adapted again in 1986 for the Tyne class all-weather lifeboat *R.F.A. Sir Galahad*. A side extension was added to accommodate a mechanic's workshop and a souvenir outlet but the building was proving difficult and costly to maintain, while more changes were going to be needed for a new type of lifeboat.

The current station was built in 2005 on the site of Victoria Pier to house the faster, more technologically advanced Tamar class lifeboat. The difficult location

and the environmentally sensitive nature of the site contributed to the £6.5M cost to build it.

The old slipway station was a listed building so the charity was unable to demolish it and could not justify the cost of maintaining it. The dilemma was solved when it was bought by Mr and Mrs O'Donovan who wanted to turn it into an unusual home. Undaunted by the magnitude of the task, they have lovingly converted it into an unusual, yet comfortable, residence with breathtaking seaviews while retaining the building's integrity and outward appearance.

The new home was featured in Channel 4's *Grand Designs* in September. Philomena O'Donovan explained she was brought up in a town with a lifeboat community (Baltimore), which influenced the decision to buy the boathouse. If you didn't see the episode you can watch it on [channel4.com/4od](http://channel4.com/4od).

As always, Tenby lifeboat crews are rescuing people at sea but these days they can get to people far quicker. Now too, RNLI lifeguards patrol Tenby's beach during the holiday season, working alongside their lifeboat colleagues.

Words: Carol Waterkeyn  
Photos: RNLI/Eleanor Driscoll, Argent Architects

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