

Lifeboats Then and Now

MD 2006



The Humber Lifeboat - Pride of the Humber

On a cold winter's night,
With the storm at its height
The lifeboat answered the call.
They pitched and they tossed,
Till they thought they were lost,
As we watched from the harbour wall.
Tho' the night was pitch black,
There was no turning back,
For someone was waiting there.
But each volunteer,
Had to live with his fear,
As they joined in a silent prayer...

Carry us
Home, home, home from the sea
Angels of mercy answer our plea
And carry us
Home, home, home from the sea,
Carry us safely home from the sea.

And back in the town
On a street that runs down
To the sea and the harbour wall,
They gathered in pairs
At the foot of the stairs
To wait for the radio call.
And just before dawn,
When all hope was gone,
Came a hush and a faraway sound,
'Twas the coxswain he roared,
'All survivors on board,
Thank God and we're homeward bound"

To carry them
Home, home, home from the sea
Angels of mercy answer our plea
And carry us
Home, home, home from the sea,
Carry us safely home from the sea.

As they battled their way,
Past the mouth of the bay,
It was blowing like never before,
Every one of them thought
Of loved one back on the shore.
Then a flicker of light,
And they knew they were right,
There she was on the crest of a wave
'She's an old fishing boat
And she's barely afloat
Please God there are souls we can save"

And carry us
Home, home, home from the sea
Angels of mercy answer our plea
And carry us
Home, home, home from the sea,
Carry us safely home from the sea.

By Phil Coulter

Lifeboat History - Who invented the lifeboat?

Henry Francis Greathead was born on January 27th 1757 and he built the first real lifeboat in 1790. It was called the Original.

The Original looked like a very large rowing boat. It had a crew of 12 and was powered by oars. It was in service for 40 years and in that time the crew of the Original saved hundreds of lives.

Henry Greathead used cork to fill the boat's bow and stern so that it would stay afloat in rough water. Nowadays lifeboats do not look like rowing boats! Instead of cork, lifeboats now have lots of watertight air spaces in them. The air in the spaces helps to keep the boats afloat even when the sea is flooding the deck. Another difference is that lifeboats are self-righting. What do you think that means?



1757 - 1816

In 1824 an organisation was set up to run all lifeboat stations and to build new ones. This became known as the National Institution for the Preservation of Life from Shipwreck and later became known as the Royal Lifeboat Institution or the RNLI.



What it was like 200 years ago?



In 1854 a cork lifejacket was invented that protected the crewman as well as keeping him afloat if he fell in the sea!

This lifeboat was used in Yorkshire from 1802 to 1864

The old lifeboats were pulled down to the sea by horses. Look at the huge wheels on the trailer!

The crew wore cork lifejackets. 1854

[Click here to read a rescue story from the 1850s.](#)

Some old lifeboats even had sails!

The William Cantrell Ashley was the last sailing lifeboat in service with the RNLI. It was stationed at New Quay until February 1949.

[Click here](#) to find a short black and white movie clip of the Looe lifeboat being launched in the days when the crew used oars!

1939

1955

1980s

RNLI Heritage Links

What are lifeboats like now?

Lifeboats are strong boats made specially for rescuing people at sea. [To link to RNLI Rescue Map showing lifeboat stations](#)

When they are not being used they are kept in lifeboat stations all around our coast. There are two main types of lifeboats.

In-shore lifeboats



These lifeboats rescue people who have got into difficulties close to the shore. Inshore lifeboats are inflatable boats with outboard engines. They are used instead of the bigger boats when help is needed quickly.

The RNLI introduced the first of its inflatable rescue boats, stationing one at Cullercoats in 1965. It needed a crew of only two or three people.

[To link to RNLI Fact sheet](#)

[To link to RNLI Short Movie Clips](#)

All-weather boats



All-weather boats are used for rescuing people further from the shore. They are larger, stronger boats that can work in deep water and in very dangerous rough seas.

How are lifeboats launched?

Lifeboats are launched in different ways. Some boats are kept in the water so that they can set off quickly.

Some boats are launched from the beach on a trailer pulled by a tractor.

Some boats run down a special ramp called a slipway.

You find a clip of the Tamar lifeboat being launched down a slipway by [clicking here](#)

The Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) [Click here](#)

In 1824 an organisation was set up to run all lifeboat stations and to build new ones. This became known as the National Institution for the Preservation of Life from Shipwreck and later became known as the Royal Lifeboat Institution or the RNLI



Their logo is a flag showing the red cross of St George and the letters R N L I with a crown and an anchor.

There are now more than 200 lifeboat stations round the coast and lifeboats are paid for by the money that people give to the RNLI.

This inflatable lifeboat the 'Blue Peter IV' was paid for by money given by Blue Peter viewers.



People who crew the lifeboats are all volunteers. That means they don't get paid. They all have other jobs but spend their spare time being trained as lifeboat men. Rescuing people is very dangerous and they are very brave!

Life jackets have been saving lives for nearly 150 years and during that time people have been trying to make them better at keeping people afloat. Many different materials have been used over the years.

In 1854, Captain Ward, an RNLI Inspector, invented a cork lifejacket that looked like a vest with cork blocks attached to it. This vest protected the lifeboat men from the cold water as well as enabling them to float in the sea.

The crews liked the new 'life savers' but there was a big problem. The cork life jackets were also worn by sailors and those who became unconscious in the water were often found drowned, face down in the water having been tipped forward by their cork lifejacket.



In 1904 Kapok lifejackets were invented. Kapok is a fluffy material that used to be used to stuff toys and cushions. These jackets were used until about forty years ago. They were much better at keeping people afloat than the cork jackets and didn't tip people forward in the water. However, they weren't very popular because they were not very comfortable to wear. They were very bulky and heavy especially when they had been in the water for a long time.



In 1970 the Beaufort Lifejacket was introduced. It was much more attractive and colourful as well as being less bulky and easier to wear. This lifejacket was kept afloat by foam and could be inflated by the crew member blowing air into a tube.



In 1993 the RNLI Crew Saver lifejacket was introduced. This lifejacket is different to all the others because it inflates automatically as soon as it enters the water. The lifejacket has a toggle that can be pulled to give extra inflation which comes from a small gas cylinder inside the lifejacket.



Unlike the early lifejackets, modern lifejackets are light and much more comfortable to wear. They have a light and a whistle so that the lifeboat man can attract attention if he falls into the sea.



[Link](#) [Link](#) [LINK](#) [Link](#)

