

= Royal National Lifeboat Institution =

The Royal National Lifeboat Institution ( RNLI ) is the largest charity that saves lives at sea around the coasts of the UK , Ireland , the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man as well as on some inland waterways . There are numerous other lifeboat services operating in the same area .

Founded in 1824 as the National Institution for the Preservation of Life from Shipwreck , the RNLI was granted Royal Charter in 1860 and is a charity in the UK and Republic of Ireland . Queen Elizabeth II is Patron . The RNLI is principally funded by legacies and donations with most lifeboat crew members being unpaid volunteers .

The RNLI has 237 lifeboat stations and operates 444 lifeboats . Crews rescued on average 22 people a day in 2015 . RNLI Lifeguards operate on more than 200 beaches . They are paid by local authorities , while the RNLI provides equipment and training . The Institution operates Flood Rescue Teams ( FRT ) nationally and internationally ( iFRT ) , the latter prepared to travel to emergencies overseas at short notice .

Considerable effort is put into training and education by the Institution , particularly for young people ; more than 6 @, @ 000 children a week are spoken to by education volunteers about sea and beach safety , and over 800 children a week receive training . The Institution has saved some 140 @, @ 000 lives since its foundation , at a cost of more than 600 lives lost in service .

= = History = =

Sir William Hillary came to live on the Isle of Man in 1808 . Being aware of the treacherous nature of the Irish Sea , with many ships being wrecked around the Manx coast , he drew up plans for a national lifeboat service manned by trained crews . Initially he received little response from the Admiralty . However , on appealing to the more philanthropic members of London society , the plans were adopted and , with the help of Member of Parliament Thomas Wilson and former MP and merchant George Hibbert , the National Institution for the Preservation of Life from Shipwreck was founded in 1824 . At the age of 60 , Sir William took part in the 1830 rescue of the packet St George , which had foundered on Conister Rock at the entrance to Douglas Harbour . He commanded the lifeboat and was washed overboard with others of the lifeboat crew , yet finally everyone aboard the St George was rescued with no loss of life . It was this incident which prompted Sir William to set up a scheme to build The Tower of Refuge on Conister Rock ? a project completed in 1832 which stands to this day at the entrance to Douglas Harbour . In 1854 the institution 's name changed to the Royal National Lifeboat Institution ( in 1849 Prince Albert had added his support to the Institution ) and the first of the new lifeboats to be built was stationed at Douglas in recognition of the work of Sir William .

In its first year the RNLI raised £ 10 @, @ 000 , however by 1849 , income had dropped to £ 354 . Finding itself in financial difficulties , the RNLI accepted a government subsidy of £ 2 @, @ 000 , which rose in subsequent years . This lasted until 1869 , when the RNLI ceased accepting subsidies ? it had found that voluntary donations had fallen by more than the subsidies ; in addition , the government 's imposition of bureaucracy and regulations were detrimental to the service . It was the loss of 27 lifeboat crew of Southport and St Annes in 1886 that gave new impetus to fundraising and an 1889 appeal raised £ 10 @, @ 000 . The first Lifeboat Saturday was held in that year .

= = = Wartime = = =

During World War I , lifeboat crews launched 1 @, @ 808 times , rescuing 5 @, @ 332 people . With many younger men on active service , the average age of a lifeboatman was over 50 . Many launches were to ships that had been torpedoed or struck mines , including naval or merchant vessels on war duty ; a notable example was the hospital ship SS Rohilla which foundered in 1914 and was attended by six lifeboats , saving 144 lives over a 50 @-@ hour rescue mission .

World War II placed considerable extra demands on the RNLI , particularly in south and east England where the threat of invasion and enemy activity was ever @-@ present , rescuing downed

aircrew a frequent occurrence , and the constant danger of mines . During the war 6 @, @ 376 lives were saved .

= = = Dunkirk evacuation = = =

Nineteen RNLI lifeboats sailed to Dunkirk between 27 May and 4 June 1940 to assist with the Dunkirk evacuation . Lifeboats from Ramsgate and Margate went directly to France with their own crews . The crew of Ramsgate 's Prudential ( now Trimilia ) ( ON 697 ) collected 2 @, @ 800 troops . Margate 's Coxswain , Edward Parker , was awarded a Distinguished Service Medal for his work taking the RNLB Lord Southborough ( ON 688 ) to the beaches . Of the other lifeboats and crews summoned to Dover by the Admiralty , the first arrivals questioned ? reasonably in their view ? the details of the service , in particular the impracticality of running heavy lifeboats on to the beach , loading them with soldiers , then floating them off . The dispute resulted in the first three crews being sent home . Subsequent lifeboats arriving were commandeered without discussion , much to the disappointment of many lifeboatmen . A later RNLI investigation resulted in the dismissal of two of Hythe crew members , who were nevertheless vindicated in one aspect of their criticism , as Hythe 's Viscountess Wakefield was run on to the beach and unable to be refloated ; she was the only lifeboat to be lost in the operation . Some RNLI crew members stayed in Dover for the emergency to provide repair and refuelling facilities , and after the end of the evacuation most lifeboats returned to their stations with varying levels of damage and continued their lifesaving services .

= = Rescues , losses and honours = =

= = = Rescues and lives saved = = =

The RNLI 's lifeboat crews and lifeguards have saved more than 140 @, @ 000 lives since 1824 . The RNLI makes a distinction between people aided and lives saved . There were 8 @, @ 462 lifeboat launches in 2014 , rescuing 8 @, @ 727 people , including saving 460 lives . Lifeguards helped or rescued 19 @, @ 353 people . Flood rescuers deployed seven times . In 2015 crews rescued on average 22 people a day .

The biggest rescue in the RNLI 's history was on 17 March 1907 , when the 12 @, @ 000 tonne liner SS Suevic hit the Maenheere Reef near Lizard Point in Cornwall . In a strong gale and dense fog , RNLI lifeboat volunteers rescued 456 passengers , including 70 babies . Crews from The Lizard , Cadgwith , Coverack and Porthleven rowed out repeatedly for 16 hours to rescue all of the people on board . Six silver RNLI medals were later awarded , two to Suevic crew members .

= = = Losses = = =

More than 600 people have lost their lives in the RNLI 's service ; their names are inscribed on the RNLI Memorial sculpture at RNLI HQ , Poole .

= = = Honours = = =

More than 2 @, @ 500 medals have been awarded for bravery : Gold ( 150 ) , Silver ( 1 @, @ 564 ) and Bronze ( 793 ) . Bronze medals were awarded from 1917 . The obverse of the gold medal carries the motto : " Let not the deep swallow me up " , from Psalm 69 . The Thanks of the Institution Inscribed on Vellum or a framed Letter of Appreciation may be given for other notable acts , such as those awarded to crews of Aberystwyth Lifeboat Station . The Ralph Glistler Award is a monetary award made for the most meritorious service in each year and was inaugurated in 1968 . The Walter and Elizabeth Groombridge Award is given annually for the most outstanding service by an Atlantic 21 ( and successors ) lifeboat crew . Established in 1986 as the Walter Groombridge Award in memory of Brighton Lifeboat Station 's Administration Officer it was renamed in memory of his wife

who died in 1989 .

The most decorated lifeboatman was Henry Blogg , coxswain of Cromer for 37 years , with three gold medals and four silver . He also received the George Cross and the British Empire Medal and is known as " The Greatest of all Lifeboatmen " . The youngest recipient was Frederick Carter ( 11 ) who with Frank Perry ( 16 ) was awarded a Silver Medal for a rescue at Weymouth in 1890 . Other notable lifeboatmen include Henry Freeman of Whitby , coxswain for 22 years , Robert William Hook ( 1828 ? 1911 ) , coxswain at Lowestoft from 1853 to 1883 and credited with saving over 600 lives plus two dogs and a cat , Henry " Shrimp " Davies , coxswain of the Cromer Lifeboat with 45 years service and James Haylett , coxswain of Caister @-@ on @-@ Sea . One lifeboat has received an award . For the Daunt lightship rescue in 1936 , the RNLB Mary Stanford and her entire crew were decorated ( see illustration in history section , above ) .

= = Heritage = =

The RNLI maintains or encourages a number of entities in respect of the history and activity of the Institution along with preserved lifeboats , including :

Historic Lifeboat Collection in Chatham Historic Dockyard with 17 historic vessels .

The Grace Darling Museum , opened 1938 at Bamburgh , commemorating her rescue of the SS Forfarshire . The museum is run by the RNLI .

The Henry Blogg Museum illustrates the history of Cromer 's lifeboats and tells the story of Henry Blogg 's most famous rescues .

The Lifeboat Enthusiasts ' Society ( a branch of the RNLI )

The ( independent ) Historic Lifeboat Owners Association , promoting the study and preservation of lifeboats .

The RNLI Heritage Trust 's collection of historic items at its HQ in Poole , including fine art , model lifeboats , and an archive of historic documents and photographs .

The National Memorial Arboretum has a memorial dedicated to those who have served in the RNLI .

= = Operations = =

Throughout Great Britain and Ireland , ships in distress , or the public reporting an accident , contact the emergency services by telephone or radio . Calls are redirected to HM Coastguard or the Irish Coast Guard as appropriate , who will coordinate air @-@ sea rescue operations and may call on the RNLI ( or independent lifeboats ) , their own land @-@ based rescue personnel and rescue helicopters to help .

= = = Lifeboat stations = = =

There are 237 RNLI lifeboat stations around the coasts of Great Britain , Ireland , the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands . Tower Lifeboat Station on the River Thames in London is the RNLI 's busiest , in 2013 rescuing 372 people and saving 25 lives . In 2015 Tower 's launches had increased to 465 . Five new lifeboat station buildings were completed in 2013 .

For public access the RNLI classifies stations as one of three types : Explore , which are normally open all year round and have a shop , Discover , normally open during the summer months and Observe which , because of their location , still welcome visitors but may not be easily accessible .

From time to time the RNLI may close a station ; some of these are later reopened by independent services . The history of some former lifeboat stations can be found in Wikipedia articles on the places where those stations were . ( See also : List of Lifeboat Disasters in the British Isles for further information on closed stations . )

= = = Rescue craft = = =

The RNLI operates 444 lifeboats ( 332 on station , 112 in the relief fleet ) . The ship prefix for all RNLI lifeboats from the D @-@ class to the Tamar @-@ class is RNLB ( Royal National Lifeboat ) .

All @-@ weather lifeboats ( ALBs ) are large boats with enclosed wheelhouses and survivor spaces below deck , which are self @-@ righting and can go out in all weather conditions . Some ALBs carry an inflatable Y @-@ class lifeboat or Y @-@ boat for inshore work , launched by mechanical arm . There are six classes of ALB motor life boats , with speeds ranging from 17 to 25 knots . The RNLI 's aim is to provide a 25 @-@ knot lifeboat to every all @-@ weather crew , and has begun construction of an All @-@ weather Lifeboat Centre ( ALC ) in Poole which , when complete , will save £ 3 million a year . The RNLI took over the ALC in 2015 with the expectation of becoming fully operational in 2019 , when six Shannon @-@ class lifeboats a year will be built .

Inshore lifeboats ( ILBs ) are smaller boats that operate closer to the shore and in shallower waters than ALBs . There are two classes , inflatables and RIBs capable of 25 ? 40 knots . The RNLI 's Inshore Lifeboat Centre at Cowes , Isle of Wight , has been building lifeboats since the 1960s and by 2015 had produced over 1 @,@ 600 .

Hovercraft were introduced in 2002 , allowing rescue on mud flats and in river estuaries inaccessible to conventional boats .

= = = Personnel and equipment = = =

Lifeboat crews are almost entirely volunteers , numbering 4 @,@ 600 , including over 300 women , and are alerted by pager . They are supported by 3 @,@ 000 volunteer shore crew and station management . Lifejackets have evolved from cork , kapok and synthetic foam to today 's light and non @-@ cumbersome designs . ALB and ILB crews wear different styles of lifejacket .

RNLI lifeguards are placed on more than 200 beaches around England , Wales , Northern Ireland and the Channel Islands , and aided almost 20 @,@ 000 people in 2014 . RNLI lifeguards are paid by the appropriate town or city council , while the RNLI provides their equipment and training .

The Institution has operated a Flood Rescue Team since the 2000 Mozambique floods , with six strategically placed teams each with two boats , support transport and equipment . The RNLI 's international Flood Rescue Team ( iFRT ) is composed of volunteer lifeboat crew with a range of additional skills prepared to travel to emergencies overseas at short notice . They have trained alongside other teams for the common purpose in the USA .

= = = = Women in the RNLI = = = =

In the early days of the service , lifeboat launch and recovery was usually undertaken by women . There were deeply @-@ held views about women actually crewing the boats themselves ? it was considered extremely bad luck . Along all parts part of the coastline , women supported their men on the lifeboat crews by working together to get the lifeboat afloat and then later recovering it from the water in readiness for when the next call came . While lifeboat crew are still predominantly male ( 92 % ) , the first female ( inshore ) crew member was Elizabeth Hostvedt in 1969 , and Frances Glody was the first woman crew member on an all @-@ weather lifeboat , at Dunmore East Lifeboat Station , in 1981 . Lauren McGuire , at the age of 27 , became the RNLI 's youngest station manager in 2011 , at Clovelly , Devon .

= = = = Voluntary support = = = =

Apart from lifeboat crew and lifeguards , the Institution provides a variety of volunteering opportunities . One of these is as " Deckhand " where signed @-@ up volunteers are notified by email or mobile phone when there is a local need , such as marshalling at fundraising events , helping with collections or in an RNLI shop . Voluntary internships in RNLI offices are available three times a year .

= = = Safety advice = = =

In addition to safety advice given in its publications , the RNLI offers safety advice to boat and beach users when the opportunity arises , and to at @-@ risk groups such as anglers , divers and kayakers . The Institution runs sea and beach safety sessions for young people , particularly in inner @-@ city areas ; more than 6 @,@ 000 children a week are spoken to by education volunteers about sea and beach safety , and over 800 children a week receive training . 500 children were taught to swim in 2014 . In an effort to reduce the estimated 400 @,@ 000 drownings a year worldwide , more than half of them children , the RNLI extends practical or strategic safety advice to lifesaver organisations overseas , in some cases providing training at the Lifeboat College .

#### = = Infrastructure = =

The Institution is split into six administrative divisions : East ( East Anglia and South East England ) , South ( South West England ) , West ( Wales and the Isle of Man ) , North ( East and west coasts of northern England ) , Scotland and Ireland ( Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland ) . The headquarters of the RNLI are in Poole , Dorset , adjacent to Holes Bay in Poole Harbour . It includes RNLI HQ , lifeboat maintenance and repair facilities , the Lifeboat Support Centre and RNLI College ( the training centre ) . The support centre and college were opened by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II in 2004 . Specialist training facilities include a wave and capsize pool , a fire simulator , a ship 's bridge simulator and an engineering workshop . The College 's accommodation is available for RNLI members and their guests when training is not taking place and offers facilities for weddings , conferences and other events . About half of the RNLI 's staff work at Poole . Other locations are Dublin , London , Perth , Saltash , St Asaph and Stockton @-@ on @-@ Tees , while some roles are at lifeboat stations or home @-@ based and include operations , estate and financial management , public relations and information technology . A new headquarters for RNLI Ireland was opened at Airside in Swords , County Dublin in June 2006 by President Mary McAleese , attended by the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the RNLI , Admiral Sir Jock Slater , R.N.

#### = = = Funding = = =

The RNLI is principally funded by legacies ( 65 % ) and voluntary donations ( 28 % ) , with the remainder from merchandising and investment . In 2014 , the RNLI 's income was £ 182 million , while its expenditure was £ 149 @.@ 6 million . The Institution encourages corporate partnerships , which included in 2014 Waitrose , Yamaha and Fred . Olsen Cruise Lines .

There are 1 @,@ 100 RNLI fundraising branches throughout the regions served by the Institution , many far from the sea , which may support a particular station , or a project such as a new lifeboat . The Institution estimated their volunteer network at 31 @,@ 500 in 2014 . The largest regular contributor is The Communications and Public Service Lifeboat Fund ( known simply as ' The Lifeboat Fund ' ) established in 1886 for civil servants to support the RNLI collectively ; the Fund has provided the Institution with 52 lifeboats as well as other support .

The ubiquitous lifeboat collection boxes seen nationwide are popular enough to have even become the target for thieves . A fixed , cast iron collection box in Porthgwarra , Cornwall , is Grade II listed . The Institution 's annual fundraising day ( " SOS Day " ) is at the end of January , but many lifeboat stations hold open days during the summer , hosting displays , stalls and other events , as well as in @-@ station shops which are open full or part @-@ time .

Nationally and internationally known celebrities in various fields are , or have been supporters and fundraisers for the RNLI ; for example , the cartoonist Giles was a Life President of the RNLI and donated many cartoons which are still being used for RNLI charity cards and other illustrations , and Ross Brawn , the former Formula 1 team boss , in 2012 raised funds through a business challenge , for a new lifeboat for Chiswick Lifeboat Station on the River Thames in London . Other names include Bear Grylls , Dee Caffari , Chris Beardshaw , Ben Fogle , Daniel Craig , Rupert Grint , and Rebecca Newman , whose Coast to Coast tour in 2012 earned her an Outstanding Achievement Award .

### == Membership ==

Membership classes involve differing levels of contribution  
Governor , which includes voting rights  
Offshore , aimed at active sailors and boaters  
Shoreline and Joint Shoreline , the most popular level  
Storm Force , for younger members

### == Publications ==

The Lifeboat is the quarterly magazine for all members , containing regional and national news from the Institution , featured rescues , book reviews , lifeboat launch listings and an additional insert for Offshore members . The former Compass quarterly regional newsletter was discontinued in 2014 , but back copies can be read on the RNLI website . Storm Force members have their own quarterly magazine .

The Institution 's website contains full details of the organisation and its activities including fundraising , lifeboats and stations , history and projects .

### == Criticism ==

### == Salvage ==

There have been a few isolated cases where RNLI crew members ( not the RNLI ) have claimed salvage leading to a not uncommon misconception that the RNLI is partly funded by this practice . There is no legal reason why crew members of the RNLI could not salvage a vessel and indeed frequently tow small vessels to safety , often long distances . The RNLI however does not support or encourage salvage because , firstly , they exist to save lives at sea and , secondly , to become involved in salvage might discourage those whose lives are at risk from calling for help . The RNLI 's Sea Safety Guidelines state : " There is no ' salvage ' fee when you are towed by a lifeboat , but a voluntary contribution to the RNLI is always very welcome ! " . This stance was reinforced when the RNLI was criticised for not launching a lifeboat to an unmanned fishing vessel that had run aground . A spokesman for the RNLI stated : " We are not a salvage firm and our charity 's aim is to provide immediate assistance for people in trouble at sea and lives are at risk . "