Fun facts about the RNLI

All-weather Lifeboat Centre
- The All-weather Lifeboat Centre for building, maintaining and refitting the RNLI’s all-weather fleet has itself taken a lot of building, for example it involved erecting 750 tonnes of steelwork and laying 90km of electrical cable.

Equipment
- Lifejackets were used by RNLI lifeboat crews for the first time in 1854. They were made of cork.
- Tractors launched RNLI lifeboats for the first time in 1920. Prior to that, a different kind of horsepower, courtesy of local farmers, provided the pull. Some lifeboat stations were still using horses in the 1930s.
- RNLI slipway rails have grease applied to them to ensure the lifeboat launches smoothly. The same grease is used to lubricate cows’ udders prior to attaching a milking cluster.

Fundraising
- Lifeboat Saturday, the RNLI’s first charity street collection in Manchester in 1891, was the first ever recorded event of its kind. It was organised in the aftermath of the Mexico disaster 5 years earlier, in which 27 lifeboat crew members from Southport and St Annes lost their lives.
- A chicken was a key member of the RNLI fundraising team at Eastbourne in the 1920s. On fundraising Flag Days the chicken was paraded around town in a doll’s pram, coercing people into support with her steely gaze. This family pet’s owner grew up to become Chair of the Ladies’ Guild.
- December 1966 saw the first Blue Peter appeal for books in support of the RNLI.

Gallantry medals
- Frederick Carter, an 11-year-old boy, is the youngest person to get a gallantry medal for his part in an 1890 rescue off the Dorset coast. He and 16-year-old Frank Perry rowed through heavy surf to save two men whose boat had capsized. Both boys were awarded Silver Medals.
- The words ‘Let not the deep swallow me up’ appear on the back of the RNLI’s gallantry medals.
- Helmswoman and Bronze Medallist Aileen Jones from Porthcawl was the first woman to be awarded a medal in 2005 for her part in rescuing the fishing vessel Gower Pride and her crew.

Heritage and museums
- We have over 9,000 objects in our Heritage collection, including collecting tins, minutes of the first ever meeting, a letter sent from the Titanic, over 460 model lifeboats and a 1970’s Action Man in full lifeboat kit.
- The RNLI has seven museums and in 2013 they were visited by over 400,000 people.
- The RNLI’s museums can be found at Bamburgh (Grace Darling Museum), Redcar (Zetland Museum), Whitby, Cromer (Henry Blogg Museum), Chatham (Historic Lifeboat Collection), Eastbourne and Salcombe.
Lifeboats

- Our lifeboats are predominantly orange because it makes them more visible on the water.
- The RNLI is better known for its stations on the coast, but we also have two inland lifeboat stations at Enniskillen (in Northern Ireland) and Loch Ness and another seven lifeboat stations on rivers – at Lough Ree, Lough Derg and Kilrush on the River Shannon in the Republic of Ireland, and at Teddington, Chiswick, Tower and Gravesend on the River Thames.
- The Shannon lifeboat Storm Rider was the first boat in the RNLI’s history to be given a name chosen by an RNLI competition winner.
- A wooden dipper used by a woman drawing water from a well which always came back upright gave William Would the idea for his self-righting lifeboat.
- The RNLI’s all-weather lifeboat fleet is identifiable by its distinctive orange and blue livery. Legoland reportedly had to create a special orange plastic brick for its model of an RNLI lifeboat to correctly match the colour.
- Peake, Richardson tubular and Beeching were all types of early sailing lifeboat used by the RNLI.

Mascot

- The favourite drink of Stormy Stan, RNLI’s fictional lifeboat coxswain and children’s favourite, is chocolate milkshake.

Rescues

- Our crews and lifeguards have saved over 140,000 lives, which is roughly equivalent to the population of Blackburn in England or Wexford in Ireland.
- RNLI crews sometimes get called out to rescue animals as well as people. Down the years these have included horses, cows, goats, ferrets and a dolphin. In 2013, crews launched 118 times to rescue animals.
- The largest number of people rescued by RNLI lifeboats in one incident occurred in 1907. Lifeboat crews from Cadgwith, Coverack, The Lizard and Porthleven rescued 456 people from the White Star Line’s passenger ship SS Suevic.
- One of the most famous rescues of the nineteenth century was undertaken by Grace Darling. Sadly she died of tuberculosis aged 29, just 6 years after her daring mission to rescue the crew of SS Forfarshire wrecked on the Farne Islands in October 1838. The RNLI’s Grace Darling museum opened exactly 100 years later at Bamburgh, Northumberland.
- They say lightning never strikes twice. Mary Roberts, one of 145 people rescued from the hospital ship Rohilla by the Whitby RNLI lifeboat in 1914, had survived the sinking of the Titanic 3 years earlier.

The organisation

- The RNLI, founded in 1824, is the oldest lifeboat service in the world.
- The RNLI started off life in 1824 as the National Institution for the Preservation of Life from Shipwreck, until it adopted its much snappier title the RNLI in 1854.
- In July 2014 the RNLI became the first major UK charity to accept the digital currency, the Bitcoin.
- Our printed magazine The Lifeboat was first published on 1 March 1852 as The Lifeboat Journal, priced 1.5d.
Training

- RNLI College, the home of training for our lifesavers, opened its doors for the first time in 2004. In its first 10 years it hosted 140 weddings, provided 97,000 nights’ sleep for RNLI supporters, ran training courses attended by over 14,000 RNLI crew members and lifeguards, and saved over £10M by using in-house facilities and selling spare capacity.
- Nine out of ten lifeboat crew members have no professional maritime experience.
- RNLI lifeguards have to be able to swim 200m in under 3½ minutes and run 200m on sand in under 40 seconds.

Safety

- Cold water shock can affect your breathing and movement in water temperatures below 15°C. The average sea temperature around the UK is 12°C.