

STEPPER POINT NEWS

WINTER 2007 - ISSUE 11

Patrons: Peter Prideaux-Brune and Rick Stein OBE



Registered Charity No 1045645

Station Report.

The last 6 months has been a period of consolidation for the Committee which is now functioning well. We still need members to cover Public Relations, Fund Raising and to act as Quartermaster (anyone with spare storage space please apply).

Work is ongoing to smarten up the lookout including being painted inside and out. The Direction Finder failed after water got inside the aerial during a Force 11 gale. Unfortunately the aerial is sealed so the water could not get out and the electronics then corroded. The water tried to get out by flowing down the inside of the coax cable, which also did not help the situation. All is now fixed and we are waiting for the wind to drop so that the aerial can be put back up the mast. The next job will be moving the Radar Display up so that it hangs from the ceiling and clears the front desk for charts, etc.

Money continues to flow in from our 'Friends of Stepper Point' and the Collecting Boxes organized by Martin Bishop. We have also had generous contributions from the Wadebridge Boating Club, the Measurers Trust, the 'Padstow Darkies' and Lesley MacLennan, from Australia, who cycled round all the Coastwatch Stations in Cornwall in remembrance of her brother Graham Hawkey.

Finally, we have established a working liaison with our sister station at Boscastle. Every day we do a 'Buddy' check by calling them at 0915 to ensure they are fit and well and in the afternoon they call us. They have also joined us for the formal Radio Training that every watchkeeper must pass to qualify for watchkeeping duties at a DFS lookout. And, to cement our closer relationship we held a joint skittles evening at the Poldark Inn on 3rd October 2007 – see page 4 for report.

Padstow gets a new Harbour Master

Rob Atkinson has recently taken over as Padstow's Harbour Master from Trevor Platt who has retired and is now the Operations Manager for the Padstow Lifeboat. Although not 'proper Cornish' (born in Stockport) Rob grew up and has lived most of his life around the Penzance area, so feels very proud to be 'nearly Cornish'. His seafaring interest started at a very early age as his parents were enthusiastic sailors and regularly cruised their small 'Achilles' class yacht between Liverpool and the Isle of Man. As a teenager he became a very keen dinghy sailor before moving on to race larger yachts including an 80 foot catamaran - he once saw 36.9 knots on the clock of this cat and had never been so frightened in his life!!

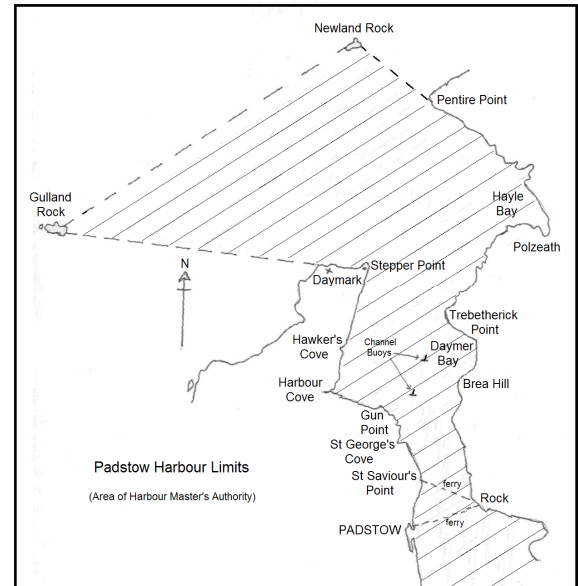
Aged 17, he joined the Merchant Navy and 'served his time' with Shell Tankers - a satisfying job which gave him the chance to see many parts of the world. Next he worked for the UK government on the research ships Discovery, Charles Darwin and Challenger, the first two worked worldwide and the third mostly around the UK. This was a fun job, as you got to do all the 'hands on' ship handling – manoeuvring the vessel to pick up moorings, holding station over vertical wires with electronic packages on the end, and sometimes deep sea trawling. Trawling was the most interesting as you were regularly picking creatures up from 4000 to 5000m deep and you could actually see the results – all sorts of strange fish such, crabs and sea cucumbers. The most spectacular trip he did was a 'cruise' down to the Antarctic – memorable sights were the icebergs, beautiful bluey white on the one side and a ghastly blood stained pink on the other where penguins had been feasting on Krill. Also down there, the Aurora Australis – the southern hemisphere equivalent of the Northern Lights, but much more vivid.

Eventually he joined the Isles of Scilly Steamship Company, where he was relief master on the freight and passenger ferries. However, after about five years with the steamship company he decided it was time for a new challenge and applied for a job as a lifeboat inspector with the RNLI in the West Division, covering all the Welsh stations, and including the Isle of Man. Every lifeboat station has to be regularly checked to ensure the equipment is being maintained properly, the crew competence levels are up to scratch and there are generally no problems – this was the main 'core' activity of this job. He loved going out on the lifeboats, as well as inspecting them, and also had to trial the boats, teach potential coxswains how to command them and also, sometimes, deliver them to stations around the UK and Ireland.

In the end, five years out of the Cornwall was just too much for himself and his wife Jo, who is 'proper Cornish' and 'off Redruth', so they were already looking to relocate back to the county when the Newlyn Harbourmaster tipped him off that Padstow Harbour Commissioners were looking for someone to take over from Trevor Platt. He was delighted when accepted for the position and although he will miss playing with lifeboats he is pleased to now have a close association with the Padstow and Rock Lifeboats. He is thoroughly enjoying getting to grips with his new job and working with the harbour staff who have all been fantastic in his first few months.

Padstow Harbour Limits

The authority of the Padstow Harbour Master extends right down the estuary and out to a line running from the Daymark to Gulland Rock then back to Newland Rock and onwards to Pentire Point. Coincidentally this is the area that the NCI Stepper Point Lookout watches over and one of the reasons why watchkeepers report 'unusual' nautical behaviour to the Harbour Master's office.



Recent Incidents from the NCI Stepper Point Logbook

- 10 Jun Coast Guard (CG) report 999 call stating child's canoe and small dinghy with 3 children on board being blown out to sea over Doom Bar. NCI report position to CG and that nearby FV 'Blue Fox' could assist casualties. CG radio the FV and also call out Rock ILB. Casualties and both vessels taken by Rock ILB to safety
- 25 Jun Yacht 'Corisand' in trouble off Trevoze Head. 2 POB, lost foresail and taking water. CG launch Padstow LB into Force 10 Gale and very rough seas. Rescue 193 Helicopter takes 2 crew and 2 RNLI off the yacht and Padstow L/B tows the casualty to Padstow. As L/B returns from Padstow to station, they divert to take one person off Yacht 'Fly' that was sheltering in The Narrows under Stepper Point. L/B finds casualty needs medical assistance so Rescue 193 takes casualty to Padstow school playing field for transfer to Treliske Hospital. NCI Stepper then reports to CG that yacht 'Fly' is dragging it's anchor. CG ask L/B to assist but they are unable to reach the yacht. NCI then reports to CG that yacht 'Fly' has drifted across estuary and was on rocks near Shag Rock. CG task Polzeath Mobile CG Team to assist but they are unable to reach yacht. Yacht 'Fly' was recovered next day almost undamaged.
- 21 Aug CG call NCI Stepper Point to look out for motor yacht 'Orhanian' believed to have lost use of one of two engines and thought to be between Bude and Boscastle. Wind was Force 8 due North and there was a heavy swell. NCI inform CG that a white motor boat has been sighted between Pentire Point and Newlands. Casualty making slow progress with probably 1 POB. Later NCI inform CG that the motor boat is confirmed to be 'Orhanian' and is in the estuary.
- 24 Aug NCI Stepper Point advised CG that a girl is stuck on the cliff under Brae Hill. CG tasked Polzeath Mobile CG Team to assist and casualty is taken to safety.
- 29 Sep CG task Rock ILB to assist casualty with broken ankle on Daymer Beach. NCI Stepper Point inform CG of position of casualty. Rock Mobile and Rock ILB on scene and casualty is recovered and taken to safety.

Buddy System with Boscastle

Thanks to an initiative by NCI Stepper Point Acting Station Manager Colin Davey, watchkeepers at the lookout now have an extra level of personal safety. A system has been introduced whereby the Stepper Point watchkeepers on duty phone NCI Boscastle in the morning to check that their watchkeepers have arrived safely and are on watch. A reciprocal call is made during the afternoon by NCI Boscastle to check that the shift changeover has been made and that the NCI Stepper Point lookout is operational. With both lookouts in an isolated position and reached by steep cliff walks, this gives added positive confirmation that all is well. The chance to have a chat with an adjacent lookout up the coast has also helped to extend our knowledge of vessels or incidents in the area which are of interest or which may need extra attention.

NCI Boscastle members also joined with NCI Stepper Point members at a recent Marine VHF Radio Course organized to get watchkeepers either Royal Yachting Association (RYA) or NCI qualified so that they can use the Coast Guard VHF Channel 0 if required. Further joint courses are planned for the New Year.

Bowling Evening

The co-operation with NCI Boscastle also led to the suggestion that there should be a social get together and so on 3rd October watchkeepers, spouses and friends met at The Poldark Inn at Delabole for an evening of skittles and beer with a pasty supper. It was an excellent evening with both sides bowling very competitively, but in the end, Stepper Point won by a narrow margin.



Colin Davey preparing to Bowl

‘That’s what we’re here for’ – by Peter Thorpe

When I set out on the walk to Stepper Point lookout for the early shift on Tuesday morning 15 May with trainee Ken Stewart, I thought it might be another fairly quiet shift as the season was not yet fully under way, it was midweek and the weather was not very inviting with a sea fret which kept rolling in to bring the two miles visibility down to 200 metres at times. Indeed when Ken and I opened up and got out the log, a brief glance back at the previous pages showed that on one day Michael Fisher had written that there were no vessels in or out of the estuary throughout the whole shift.



Similarly, after the initial sweep of the horizon and our closer waters, Ken and I could not see any vessels and settled down for a quiet morning. We were not to know that it was to be the second time in nine days that the hapless yacht Hara was to be attended by a lifeboat.

After carrying out the usual lookout opening procedures, we spotted our first customer at 10.05 hrs, a white hulled Horizon 32 foot yacht but we could not see its name. It was coming in close under the cliff from the West, with heavily reefed mainsail and jib in the North Westerly force five, making her way under power into the estuary. Ken and I were immediately concerned as we could see at once that instead of hugging the far shore close to the porthand buoy where the channel is, she was making for the shallow water of the Doom Bar. With an hour to go to low water on a falling spring tide we rang Falmouth Coastguard at 10.05 hrs to say that she was standing into danger and would probably go aground. During this time, we could not see anybody up on deck and we could not see any heads in the cabin. Sure enough at that moment, as we feared, she was picked up by the standing wave on the Doom Bar and was soon corkscrewing around as she went aground with her keel firmly in the sand. Even then, nobody came up on deck and as the vessel twisted round we got a proper look at her stern for the first time to discover that it was the yacht Hara.

I remembered that it had been in trouble nine days before when it had made a PAN PAN call at 18.06 hrs to Falmouth Coastguard to say that the engine had failed and with two exhausted crew on board, needed help. Padstow Lifeboat was tasked and our adjacent station to the East, NCI Boscastle, were able to keep the Hara under radar watch until the lifeboat arrived and to continue to monitor the situation as a long slow tow back to Padstow got under way. It says a lot about the dedication of NCI watchkeepers as Tony Hart at Boscastle kept the station open until 19.24 hrs to be sure that all possible assistance was given. Padstow Lifeboat finally got back on slip at 01.00 hrs.

In the Camel estuary Ken and I could now see a potentially very dangerous situation arising and still nobody came up on deck. We were concerned that the skipper may have been injured and rang Falmouth Coastguard at 10.20 hrs to say that the Hara was now firmly aground on the bar. They asked whether we believed she was adrift, but we said that she had entered the estuary under control. At 10.25 hrs the Coastguard decided to page the Rock Inshore Lifeboat and Polzeath Mobile CG Team. We offered to direct the ILB to the casualty by radio on channel zero, but at that moment, the ILB radioed Falmouth Coastguard to say that it was launched and that it had got a visual on the yacht. It was on scene at 10.37 hrs and we had in the meantime advised Falmouth of the weather conditions and of the sea mist which was closing in. Still nobody had come up on deck, and at 10.43 hrs the helmsman of the Rock ILB boarded the Hara and entered the cabin. He radioed that there was only the skipper on board and he was in his bunk. He had said that he had put the Hara onto the bar in order to repair her bilges and declined further assistance, he would stay aboard until there was sufficient water to refloat her. At 10.50 hrs the Coastguard radioed the ILB to return to base and rang NCI Stepper Point to task us with a watching brief and advise if anything changed. We called them again later to say that the visibility had reduced to 200 metres and we were no longer able to see the Hara, but it soon cleared again. At 12.39 hrs the tide had turned and the water had risen sufficiently for the Hara to float free and we could advise the Coastguard that the skipper had got the engine going and was nervously taking her slowly upstream towards Padstow. We were thanked by the Coastguard for our help, but we both said together – ‘that’s what we’re here for!’

Padstow Ferry in Collision with Dredger - Passenger Casualties

No, not really, but the scenario for an evening exercise mounted by the RNLI and Padstow Harbour Authorities on 26 September 2007 involving Padstow Lifeboat and Rock Inshore Lifeboat and was observed by NCI Stepper Point.

After the second regular NCI shift by watchkeepers Graham Bradshaw and John Sinker at Stepper Point had closed at 1700 hrs on this Wednesday afternoon, Colin Davey and Peter Barrett arrived to advise Falmouth Coastguard that the lookout was being manned for a third watch to monitor and record the evening collision exercise.

The incident began with a radio call at 18.19 hrs by Padstow Ferry 'Black Tor' (carefully prefaced with the explanation that this was an exercise) that it was in collision with the dredger 'Sandsnipe' and that there were at least two serious passenger casualties. Immediate assistance was required.

At 18.20 hrs Rock ILB was launched and raced to the scene in the middle of the Camel estuary at the Padstow Ferry's usual high water crossing point. The watch at Stepper Point noted that visibility was 15 miles and it was a spring tide of 7.6 metres with high water at 17.59 hrs, so the tide had just turned. There was a Northerly Force 7 blowing straight up the estuary and making for choppy conditions. Rock ILB was met with realistic scenes of panic amongst the passengers which tested the crew's ability to calm the situation and take charge quickly.

At 18.21 hrs Padstow Lifeboat was seen by the Stepper Point watch heading up the estuary at speed on its way to the stricken ferry. But, in an extra twist to the scenario, the lifeboat paused at the starboardhand buoy to drop a dummy body into the water. Padstow lifeboat then radioed to Rock ILB that it should also recover this casualty. This was achieved at 18.25 hrs.

When Padstow Lifeboat 'Spirit of Padstow' arrived at the incident, passengers and casualties were quickly assessed and it was decided to evacuate all passengers onto the larger lifeboat. Matt Hicks took the part of a seriously injured casualty and was tended by Padstow lifeboat crewman Steve Nicholas in the lifeboat sick bay. Other lifeboat crew members helped to hoist a disabled casualty still in his wheel chair onto the Spirit of Padstow by means of the midships hoist.

After the exercise, Padstow Harbour Master Rob Atkinson said that he was very impressed by the speed and professionalism of the response from both lifeboat crews. He said that he hoped that this type of incident would never happen in real life, but that if it did, the public could be assured that the emergency arrangements were going to be effective, and that there would be good co-operation between the various agencies involved.

Trevor Platt, RNLI Padstow Operations Manager said "we were pleased with the performance of boats and crews in this exercise and were also able to identify areas of training and procedure to be polished for the future."

The view of the NCI watchkeepers was that although the incident occurred some distance from the lookout, they had a direct line of sight at all times. This enabled them to make a log of the timing of events as they happened, as well as all radio communications. This is important because parts of the Camel estuary near Padstow can lie in radio shadow from the Falmouth Coastguard aerial at Trevoze Head due to the cliffs, and on at least one

previous occasion NCI Stepper Point has been able to relay a missed radio communication to the Coastguard.

Now that NCI Stepper Point has Declared Facility Status, the coastguard recognises us as part of the Search and Rescue facilities available to it, and we would, for example, be able to direct the lifeboat to a casualty in the water by radio on Channel Zero if instructed. Similarly, our log would be relied upon in a court of law if required, to independently determine the facts of an incident.



Padstow Lifeboat heading up the Estuary at speed

Wreck and Rescue around Padstow's Doom Bar (Lodenek Press)

This book is now available at £8.96 from all local outlets. Any Friends of Stepper wishing to order a copy please contact the author, Brian French at sbfrench@tiscali.co.uk

*Visit our Patron at the beautiful 16th Century Elizabethan mansion of
Prideaux Place, Padstow. Telephone 01841532411*

*Visit our Patron at the Padstow Seafood Restaurant.
Telephone: 01841532700. e-mail. reservations@rickstein.com*

Friends of Stepper Point - Application Form 2008

I/We would like to join the Friends of Stepper Point.

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

_____ Postcode: _____

E-mail: _____

I enclose _____ annual subscription of £15.00 (Adults)

and/or _____ annual subscription of £10.00 (Under 16's)

Please forward subscriptions to the address below:
(Cheques payable to 'NCI Stepper Point')

Hon Treasurer, Pegasus, Porthcothan Bay, Nr Padstow. Cornwall PL28 8LR

Subscribers will receive our newsletter on a twice yearly basis.

I would like a receipt from NCI Stepper Point.

I would like to make an additional donation of £_____.

If you would like to donate regularly by Direct Debit or Standing Order, please contact our treasurer who will forward the necessary form to you.

If you would like to receive the newsletter by email (saving us time and postage) please delete as applicable: YES / NO

Gift Aid

I certify I am a taxpayer in the UK and wish my contribution to be claimed in accordance with the rules applying to gift aid to charities.

I understand that I can cancel my contributions without any obligation at any time, by informing my bank and the Treasurer of NCI Stepper Point in writing.

Signature Dated