In 1789, a ship named *Adventure* ran ashore in the mouth of the River Tyne during a violent storm. The rough seas prevented local men from doing anything to save the crew with the boats they then had and many of the *Adventure*’s crew drowned.

This disaster inspired The Gentlemen of Lawe-House, a group of local businessmen from South Shields, to place a newspaper advert for a competition to design a rescue boat to go out to shipwrecks. They offered a reward of 2 guineas (£2.10) for the successful design.

The competition received worthy entries from William Wouldhave and Henry Greathead but the group nevertheless decided neither design would be an outright winner. Instead, the committee used ideas from both and produced a final design for a lifeboat. They offered 1 guinea (£1.05) as a reward to Wouldhave, who took offence at having his prize-money halved and rejected his winnings. They asked Henry Greathead to build the design they had completed and thus Henry Greathead went on to become known as the inventor of the lifeboat.

His first lifeboat was aptly named *Original*. Over the following 2 decades, over 30 of Greathead’s lifeboats were built for orders around Britain’s coast and abroad. The images all show the series of *Original* lifeboats, the first type of boat known as a ‘lifeboat’.

An extract from the *Caledonian Mercury* in 1801 shows not only the success of Greathead’s lifeboats but how the British press supported the campaign to bring this valuable invention into general use.
1. Why was the competition launched to design a rescue boat?

2. In the rescue off Scarborough in 1801, reported in the Caledonian Mercury, why were the crew of fishermen in the lifeboat so impressed with the design?

3. What impact would this new lifeboat have had on the wider campaign to improve lifesaving at sea?