Patrick Sliney, Ballycotton coxswain on call for 76 hours, on service for 63 hours and Gower Pride and her crew to be awarded a Medal for a female crew member of the crew of the Clark of Lerwick for his part in the gale force rescue of the Savinesti, the Gower Pride and her crew to be awarded a Medal.

2013 for the daring rescue of a woman from a swollen Devon river. 2003 for helping save the life of a bodyboarder whose boat had capsized. Frank was also awarded a Silver Medal.

Fundraising

When Sir William Hillary first issued his appeal to the British nation in 1823, he sent it out to the Navy and government, to great sympathy but not much cash. It was MP Thomas Wilson who suggested asking wealthy philanthropists to support the fledgling lifeboat service. Fundraising in 1824 was very successful, bringing in almost £10,000. But the impetus soon stagnated and by 1849 income had dropped to £354.

Fundraising efforts in the mid 19th century were focused on the wealthy, and it wasn’t until the late 1880s that the RNLI saw how generous the general public could be. Unfortunately, this swell of support was prompted by one of the saddest occasions in RNLI history. On 9 December 1886, 27 lifeboat crew members from Southport and St Annes lost their lives while trying to rescue the crew of the barque Mexico. A public appeal was launched, and local man Charles Macara took the cause to heart. An 1891 appeal, supported by the press in the north east of England, raised £10,000 in 2 weeks. On 1 October of the same year, Charles and his wife Marion organised the first Lifeboat Saturday. Bands, floats and lifeboats paraded through the streets of Manchester, followed by volunteers with collecting buckets and purses on poles. More than £5,000 was taken on the day, which was the first recorded example of a charity street collection. Marion Macara formed a Ladies’ Guild to help organise the street collection and, within 10 years, more than 50 Ladies’ Guilds had sprung up around Britain and Ireland, and the RNLI’s income had doubled.

Wartime

RNLI lifeboat crews continued saving lives at sea throughout both World Wars. When the First World War broke out, many lifeboatmen were called away to fight. The average age of the lifeboat crews left at home increased to over 50. During the war years (1914-18), RNLI lifeboats were launched 1,808 times, saving 5,332 lives. In 1939, young lifeboat volunteers were again called away to war. Nevertheless, by the end of the Second World War in 1945, RNLI crews had saved 6,376 lives around the coasts of Britain and Ireland.

Early lifesavers

The islands of Britain and Ireland have always been at the mercy of the sea. In the early 19th century, there was an average of 1,800 shipwrecks a year around our coasts, and this danger was an accepted part of life onboard. Coastal communities often watched helplessly as vessels foundered. Rescue services did exist in some places – there are records of a rescue boat stationed in Liverpool from 1730. In Bamburg, Northumberland, men from the local castle patrolled the shore on horseback, ready to go to sea in their ‘unimmergible’ coble – the first purpose-built lifeboat, designed by Lionel Lukin and patented in 1785. A 1789 competition, run by a group of businessmen from Tyne and Wear, sought designs for rescue boats. One of the entries, from William Wouldhave, was designed to self-right. Boatbuilder Henry Greathead was asked to build a lifeboat combining the best features of Lukin’s and Wouldhave’s designs and came up with a vessel called the Original. Within 20 years, he had built more than 30 of these lifeboats, and they were saving lives around the UK and its islands, from St Andrews to St Peter Port.

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Henry Blogg
Cromer’s Henry Blogg is the RNLI’s most decorated lifeboatman. He was Coxswain at the Norfolk station for almost 45 years. During his 53 years of service, Blogg was awarded three Gold and four Silver RNLI Medals for Gallantry, as well as the George Cross and British Empire Medal.
With his dedicated crew, he launched 387 times and helped to save 873 lives around the Cromer coast. The RNLI manages a museum named after him in Cromer.
RNLI.org/henryblogg

Grace Darling
A lighthouse keeper’s daughter from Northumberland became a national heroine in 1838 for her part in the rescue of passengers from the wrecked steamship Forfarshire.
Grace Darling was 22 when she and her father took their small fishing boat out in a fierce storm to reach a group of survivors.

On the rocks, her father found eight men, including one who was badly injured. There was also a woman holding two children, both of whom had died. Mr. Darling and three of the men rowed the boat back to the lighthouse, taking with them Grace, the injured man and the woman.
Grace looked after the survivors while her father and two of the Forfarshire crew returned for the other four men.
Although she wasn’t on a lifeboat crew, Grace was awarded the RNLI’s Silver Medal for Gallantry. She was the Institution’s first female medallist and remains a lifeboating icon. The RNLI manages a museum in her honour in Bamburgh, Northumberland.

RNLI.org/gracedarling

Lifeboat development
Great Britain’s Original and similar rowing lifeboats set the standard until the 1850s. One Original, the Zetland, saved hundreds of lives from her station in Redcar, Yorkshire. Built in 1802, she is the oldest lifeboat still in existence, and can be seen at the RNLI Zetland museum.
The RNLI’s Zetland Sailing lifeboats were introduced in the 1850s, with different types issued to different stations, according to their needs. The most successful were the Beechings, the Peakes, the Richardson tubulars, the Norfolk and Suffolk class, and, in later years, the Watsons fitted with a mast and sails in case her engine failed.
The RNLI’s Steam-powered lifeboats were introduced to the fleet in 1890, when the Duke of Northumberland went on station in Harwich. Six steam-driven lifeboats were built before their development was abandoned in favour of petrol.
In the early 1900s, the RNLI began to experiment with engines on its lifeboats. The first motor-driven lifeboat was to be sent to a station was the J McConnel Hussey, which went to Tynemouth in 1905. Early lifeboat engines could be unreliable, so sail rigging was also prominent on these boats.
The small D class inflatable lifeboat was introduced in 1963 to deal with rescues closer to the shore. The RNLI’s first rigid inflatable lifeboat, the first of which was the Atlantic 21, Today’s B and D class lifeboats are direct descendants, making up the bulk of the RNLI fleet.
Meanwhile, larger all-weather lifeboats were being developed. Each new incarnation was faster and safer than its predecessor.
These are now six classes of all-weather lifeboat in the RNLI fleet, with a variety of sizes, draughts and launch and recovery methods, suitable for all areas of the British and Irish coastlines. They are the Tyne (introduced in 1982), the Mersey (1988), the Severn (1996), the Trent (1996), the Tamar (2006) and the Shannon in 2013. Production of the Shannon class lifeboats was brought in-house to the RNLI’s All-weather Lifeboat Centre in 2015.
The B class lifeboat, a waterjet-propelled rigid inflatable, is the RNLI’s fastest lifeboat. It was introduced in 2002 at the RNLI’s four lifeboat stations along the River Thames.

Launch and recovery
For the RNLI’s first 100 years or so, lifeboats were mostly launched and recovered from their local beaches. In many communities, hauling the lifeboat during launch and recovery was done by women, as most of the men were onboard. Often, farmers loaned their horses to help pull the weight.
Lifeboats were often dragged for long distances before launching, to minimise the time at sea in rough conditions. In 1899, the lighthouse, Devon, lifeboat was hauled across Exmoor by a team of 50–60 people and 18 horses, to go to the aid of a vessel in distress in another bay 10 miles away. During the journey, which lasted over 10 hours, the team had to knock down walls and other obstacles, take the boat off her carriage to get her through gates, and deal with gale-force conditions. The casualty vessel, Forst Hall, and those aboard were saved.
These days, most large, all-weather lifeboats like the Tamar are designed to be launched from a slipway, or to lie afloat. But beach launches are still common, especially with the smaller, inshore lifeboats. Specially adapted tractors are now used to do the hauling.

A changing service
The way in which people use the sea has changed dramatically since the RNLI’s foundation. More people are using the water for leisure so our lifesaving service has had to change accordingly.
In 2001, our Lifeguards began patrolling some of the most popular beaches in England. RNLI Lifeguards now patrol over 200 beaches around the UK and Channel Islands, rescuing thousands of people every year and providing first aid and safety advice. This ‘prevention-rather-than-cure’ approach also helps the RNLI’s Coastal Safety and Education teams save lives by preventing people from getting into danger in the first place.
Also in 2001, the RNLI’s first station on an inland waterway was established, at Evesham in County Worcestershire.
A year later, four lifeboat stations were set up on the River Thames. One of these, Tower, is now consistently among the charity’s busiest stations. Environmental change has increased demand too. Our Flood Rescue Teams were formed in 2000 to respond to floods anywhere in the UK or Ireland within 6 hours. The RNLI also has an international Flood Rescue Team that can deploy anywhere in the world within 24 hours.