

HM Coastguard



HM Coastguard
Saving lives for
200 years

Saving lives for 200 years



An island nation

From protection
to rescues

Training is gaining

Training is central
to all we do

Fit for the future

Using cutting-edge
ways to modernise
search & rescue

Life as a Coastguard

Then and now

Souvenir Edition

Two centuries of service



Welcome to this very special commemorative magazine as we celebrate Her Majesty's Coastguard's 200th birthday.



Operating the winch on a Coastguard Land Rover pre 1979. Credit: David M.Jones

This amazing and major milestone is a fantastic moment for our organisation and we all look forward to being involved in an exciting programme of events across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland this year (2022).


As Chief Coastguard, it has given me great pleasure to use this opportunity to look back through our distinguished history books and I am sure many of you have also been able to recall noteworthy memories and experiences.

Our commitment to keeping the public safe at the coast has not wavered one bit over the course of the past two centuries and this rich responsibility is on all of us to uphold for the next 200 years, ensuring HM Coastguard is front and centre, embedded and supporting local coastal communities throughout the UK.

Each day, I feel immense pride to be working with dedicated colleagues and fantastic volunteers as we drive safety standards and provide, as a frontline UK emergency service, our 24/7, 365-days-a-year search and rescue service to save lives at the coast and at sea.

Our wide-ranging and often complex work does not come without its challenges but is possible thanks to the magnificent and selfless acts of service by so many highly-skilled individuals thriving in specialist roles. These roles include those who are part of the Coastguard Rescue Service, helicopter and lifeboat crews and other rescue partners.

Coastguard 200 is an opportune moment to recognise all of these immense contributions made by people connected to HM Coastguard past and present.

Building on these water-tight foundations and in the years to come, we will continue to invest in our staff and volunteers, as well as in new technology and innovation, so that HM Coastguard is able to fulfil its role of saving lives. Public safety is what we do and that will never change. 

PETE MIZEN
CHIEF
COASTGUARD



Courtesy of:
Poole
Coastguard
Rescue Team

See for yourself

During 2022, our bicentennial is being marked in many different ways across the country. Including special exhibitions at the National Emergency Services Museum

in Sheffield, Falmouth's National Maritime Museum and St Barbe in Lymington. Follow us on our social media channels to keep up to date with the latest news and activities!



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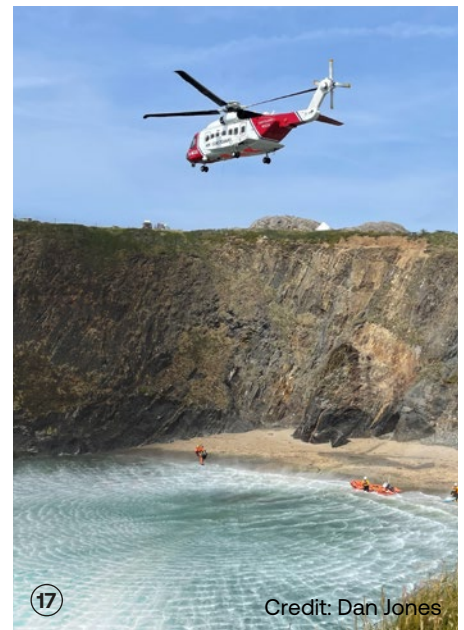
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Credit: Colin Higgs



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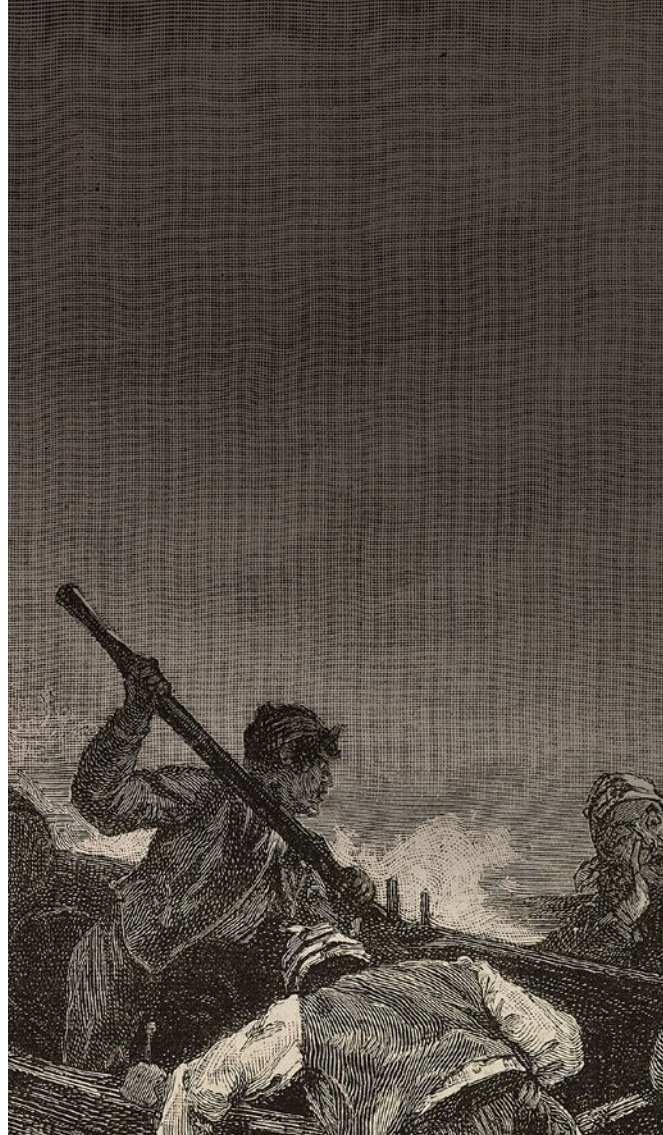
An island nation

From protection to rescues.

HM Coastguard is now a world class leader in maritime search and rescue, on call 24/7 to send help to anyone in difficulties around our coasts, every day of the year. We know what we need to do, the resources we need and how to respond quickly. Protecting and saving lives is what we do, but did you know that our origins lie in the protection of a different sort involving violent clashes and illegal trade?

As an island nation, the highly prized goods that are now a regular part of our daily lives once had to make perilous journeys across the oceans on sailing ships. Tea, wine, spirits, silks and lace were the treasures that caught the attention of smugglers. Their mission was to secretly land their treasure on secluded parts of the coastline in a money-making bid to avoid paying customs duties and taxes.

In 1784 the Prime Minister William Pitt the Younger, suggested that of the 13 million lbs (nearly 6 million kilos) of tea consumed in Britain, only 5.5 million had been brought in legally.




Smuggling – a threat to the UK’s economy and security

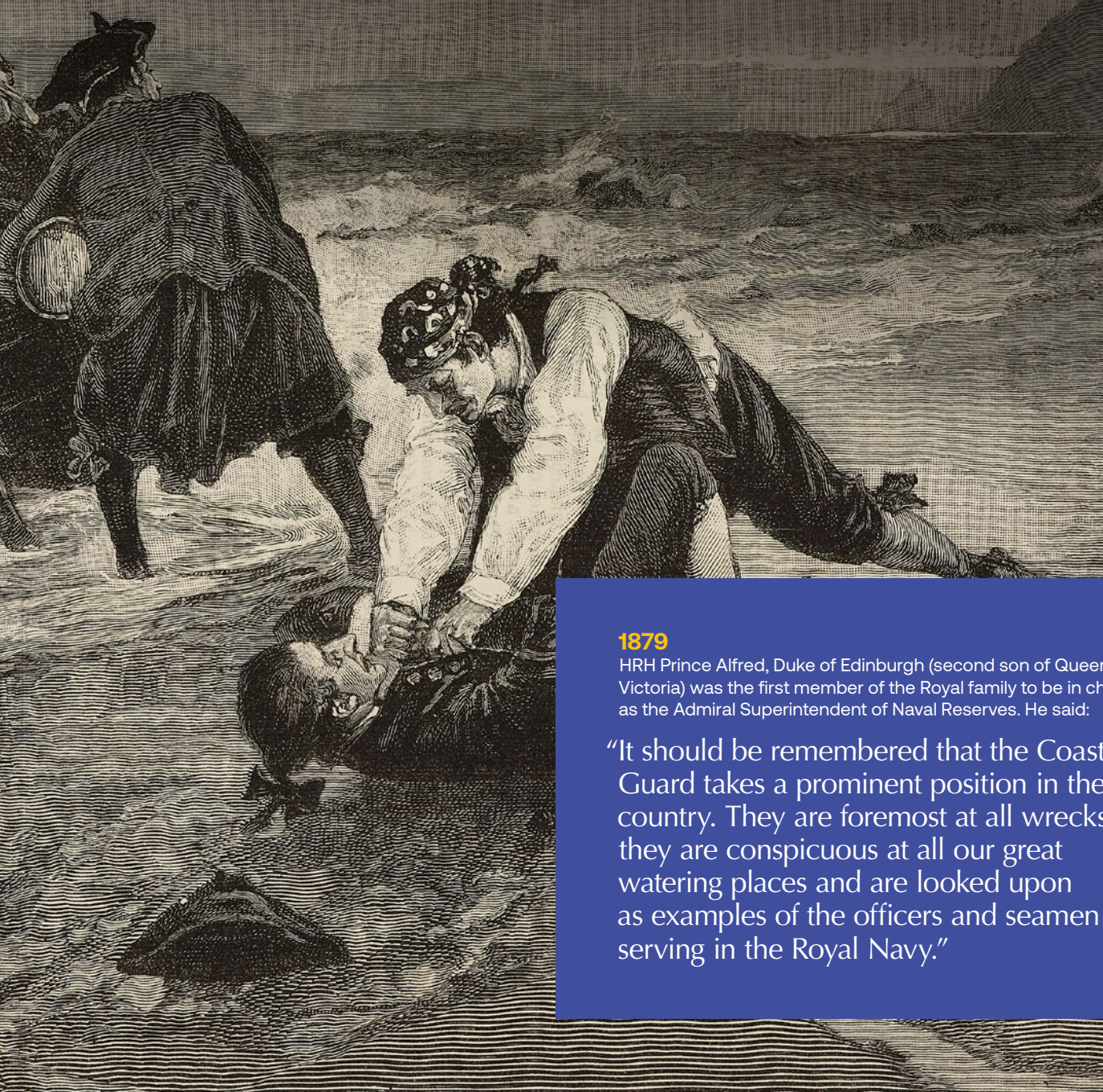
The scale of the problem during what’s known as the golden age of smuggling was huge and the Government was determined to tackle it.

It was a battle between the smuggling gangs and HM Customs. Teams of Government Preventive Officers patrolled the coasts, aiming to prevent or catch the smugglers. But there were not enough officers and the smugglers often avoided detection. Staff from the onshore Customs Houses were supplemented by Customs Revenue cruisers at sea watching the coasts and from 1698 riding officers on horseback joined in the coastal patrols.

Although many people enjoyed the illicit gains from smuggling, the reality was brutal. Local people were fearful of violent reprisals on informers, Revenue Officers were murdered and corruption meant that captured smugglers were able to avoid harsh punishments.

What was next?

In 1809, things became more serious. The Board of Customs introduced the Preventive Water Guard, a force which used nimble small boats to patrol the coasts. By 1816 the Guard was strengthened with 151 stations, organised into 31 districts. The chief officers were experienced naval seamen or fishermen and armed with ammunition, stores and oars for rowing, they were at sea as much as possible and on the lookout. 



1879

HRH Prince Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh (second son of Queen Victoria) was the first member of the Royal family to be in charge as the Admiral Superintendent of Naval Reserves. He said:

“It should be remembered that the Coast Guard takes a prominent position in the country. They are foremost at all wrecks, they are conspicuous at all our great watering places and are looked upon as examples of the officers and seamen serving in the Royal Navy.”

Timeline



17th & 18th Centuries

Smuggling was rife as people tried to avoid taxes. By 1743 it's estimated that half the tea drunk in Britain was illegally imported.

1713

Troops of dragoons had orders to assist customs officers.



15 January 1822

The Birth of HM Coastguard

Treasury adopts proposals from committee report. It was in effect the birth of HM Coastguard and brought together the Revenue cruisers, the Riding Officers and the Preventive Water Guard.

The Treasury Minute provides the first use of the term 'Coast Guard'.

Approx 3,000 men made up the Coast Guard.



1854

Merchant Shipping Act. Board of Trade becomes responsible for issuing life saving equipment to the Coast Guard and later to the volunteer life saving brigades around the coasts.

13 June

1831

Admiralty publishes new regulations as part of plan for Coast Guard to become a reserve for the Royal Navy. It included payments and allowances. A salary of £10 for the chief boatman and £5 for a commissioned boatman.

1698

Riding Officers on horseback patrolled the coasts to stop smuggling.

1829

The first Coast Guard Instructions were published. They defined anti smuggling duties and the need to maintain good relations with other revenue protection organisations.

1856

Coast-guard Service Act (repealed in 1925) to make better provisions for the defence of our coasts, and be ready to assist HM Navy in war or emergency plus protection of the Revenue.

1809

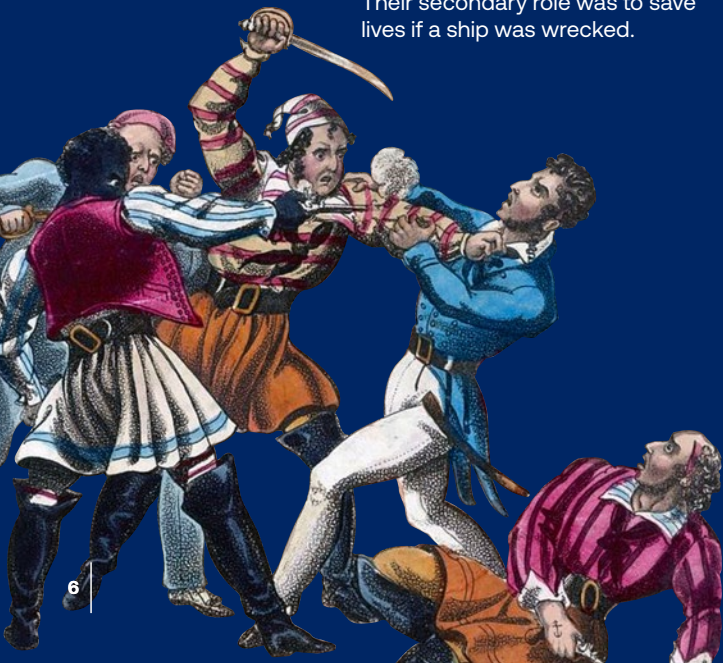
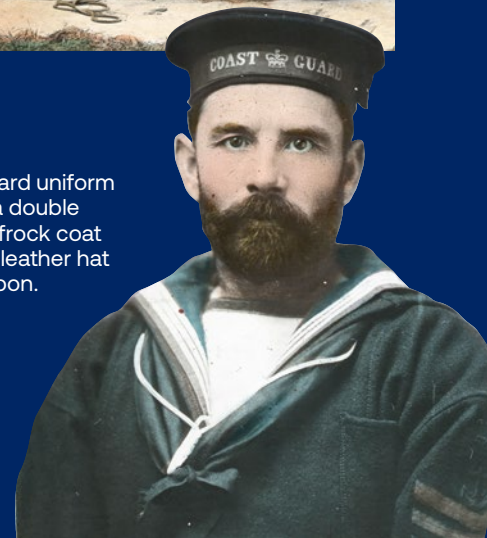
Preventive Water Guard formed to stop smuggling, operating from 151 stations around the coast. Their cutlasses needed to be sharp. Their secondary role was to save lives if a ship was wrecked.



1832

(approx.)

Coast Guard uniform became a double breasted frock coat and a flat leather hat with a ribbon.





1922

Wartime experience showed that a coast watching and life saving service was essential.



23 February

1970

Women allowed to become coastguards for the first time, entry age limit lowered to 16.

1998

Marine Safety Agency and The Coastguard Agency were joined to form MCA. In 1998 HM Coastguard reported to Parliament that it responded to 11,667 incidents in 1997.

1914–1918

World War 1 and the Coastguard was mobilised.

1939

WWII is coming. Under the National Service scheme, volunteers were invited to enrol as Auxiliary Coastguards. Training in signalling and protection against poison gas was given.

1960

Coastguards were now handling 2,000 incidents a year and 3,363 by 1967 – of the 1967 total, nearly half were pleasure vessels.

1971

HMCG contracted Bristow to supply a search and rescue helicopter.

2015

HM Coastguard takes over from Royal Air Force and Royal Navy to deliver the UK's search and rescue helicopter service.

1 October

1945

The Coastguard was released from Admiralty war duty and returned to a civilian service. The Auxiliary Coastguard was stood down.



Late

1940s

Military helicopters started to be used to assist with rapid rescue.

1 April

1994

The Coastguard Agency and the Marine Safety Agency were formed from the Marine Directorate and Surveyor General.

1 April

1923

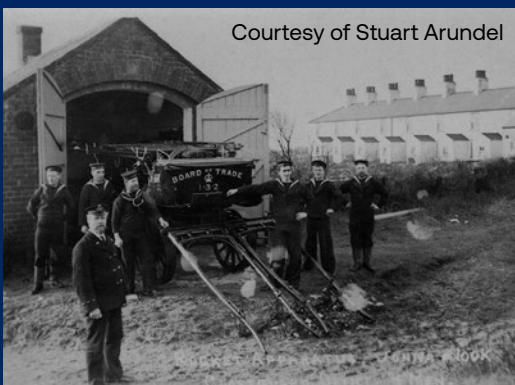
The Government accepted the report and the Board of Trade assumed responsibility for the Coastguard. By Royal sanction the force retained the title of His Majesty's Coastguard. It was the first time Britain had a specialised staff devoted to coast watching and life-saving.

1964

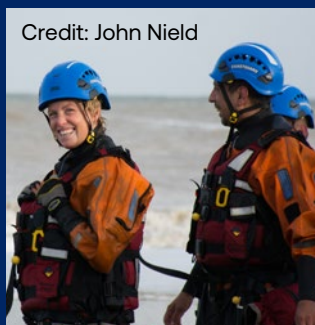
The Coastguard was transferred back to the Board of Trade. Equipment now included Land Rovers and radio-equipped vehicles and many stations were part of the 999 telephone emergency service.



Courtesy of Stuart Arundel



Credit: John Nield



2020–2021

HM Coastguard responded to over 33,000 incidents (up from 31,234 in 2019) and the search and rescue helicopters were sent out 1,975 times from their 10 bases. And Coastguard teams and the helicopters also provided support to the NHS and others during the Coronavirus pandemic.

Saluting a new era

The 19th Century brought in a new era of changes in our society which saw the UK's population double, people moving from the countryside to find work in the new industrial age and the beginning of mass leisure as people started to enjoy music halls, great museums, public parks and seaside holidays. It was a new age of great change too around our coasts and in the evolution of what's now HM Coastguard.



On the coasts, the Preventive Water Guard (the Board of Customs force to fight smuggling) were instructed to safeguard shipwrecks from looters and the boatmen were also trained to use life saving equipment. The balance was shifting.

The birth of the Coastguard

In 1821 a government Committee of Enquiry looked into the Customs Service and determined that the Board of Customs should control the Preventive Water Guard, the Riding Officers and the Revenue's cruisers.

This new force was named the Coast Guard in 1822. But it was not until the twentieth century that the two words were joined.

In the Navy

The Admiralty stepped in and in 1831 won the right to appoint Coast Guard officers and select boatmen from paid off naval crews. This set the scene for the Coast Guard as a naval reserve and recruiting agency.

By the time Queen Victoria came to the throne in 1837, Coast Guard vigilance was praised for a great reduction in smuggling and the Admiralty gave the force naval style uniforms, drills and training on coastal defence. Life saving equipment was provided to the Coast Guard by the Board of Trade to fulfil its responsibility for safety at sea, set by the 1854 Merchant shipping act.

Admiralty – a new master

The Crimean War broke out in 1854 and every available coast guard was drafted in to help the Royal Navy, with almost 3,000 men serving. The war highlighted the problem of how to man the Fleet in time of war.

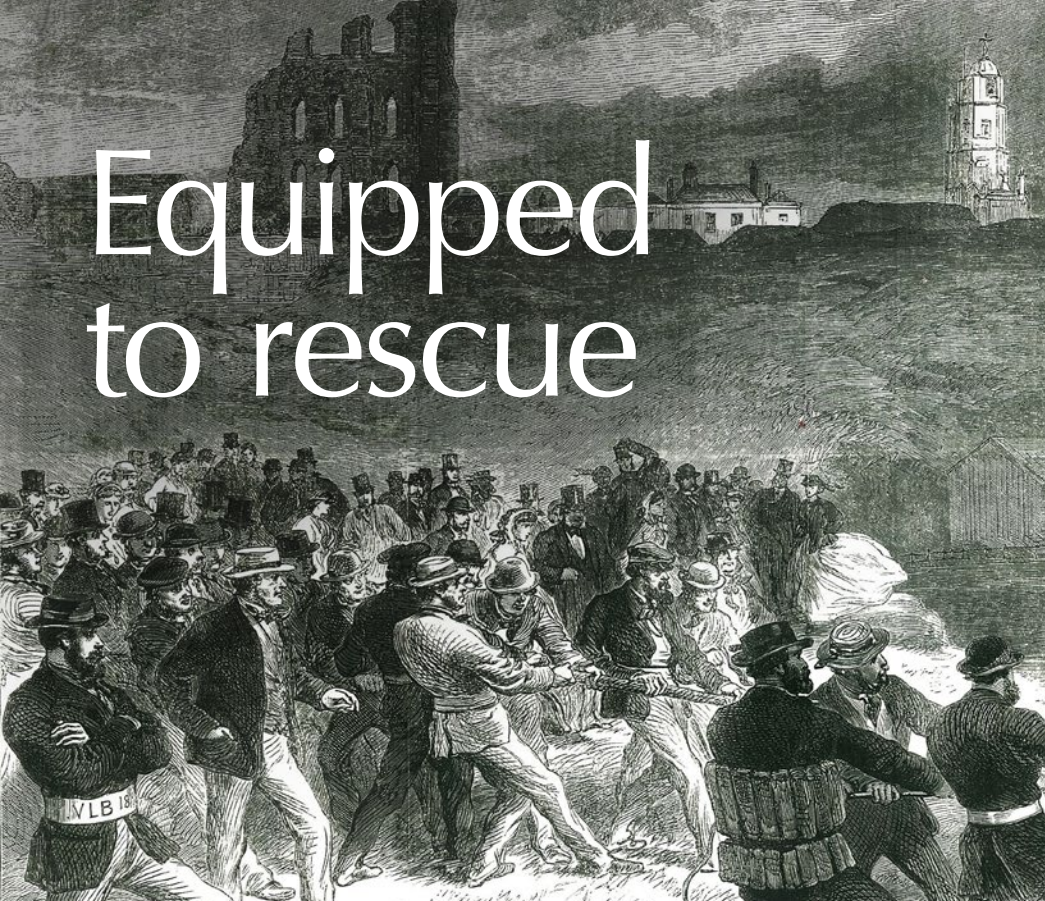
By 1856 the Coast Guard Act meant that the Admiralty took charge of the Coast Guard from the Board of Trade. Coast Guards were trained as a naval reserve to supplement naval crews, provide help for vessels in danger, taking charge of wrecks, operation of life saving equipment and involvement with lifeboats. [CG](#)

What a life

"The work was terrible. In winter we had to be on our guards by dusk and we never got back until eight next morning. The only nights we got in was when we got day watchman at the stations – about every 10 days. Even then we seldom got more than half the night off if smuggling boats were expected. I've often been that done up, I could scarcely walk home."

Memories of an old Coastguard from William Webb's history.

Equipped to rescue



The Tynemouth Volunteer Life Brigade (VLB) was founded in 1864 and remains one of many high calibre declared HM Coastguard facilities. It's the oldest and one of only three remaining active VLBs in the UK. Image shows the early volunteers practising a Breeches Buoy rescue from the Spanish Battery to the North Pier.

Image credit: Sheffield Emergency Vehicle Museum

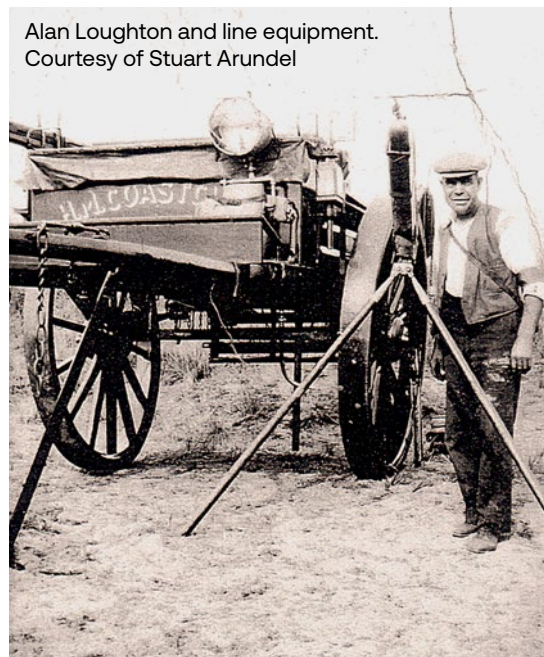
Saving lives has always been in the origins of HM Coastguard, even before it was formally adopted as a duty some 200 years ago. After all, helping others is a fundamental human instinct and humankind has always found ingenious solutions. We've taken a lookback at some of the rescue equipment of yesteryear.

Some of these early principles still exist today and they are part of a powerful combination of the use of latest technology, training, equipment and communications. See how we train for rescue success on page 12.

One of the first recorded maritime lifesavers was Captain Manby who experimented firing mortars to carry a line to a ship. His first rescue using 'Manby's Mortar' was in 1808 and by 1809, he'd added a 'cot' slung below the line which later evolved into the Breeches Buoy.



Breeches Buoy in action, Holyhead Coastguard and Auxiliary team. Credit: David Jones



Alan Loughton and line equipment. Courtesy of Stuart Arundel



Rocket crew getting ready to rescue from a stricken trawler. Courtesy of Stuart Arundel



Watchet Coastguard team in training with the Breeches Buoy in the 1990s. Credit Simon Bale

Manby's invention was officially adopted and the Preventive Water Guard were issued with his Life Saving Apparatus (LSA). Apart from rockets replacing mortars, Coastguard LSA supplied by the Board of Trade changed very little until the 20th Century brought electrically ignited rockets and lines of man-made fibre. [CC](#)

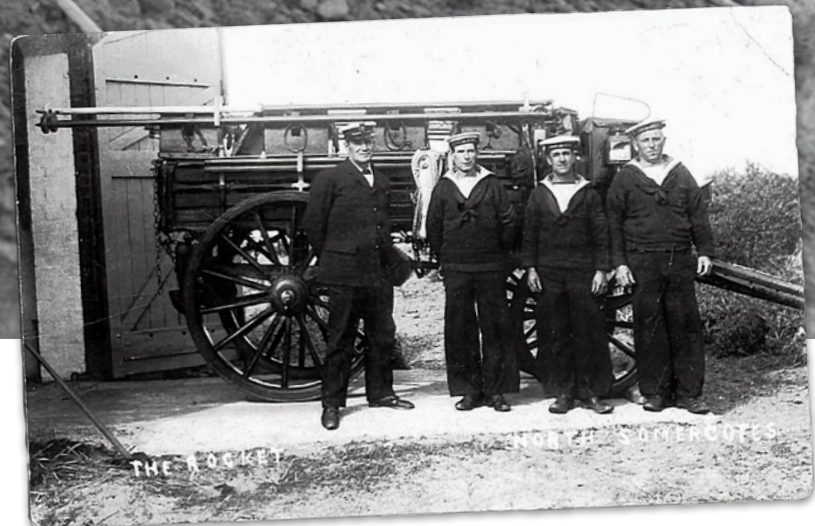
War & peace

The tragedies of the World Wars affected everyone and HM Coastguard remembers all those whose lives were lost to this day.

The German Bombardment of Whitby 16 December 1914. Coastguard Frederick Randall was killed in the attack. He left a wife and four children. Credit: Whitby CRT



Inset left: The Death Penny — a commemorative plaque in bronze given to the next of kin for those men and women whose deaths were due to the First World War of 1914–18



Donna Nook coastguards in the 1930s

Lives were turned upside down when Britain declared war on Germany in 1914 and as part of the Admiralty's naval reserve, it was just a matter of hours before coastguards joined the Navy ships.

Tragedy strikes early

The first tragedy struck in September of that year. The Cressy, Aboukir and Hogue were struck by a U boat on 22 Sept 1914. All three sank 2,200 men were on board and 1,400 were drowned, many of them coastguards. Other tragedies followed swiftly.

Ashore, coastguard stations were seriously undermanned and men were sent home to re-establish a coast watch against the enemy. Here they used their considerable skills in signalling, telegraphy and wireless to send information to the Admiralty.

Milestone moment

This wartime experience proved that a coast watching force was vital. And on 1 April 1923, the Board of Trade took responsibility for the coastguard.

By Royal sanction the force retained the title of His Majesty's Coastguard. This was the first time Britain had a specialised organisation devoted to coast watching and life saving.

The Coastguard Service Act of 1925 still allowed the Admiralty to control the Coastguard in time of national need. In May 1940, that happened as WWII approached and

4,500 Auxiliary Coastguards were recruited on National Service, in time for the start of war in September.

HM Coastguard was put on constant watch for any suspicious warship activity and 900 Auxiliary Coastguards were recruited under the National Service scheme. They had weapons, Army style khakis and courses in aircraft recognition.

Our teams played a key role during these war years. In 1945 the service was placed under the Ministry of War Transport before returning to the Marine Division of the Board of Trade in 1959. [CC](#)

Living memories

With the end of World War II, life changed for the better and so began a new era of change around our coasts. And for HM Coastguard, it was a further evolution into the full search and rescue service we're more familiar with today.



Credit: Poole Coastguard Rescue Team

Aviation now started to play a role as helicopters were becoming more widely used in the military and their ability to quickly pick up 'ditched' crews was recognised.

Upwards

By 1953, the Royal Navy started using their land-based helicopters for search and rescue. And by 2013, the Royal Navy had clocked up 60 years of helicopter search and rescue. It was time for the next phase as the Department for Transport signed a contract with Bristow Helicopters Ltd for the provision of search and rescue services to start from 2015. Responsibility for the service was fully handed over to HM Coastguard on 1 January 2016.



The Shipping Forecast

North Utsire, South Utsire, Forties...Dogger, German Bight. If any of these names sound familiar, then you've probably heard the iconic Shipping Forecast broadcast on the radio. It's the stuff of which films are made and books written and it's thought to be the longest running national forecast service in the world. It is the 'go to' for all mariners for the vital weather forecast in shipping areas around our coasts. It's produced by the Met Office on behalf of the Maritime and Coastguard Agency. And it has a fascinating language all of its own. Find out more about the [Shipping Forecast](#).



1998

Marine Safety Agency and Coastguard Agency joined to form the MCA

Credit: Crown Copyright

Swinging 60s

By the 1960s, leisure around the coasts was on the increase as was the popularity of boating. In 1960, coastguards were handling some 2,000 incidents a year, double that of the pre-war years. Communications were better too as stations began to be linked in to the 999 emergency call service and Land Rovers and radio equipped vehicles came into being.

In the 1970s women joined the service, national government safety campaigns arrived and there was even more recognition as coastguard stations had their own ensign awarded by the Queen.

The march of tech

In the 80's, mobile phones, faxes and new technology made major advances, helping news to spread around the world more rapidly than ever before. News of maritime disasters were published within hours rather than days, and that continues, making our fascinating and challenging work highly visible to anyone wanting to know more. [CC](#)

Training is gaining

Technical training is central to everything that we do. All our coastguards, from the Maritime Operations Officer you speak to in the operations room, to the Senior Coastal Operations Officer managing the team who locate and recover you, will be trained to the highest of standards by our training teams.

As soon as our coastguards begin their important roles in the operations room, they are trained in operational communications and systems, navigation, vessel traffic monitoring, search planning awareness, incident response and nautical knowledge.

Specialist training

Within the Aviation and Maritime Technical Training Team there are seven technical trainers, including a specialist aviation trainer. For aviation, new recruits begin with a 'ground school', where Senior Aeronautical Officers are taught all elements that form their operational role. Soon we will also be providing on-the-water practical experience to all maritime staff, using HM Coastguard boats.



Calling the Coastguard in an emergency situation might feel like a big step, but if you find yourself having to make 'that call', you will be met with skilful professionalism every step of the way.



Berry Head and Torbay teams training at Berry Head with the RNLB. Credit: Drew Parkinson

Penzance Coastguard Rescue Team Cliff Rescue Technician Paul Allen and Cliff Rescue Officer Gemma Summerwill. Credit: Colin Higgs

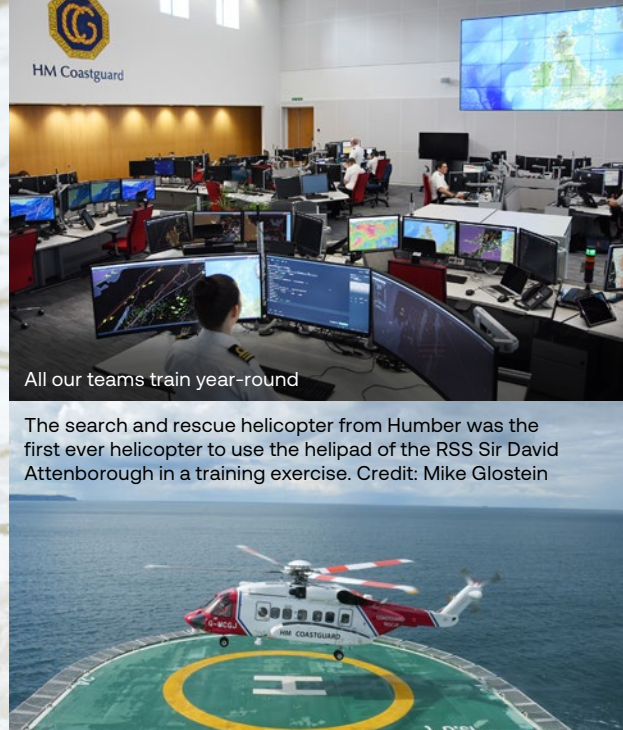
Credit: John Nield Photography



Credit: Steve Davey



Credit: Harbour Media



All our teams train year-round

The search and rescue helicopter from Humber was the first ever helicopter to use the helipad of the RSS Sir David Attenborough in a training exercise. Credit: Mike Glostein


HM Coastguard's technical rescue training has developed over the last fifteen years to become national leaders in the technical disciplines of rope, water, mud and land search.

Recently this has also expanded to bring casualty care and driving capabilities into the team, with the addition of two new roles to lead each of these disciplines.

Full qualifications

The Technical Rescue Training Team takes new-entry Senior Coastal Operation Officers (SCOOs) through from the day that they arrive in the agency to full qualification over the space of around eighteen months. Face-to-face training is supported by both a workbook and online e-learning modules. Revalidations are also part of the training cycle with all coastal staff having regular contact with technical rescue trainers to keep their skills current and up-to-date with the latest changes.

Simulating Situations

Our face-to-face training takes part at a range of training sites to give coastguards different environments to develop their skills and then allow them to put those skills into practice in real-world scenarios. In 2015, the Training Centre itself was relocated from Highcliffe, Dorset, to Lee-on-Solent in Hampshire, allowing for a brand-new training facility alongside a high-end simulated cliff top. 



Rope rescue training. Credit: Lee Crumpler

Let's talk tech

“999 Coastguard please”

What really happens when you call for help?



Our operations room controllers work together as a team, co-ordinating rescues and all the emergency responders. Seen here are some of the ‘tools’ they use. On the left is a touchpad keypad for instant calls and communications with rescue teams on the ground. Second from left is the screen which shows the input of all information about the incident. The blue screen (2nd from right) shows an illustration of search planning.



HOW TO CALL FOR HELP:



If you've been unlucky enough to have called us for help, you may have been speaking to one operator but behind them there's a whole team that's seamlessly leaping into action at the same time. What does it take and how do they do it?

The highly skilled teams in the operations centres use a full ‘technology toolkit’ to help co-ordinate search and rescues. From an operations room nerve centre, technology allows teams to plan, share information and work closely with the thousands of incredible volunteers, coastal officers and fellow emergency services partners across the UK.

Live incident command system

Alerts may be received by phone, VHF radio and other alerting systems such as Personal Locator Beacons (PLB) but the rapid response is the same. The operator inputs all the available information into a live incident command system, every report is logged and automatically numbered and this information can be seen by all authorised users, anywhere.

The system lets the controller zone into area maps and the location of ‘assets’ such as Coastguard Rescue Teams, blue light partners and others such as the RNLI and independent lifeboats. From here, they can ‘drag and drop’ the buttons for the assets into the incident to ask them to attend, which HM Coastguard calls ‘tasking’. The alerting and tasking system also sends a text to our incredible teams of volunteers.

A touchpad communications system is nearby and the operators

can use this to call and speak to emergency services responders and other control rooms including police, fire and rescue and ambulance.

Search planning

An important tool is a search planning system for those in difficulty in the water. This uses live data that takes into account the tides, wind speed and even the wave height in an area that can be pinpointed to the exact last known location of the casualty.

It helps forecast how far the person or people may have moved over periods of time so those sent to search the area such as a rescue team searching the coastline, a lifeboat or helicopter can be sent to the most likely location.

Help us to help you

Knowing where you are and being able to provide your location if you ever need to call for help really does help us to help you. [Find out what tech should be in your ‘toolbox’](#)

SEE THE VIDEO, HEAR THE CALL

Paddleboarder Alfie is rescued – hear the real life emergency call



New radio network

Fibre technology that will give HM Coastguard even more options for hi-tech lifesaving search and rescue telecommunications is rolling out across the UK in a £175m upgrade.

The new state of the art search and rescue radio network uses fibre technology and will allow coastguards to continue to receive distress calls from all maritime users and seafarers and co-ordinate rescue operations.

The new fibre technology will replace the legacy copper-based network which will become increasingly outdated.



Credit: Julie Sloan

Radio sites such as Belfast, St Margaret's Hope, Lough Navar and Lee-on-the-Solent have already been switched over to the new network. These sites will closely be followed by all 165 remote radio sites over the next two years.

The replacement technology will bring improvements across the radio network such as increased security and bandwidth. This will allow further investment in advanced search and rescue technology that requires a digital connection and high bandwidth, to enhance life-saving operations, where every second is essential.

The new network is being built and maintained by Telent Technology Services Ltd, and as they lay new fibre cables around remote areas of the UK, it could also enable members of the public close by to access superfast broadband services from their supplier. [cc](#)

Satellite heroes

They're the unsung heroes of search and rescue which have helped to save countless lives over the last four decades.

Cospas-Sarsat, the international satellite system for search and rescue, has played a vital part in search and rescue operations since their introduction in 1982.

These satellites are capable of picking up signals from emergency 406 MHz distress beacons set off anywhere in the world.

Whether the signal is from a commercial plane or a walker in the mountains, the principle is the same. As soon as a beacon is activated its signal is picked up by satellites which

begin sending information back to earth within minutes.

Three types of beacons are picked up by Cospas-Sarsat satellites:

- **Emergency Locator Transmitters (ELT)**, which are used in aviation;
- **Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacons (EPIRB)**, which are used in maritime, and;
- **Personal Locator Beacons (PLB)**, which can be used by individuals in any environment.

Each type of beacon transmits a unique digital code containing beacon details and the country code which the beacon is registered to. If an alert is triggered in the UK, or is UK coded, information is sent to the Mission Control Centre, based at the Joint Rescue Coordination Centre, in Fareham where operators are ready to react. The beacons also have a built-in homing frequency which is used to guide rescuers to their location. [cc](#)



The 999 family

It is often said that those who carry out search and rescue are like a family. They care for each other and those they serve. Across its 200-year history, Her Majesty's Coastguard has become an active part of an extended family, not just here but across the world.



Credit: David Edwards

One team, one aim. To search, to rescue and to save. From the moment that distress call comes in, to that moment that someone is pulled to safety, the search and rescue community will strive together to find them.

While HM Coastguard is the organisation which coordinates the search and rescue, it doesn't see itself as more important than those who work with it. Whether it's the RNLI or independent lifeboats and lifeguards, or the National Coastwatch Institution – every one of them has a part to play from the moment that distress call comes into our maritime rescue coordination centres.


On the ground, we regularly assist our other emergency service friends – police, ambulance and fire. Sometimes these are difficult and sensitive incidents and involve many hours of searching alongside each other, using each of our unique skills to do all we can in response to an emergency.

Most people hear HM Coastguard and think of stormy seas and crumbling clifftops, but we're also to be found supporting our friends in mountain rescue across the UK.

We work with emergency services when they ask us to support them with our helicopters which are often found assisting the mountain rescue teams on the ground. Even the most experienced mountaineer or hiker can be caught out by the conditions and sometimes in the most difficult places to get to. Our helicopter crews have supported rescues working with emergency services and the mountain rescue teams to get people to safety.

You may well also have heard about our involvement in supporting maritime safety at global events and incidents – our coastguards provided support to the NHS during the pandemic, worked alongside other emergency services and partners at COP26 and G7 and their water rescue skills were employed for dealing with flooding.

Our links with the Coastguard Association are also part of the family life – you never really stop being part of the 999 Family and they support those who once served.

All one family. All one team.
All one aim. 



Credit: Royal Foundation

The Royal Foundation

Emergency services across each of the home nations have committed to a uniform approach to supporting the mental health of their emergency responder workforce.

In a UK first, The Chief Officers of the National Police Chiefs Council, National Fire Chiefs Council, Association of Ambulance Chief Executives and HM Coastguard have made a public pledge on behalf of their organisations at The Royal Foundation Emergency Services Mental Health Symposium.

An uplifting sight

Flying to the Rescue



Our iconic helicopters with their distinctive red and white livery are sent to the rescue at any time of the day or night, co-ordinated by the specialist teams at the ARCC, the Aeronautical Rescue Coordination Centre which works closely with our maritime operations centres.

With a trained winch paramedic on board, they are sent to incidents in which people, often lone casualties require rescuing as well as coastal and maritime searches. In addition to that, about a third of the work is undertaken on behalf of other government departments.

2020
in numbers

513
people rescued
by helicopter

1,021
people assisted
by helicopter

1,932
people assisted
by fixed wing

2,187
incidents
attended
by helicopter

230,010
nautical miles flown
by our fixed wing
– that's 10 times
around the world

Fixed Wing

In 2020 Coastguard fixed wing aircraft flew nearly double the amount of anticipated flying hours which reflects the overall increase in demand for coastguard aviation. The types of missions flown in the last year include:

- Search and rescue
- Border protection
- Counter pollution
- Fisheries protection
- Search and rescue top cover



“Mayday!”

‘Mayday’ is an internationally recognised distress call for radio communications. It’s used for vessels and people in serious trouble at sea and in the aviation world. The term was made official by an international telecommunications conference in 1948, and is an anglicising of the French “m’aidez,” (help me).

Life as a Coastguard

Then and now

Porthleven family

For nearly a century, a member of the Strike family has watched over Porthleven's rugged coastline.

Chris, the fourth generation of Strike to receive his 20 year medal. And he'd love to see his daughter become the fifth generation to don the uniform.


"If you add up all of our years of service, we have 213 years between us and we are very proud of that."

The town was infamous for shipwrecks and has experienced its share of disasters.

And from 1928, there has been a Strike on duty to protect its shores – starting with Frank when he joined the Porthleven Auxiliary Coastguard (which became the Coastguard Rescue Service).

Three of his sons Frank (31 years), Alec (36 years) and Vic (22 years) each surpassed the 20-year milestone as have Alec's sons Tony (38 years, not retired) and Iain (31 years).

Chris (son of Iain) has also now reached his two-decade milestone and hopes to go on to become Station Officer.

"I would like that," he said. "The three generations above me became Number One, as it was known then, and I would like to keep that tradition alive." 



Above: Frank Strike fired the line to the St Anne, which was wrecked on Porthleven beach in 1931, saving all 7 crew. He's seen here holding a cannonball. (Image courtesy of Museum of Cornish Life)



Training was a bit closer to the edge when this picture was taken. Frank (second from right) started the family tradition when he joined in 1928.

Meet Chaplain Tom


Life can be a tough old place to be. Serving in a blue light service can place a heavy toll on individuals, teams, their relationships and their families. Caring for the carers is an important part of HM Coastguard's work – and now it has appointed its first ever full-time chaplain, Revd Tom Ebbens.

Tom is a coastguard through and through. As a student, he signed up as a volunteer with Aberystwyth Coastguard Rescue Team, went on to serve in numerous Maritime Rescue Coordination Centres and from there went on to become a Senior Coastal Operations Officer in Cornwall.

But he is also a person with a deeply profound, yet quiet faith. His faith journey led him to be ordained in June 2021 but also to explore the possibility of supporting his fellow coastguards as a chaplain.

He said: "I've been in the coastguard service for 12 years now and understand how it feels to be a serving coastguard. I also know how sometimes people need a friend to talk with, to explore difficult situations with and to just listen to them."

"We experience the highs of rescue but also the lows of tragedy and loss. Those incidents stay with you and sometimes you can't help but take that home with you."

"What the chaplaincy does is help create a space for people, regardless of whether they have faith or not, where they can talk through the things that trouble them. It's important to support people where they are and that's what chaplaincy is all about." 



Protecting our coasts

Here's a brief look at some significant events that have shaped the way we safeguard our coasts today.

Sea Empress – February 15, 1996

The Sea Empress oil tanker hit rocks as it entered the Milford Haven Estuary and was damaged below the waterline. Over the next few days, severe weather hampered attempts to bring the vessel into Port and over 72,000 tonnes of oil were released into the sea.

120 miles of the coastline were contaminated and there was serious impact on marine and coastal ecosystems, including damage to thousands of seabirds.

This incident led to the creation in 1999 of the role of the Secretary of State's Representative for Maritime Salvage and Intervention (SOSREP). The SOSREP works alongside HM Coastguard and the MCA but is entirely independent to enable rapid decision making during those maritime incidents around the UK which present a risk to safety or significant pollution. This role was to be pivotal in avoiding wide-ranging environmental damage 11 years later during the Napoli incident.

When maritime disasters happen – HM Coastguard volunteers and staff work tirelessly around the clock in response. Actions are reviewed and lessons learnt to improve future responses to safeguarding lives and protecting the environment.

MSC Napoli, 2007

The 53,000 tonne container ship was intentionally run aground on the Jurassic Coast in January 2007 having suffered severe structural damage during a storm in the English Channel.

Following the successful evacuation of all crew, the initial plan was to tow the vessel to Portland but it became apparent the ship, with 4000 tonnes of fuel and 2300 containers on board, was at risk of sinking which would have resulted in a huge environmental catastrophe and serious navigational hazard.

Around 300 tonnes of fuel and 114 containers entered the water during and after the grounding but this could have been much worse. The SOSREP's decision to beach the vessel was deemed the least-worst possible outcome.

Items from the containers washed up in Lyme Bay leading 'looters' to flock to the area. Police warned that those removing goods without notifying HM Coastguard's Receiver of the Wreck faced fines.

HM Coastguard's Receiver of Wreck is responsible for investigating the ownership of any wreck and advertising it to give the owner a chance to claim it. If you recover wreck it must be reported within 28 days or you could face a fine.

MSC Napoli

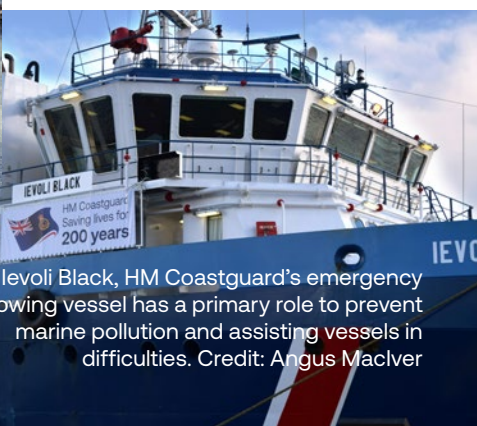


Herald of Free Enterprise, 1987

The Ro-Ro ferry, heading for Dover, capsized minutes after setting sail from Zeebrugge in Belgium on March 6, 1987. 193 people lost their lives in the disaster.

The inner and outer bow doors had been left open as the vessel left the harbour causing the sea to immediately flood the deck.

This incident led to the formation of the UK Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB) in 1989. The MAIB investigates all maritime accidents in UK waters and accidents involving UK registered ships worldwide and makes recommendations for future improvements to safety. [CC](#)



The levoli Black, HM Coastguard's emergency towing vessel has a primary role to prevent marine pollution and assisting vessels in difficulties. Credit: Angus MacIver

Transforming the future

What is UKSAR2G?



HM Coastguard's drone, helicopter and aeroplane assets undertaking their first formation flight in Wales. Credit: Ian Black, HM Coastguard, Bristow Helicopters, 2Excel Aviation

The UK Second-Generation Aviation Search and Rescue programme (UKSAR2G) is part of the Maritime & Coastguard Agency's commitment to further improving its search and rescue offering in the skies.

New technology


UKSAR2G is focussed on using new technology and aerospace capabilities to help find people more quickly, and save more lives. It draws on historic and the future anticipated growth in demand for coastguard aviation services.

As part of the programme of UKSAR2G innovations, HM Coastguard will continue to explore developments in large high endurance uncrewed aircraft, working closely with the Civil Aviation Authority.

Last year, a series of trial flights involving the use of large drones operating beyond visual line of sight were successful. Uncrewed aircraft have also been used in real missions to assist air, sea and land-based recovery teams.

What's next?

The programme's procurement phase is in progress. Six companies have been invited to bid.

It is anticipated a contract will be awarded to the successful bidder or bidders in 2022, with an expected service starting autumn 2024. 

For further information:

Visit gov.uk/mca/uksar2g
Email uksar2g@mcga.gov.uk

In numbers

When the Coronavirus pandemic hit in 2020, one thing didn't change; we remained ready and prepared to respond, sometimes in the most difficult of conditions. Our employed and volunteer coastguards worked shoulder-to-shoulder with the other emergency services in the provision of mutual aid in support of the wider response to the pandemic. It included providing aviation support to the National Health Service to move patients; pro-active patrols of our busier beaches and coastal communities and involvement in high-profile incidents beyond our usual work, such as taking the lead role in rescuing people from the train derailment at Stonehaven in Scotland.

33,580

incidents were responded to (up from 31,234 in 2019)

1,750

flying hours flown by the fixed wing aerial reconnaissance service

1,975

taskings for our helicopters

17,000

kilometres of UK coastline covered

40m

people were reached on social media about beach safety

102

operational staff in the Coastguard Rescue Service

3,500

volunteers (average) in 308 teams

See the [MCA's annual report and accounts 2020-21](#) for more.



Honours & awards

Northern Ireland

Rathlin Coast Rescue Company

Shackleton – Stricken trawler on the rocks, 1 March 1930

Steam trawler Shackleton came to a sticky end in fog and rough seas off the remote coast of Rathlin Island, County Antrim. In a 12 hour race against time, the Rathlin Life Saving Company led a group of 50 men who walked through the foggy night with heavy equipment. The lives of all 14 crew were saved using the breeches buoy technique.

The Rescue Shield historically was awarded to the life saving company for the most exceptional rescue where lives would definitely have been lost. It's among several prestigious honours including the Honorary Commodore's Award and Chief Coastguard Meritorious Service Award

England

Newhaven & Solent Coastguard District

Eendracht: Washed on a sandbank, 21 October 1998

Overwhelmed by violent gale force winds the sail training schooner Eendracht and its 51 people were washed onto a sandbank at Newhaven and battered by waves.

It took extraordinary skill to get them to safety in treacherous conditions. Two Coastguard rescue helicopters were used to airlift them. Multi agency teams were also at the scene throughout.

Scotland

Stornoway

SS Clan MacQuarrie: The storm of 31 January 1953

A great storm blew that snowy night and the 66 crew of the Clan MacQuarrie were in mortal danger as it was driven onto the shore at Borve, Isle of Lewis. Winds gusted up to 100mph. All 66 on board were saved by the biggest ever breeches buoy rescue which still retains the world record.

Wales

Llandudno & Rhyl Rescue Companies

Life threatening flooding: 26 February–2 March 1990

Coastguard Rescue Teams from Llandudno and Rhyl were among the rescuers who worked as one team, day and night to help thousands of people when a storm hit the North Wales coast. Sea defences were broken. At Towyn, the sea flooded the streets and about 5,000 people were evacuated from their homes.

Since then, HM Coastguard has specially trained teams in flood rescue. [CG](#)

Fit for the future

Although we were born 200 years ago, today's Coastguard is always looking to the future, and we're constantly striving to find new and innovative equipment and ways of working to help save lives.

In summer 2021, the first operational drone flight joined manned helicopters, fixed-wing aeroplanes, boats and cliff rescue teams on lifesaving missions at sea and over land in North Wales as well as taking part in a series of major training exercises with other 999 teams. Remotely piloted aircraft can enhance situational awareness for emergency responders. They can send live images from the scene to coastguard operations rooms as well as other responders and can be available on scene for extended periods. The drones will begin being used operationally in 2024.

In 2022, HM Coastguard's operations rooms will get a further boost with a new state-of-the-art system that's been developed

specifically for us. Highly flexible, it's designed to transform the integration of all aspects of search and rescue management. It will permit even closer collaboration between teams and allow coastguard operations experts to work more easily from multiple locations beyond the control rooms, with fast, real time access to live information.

The national radio network is also being upgraded to fibre technology allowing the Coastguard to invest in advanced search and rescue technology that requires a digital connection and high bandwidth. Remote communities will benefit too, with those close by having access to superfast broadband.

“Keeping people safe on the sea and around the coast, will always be a priority for HM Coastguard. Using new and cutting-edge ways to modernise search and rescue, such as remotely piloted aircraft (drones), and ever evolving methods of detection could prove the difference between life and death, so technology like this has a vital role to play.”

CLAIRE HUGHES,
DIRECTOR OF HM COASTGUARD

While saving lives is our number one priority, saving the planet is really important to us too. ‘We started to invest in electric cars last year’, says James Burke, HM Coastguard’s Resources Manager. Following trials, six Mitsubishi Plug-in Hybrid Electric Vehicles have been purchased and our Chief Coastguard has even been putting the Outlander to the test in his local area. We’re also in the process of procuring 19 fully electric Hyundai Ionic 5s – they’ll be used as staff cars UK-wide. And we’re continuing to identify ways to electrify our fleet where operationally possible by 2027, trialling and integrating electric models as they arrive on the market. It’s our ambition to replace the whole fleet with battery electric vehicles over the next 5 years, although it will be a couple of years before commercial 4x4s are available.’

As well as new eco-friendly vehicles, the Coastguard Rescue Service (CRS) will also soon be benefitting from a new internal website to host operational support material along with a digitised incident log to capture live data. The new website will provide an online training resource which records training achieved and reminds coastguard officers when they need to refresh their skills while another platform will capture all equipment needs.

The twin to the Coastguard Rescue Service website will be a new external HM Coastguard website, due to be launched during HM Coastguard’s 200th year. The website will provide a platform for safety campaigns, helping us be even more effective in ensuring that everyone knows what to do in an emergency at sea and along the coast. [CG](#)

Remotely piloted aircraft. Credit: Ian Black, HM Coastguard, Bristow Helicopters, 2Excel Aviation.



The new Mitsubishi Outlander plug-in hybrid car on display at the Emergency Services Show.



Maritime &
Coastguard
Agency

Safer lives,
safer ships,
cleaner seas

The bigger picture

Her Majesty's Coastguard is one of the UK's four frontline emergency services. But as the search and rescue arm of the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) it's also part of a much wider maritime safety organisation.

The MCA is an executive agency of the Department for Transport (DfT) and works to prevent loss of life on the coast and at sea. The MCA's vision is to be a world-leading organisation, accelerating the transition to sustainable shipping with non-negotiable safety standards. The MCA puts our people, our customers and our planet at the heart of everything we do. That vision drives our commitment to safer lives, safer ships, and cleaner seas.

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