



Lifeboats

THE
ROYAL NATIONAL LIFEBOAT INSTITUTION
(RNLI)

DID YOU KNOW THAT 1,100 RNLI fundraising branches provide financial support in six regions across the UK and Ireland, many inland but which nevertheless may support a particular lifeboat station. In 2014, the volunteer network was estimated at 31,500 people.

Here in the **Farleighs**, we belong to the **East Division, Maidstone Villages** branch.

Our collection activities take place throughout the year. Typically, this entails:-

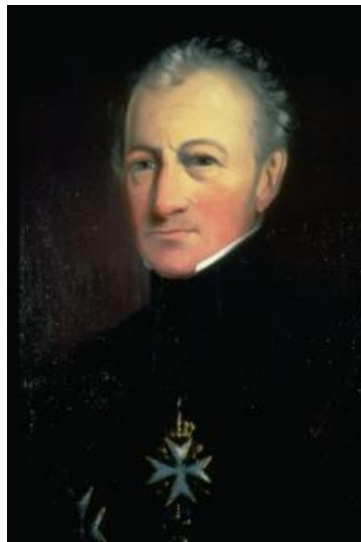
- Collection boxes strategically placed at, for example, The Good Intent, The Bull, and The Walnut Tree
- National collection at a retail outlet (in 2014: Tesco's, in our case at Tovil)
- House to house collection
- A strawberry tea in our Box Secretary's garden (dreadful weather this year, for the first time in years)
- Street collections at, for example, Headcorn
- A pizza & punch evening at our Chairperson's house

- A Christmas mince pie, punch and stalls evening at Filmer Hall, East Sutton
- A stall at Boughton Monchelsea fete
- A stall at Headcorn Autumn Fair (Boy Scouts)
- Coffee mornings
- Pub quizzes at, for example, **The Good Intent** (watch our website for the next date!)

Origins of the RNLI – a bit of history

The **Royal National Lifeboat Institution**, a charity, exists to save lives in the waters surrounding the United Kingdom and on some of its rivers and other inland waterways.

In 1808, Sir William Hillary, a resident of the Isle of Man, was active in planning for a national lifeboat service. Little enthusiasm was shown by the British Admiralty, despite the appalling incidence of shipwreck around the coasts of the Kingdom. Nevertheless, he persisted and, with the backing of two MP's, Thomas Wilson and George Hibbert, in 1824 he founded the “National Institution for the Preservation of Life from Shipwreck”.



Sir William Hillary

In 1830, when he was 60 years of age, Sir William assisted in the rescue of the crew of the vessel “St George”, which was grounded at the entrance to Douglas on the Isle of Man. All the crew was saved, with no fatalities on the vessel nor on the lifeboat.

The name “National Institution for the Preservation of Life from Shipwreck” was changed in 1854 to the “Royal National Lifeboat Institution”. The first purpose-built lifeboat under the charity was stationed at Douglas in memory of Sir William’s contribution.

In 1860 the RNLI was incorporated under Royal Charter. In that year, its fleet of lifeboats was increased to 52, and just 50 years later the lifesaving fleet comprised 280 RNLI lifeboats and 17 independent boats.

Status

The RNLI is a charity, with the Queen as its Patron.

Operating 444 lifeboats from 236 stations situated around the coasts of the United Kingdom, Ireland, the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands, rescues averaged 23 people a day in 2013. Most of the crews are unpaid volunteers. RNLI lifeguards man over 200 beaches, and are paid for by the local council, the RNLI providing equipment and training. Flood Rescue Teams (FRT) operate nationally and overseas; in the latter case teams travel at short notice to assist with international emergencies.

Of the 444 lifeboats, 332 are kept on station and 112 in the relief fleet.

Training and education, mainly for young people, is regularly undertaken by the RNLI, with children presented with sea and beach safety by volunteers, as well as awareness training for interested parties such as amateur fishermen and divers.

Funding for the Institution is mainly provided by legacies and voluntary donations, with some from the sale of branded goods (Christmas cards, models, clothing for

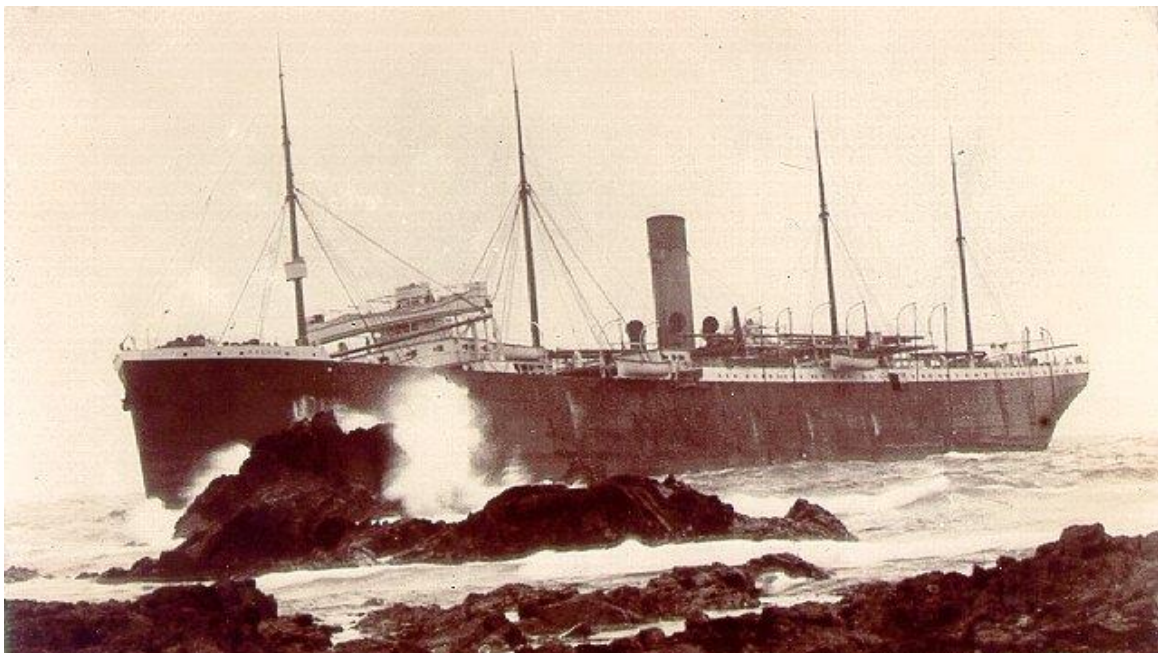
example) and investment. In the last year of accounting, 2013, income was £182.7 million, expenditure £144.6 million.

At a cost of 600 fatalities in service, 140,000 lives have been saved at sea since its inception.

Some rescues

ss “Suevic”

On 2 February 1907 “Suevic” of the White Star Line departed Melbourne bound for Liverpool via Capetown, Tenerife, Plymouth and London, commanded by Captain Thomas Jones. On 17 March, she was en route to Liverpool with 382 passengers, 141 crew and cargo. In the afternoon, she was off the southwest coast of England, in thick fog. This was well before the days of radar and the officers were unable to fix their position. At about 10 pm, the Lizard light was sighted; the ship proceeded at full speed, but due to errors in calculating the distance off, she grounded some twenty minutes later on the rocks of the Maenheere Reef just off the Lizard.



Ss

“Suevic” aground near Lizard Point, Cornwall

The Master attempted to refloat the vessel using the main engines astern, without success. Distress rockets were fired and a rescue effort was undertaken, the RNLI leading the operation with volunteers from Lizard, Cadgwith, Coverack and Porthleven. The operation took 16 hours to complete and was successful; all passengers, including 70 babies, and crew were rescued.

Four silver RNLI medals were awarded to the RNLI volunteers and two to “Suevic” crew in recognition of their actions. This remains the biggest rescue operation in the RNLI’s history.

The Daunt Rock lightship “Comet”

On 7 February 1936, Ballycotton, on Ireland’s south coast, was experiencing a south-eastern gale, with rain and snow, which later developed into a hurricane.

At 8am on 8 February, an SOS was transmitted by the lightship “Comet”, stationed off the Daunt Rock nearby. The vessel had broken her moorings and was drifting; being a lightship, without engine power. RNLI “Mary Stanford”, based at Ballycotton, put to sea. Once on site near “Comet”, several attempts were made to get a steel tow wire aboard. However, the conditions were too severe and the wire parted several times. Other vessels stood by while the lifeboat made for Cobh to take on heavier wires. The crew had been all day without food; they got a meal, slept for a few hours and early on 9 February returned to the Daunt Rock. Conditions were still severely adverse, now with the added danger of fog. The lifeboat stood by all day as it was impossible to get the tow wire on to “Comet”.

In the evening of 9th, “Comet” was only 60 meters from the Rock. The lifeboat coxswain, Patrick Sliney, determined to get alongside the lightship and attempt to take the crew off. The lifeboat got alongside several times and five of the seven lightship crew were taken off safely. On the sixth attempt, the two remaining men, exhausted, were dragged off bodily by the lifeboat crew.

The rescued were taken to Cobh and landed, and after nearly eighty hours on site the “Mary Stanford” returned to Ballycotton. The crew had had just three hours’ sleep during the rescue.

Coxswain Patrick Sliney received a Gold Medal award; Second Coxswain John Lane Walsh and Motor Mechanic Thomas Sliney received Silver Medals; and Crew Members Michael Coffey Walsh, John Shea Sliney, William Sliney and Thomas Walsh received Bronze Medals. Uniquely, RNLi “Mary Stafford” also received an award.



Rescue of the crew of the Daunt Rock lightship by Ballycotton lifeboat RNLi Mary Stafford

Grace Darling

The story of Grace Darling’s heroic role in the rescue of crew members of ss “Forfarshire” in 1838 is possibly the best-known and emotive of the Institution’s thousands of operations off our shores.

Grace Darling was the Longstone Lighthouse keeper’s daughter. The lighthouse was situated on the Farne Islands, Northumberland. In the early hours of 7 September 1838, Darling looked out from her window and saw the grounded vessel and its survivors on a nearby rocky island, Big Harcar. The “Forfarshire” had foundered during the night and broken in half.

Darling and her father, William, realised that the weather and sea conditions were too severe for the nearest lifeboat, at Seahouses, to be launched; so they took their own boat, a Northumberland coble, via a route that kept to the lee of the island, out to the survivors. She and her father helped four men and a surviving woman into the boat. The woman had lost her two children during the night. The survivors and William rowed back to the lighthouse, and later returned to the wreck and rescued four more survivors.

The Seahouses lifeboat had meanwhile set out but arrived at Big Harcar rock only in time to find dead bodies, including the surviving woman's children. The weather was still severely adverse so the lifeboat was rowed to the lighthouse, where they and the survivors of the wreck were obliged to shelter for three days until conditions improved.

Sixty-two people were lost on the "Forfarshire". The survivors rescued by the Darlings had taken refuge in the bow section after the vessel broke in half. Other passengers and crew, nine in all, escaped by a ship's boat from the stern section and were picked up by another ship later that night.






The public hailed Grace Darling as a heroine when news of her role in the rescue spread. She benefitted from a public subscription, to which Queen Victoria contributed; several portraits of her were painted; and she received hundreds of gifts. She fell ill of tuberculosis in 1842, when she was just 26, and died that year.



Rescue of the survivors of ss "Forfarshire"

Lifeboats

All RNLI lifeboats' names are prefixed **RNLB** (Royal National Lifeboat).

The fleet	Lifeboat	Launch type	Length	Maximum speed	Range	Crew
	Shannon	Carriage, slipway or afloat	13.6m	25 knots	250 nmile	6
	Tamar	Slipway or afloat	16.3m	25 knots	250 nmile	7
	Severn	Afloat	17.3m	25 knots	250 nmile	6
	Trent	Afloat	14.3m	25 knots	250 nmile	6
	Tyne	Slipway or afloat	14.3m	18 knots	240 nmile	6



[Mersey](#) Carriage, slipway or afloat 11.62m 17 knots 240 nmile 6



[B class – Atlantic 85](#) Carriage, davit or floating boathouse 8.44m 35 knots 2.5 hours 4



[B class – Atlantic 75](#) Carriage, davit or floating boathouse 7.38m 32 knots 2.5 hours 3



[D class](#) Trolley or davit 5m 25 knots 3 hours 2-3



[E class](#) Afloat 9m 40 knots 4 hours 3



[Arancia inshore rescue boat](#) Trolley 3.88m 21.6 knots 1.5 hours 2



[Hovercraft](#) From transporter 6.88m 30 knots 3 hours 2-4

Organisation

Management

Situated in Poole, Dorset, the RNLI headquarters is located adjacent to Poole Harbour. Operations include management, lifeboat maintenance and repair facilities, the Lifeboat Support Centre and training facilities which feature a wave and capsized pool, fire simulator, bridge simulator and engineering workshop. Accommodation is available for RNLI members and their guests. A new headquarters for RNLI Ireland was opened at Airside, north County Dublin, in 2006.

Regions

The Institution is organised into six administrative regions:-

- East Division – East Anglia and South East England
- South Division – South West England
- West Division – Wales and the Isle of Man
- North Division – East and west coasts of northern England
- Scotland Division – Scotland
- Ireland Division – Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland

I hope this article has been of interest to you. Your support is vital to the RNLI, and if you wish to be further involved in or informed on any aspect of its activities, please visit our website on

www.rnli.org.uk

Brian Cushing