

Neil Smith - Incidents

Back in the days before we had radar and before we were allowed to use the radio (yes, we used to be) I had a hand held scanner. Just before going off watch I picked up a Mayday from a dive boat reporting a diver who had not surfaced. I waited a few seconds for a response from the Coastguard, but nothing, it seemed I was the only one to pick it up, it did not come over the lookout radio, so I dialled 999 and reported same. The Teesmouth & Hartlepool Lifeboats were turned out and discovered that the diver had surfaced some distance from where he was expected. A happy ending, but I was the only one to pick up the mayday. It could have been worse.

A rising tide and children "wave dodging", two of whom were on bikes on the slipway opposite the lookout. A large wave and they both were washed into the sea, one with his bike. One managed to scramble back the other didn't. Another phone call to the Coastguard, although the boy did manage to reach the steps and get out by the time I had called. He was OK but he lost his bike. I was taken to task (mildly) by the Coastguard for not using the radio (we had only just been allowed to use it, so instinct cut in). Both boys were safe but wet and will think twice before they do it again.

Low water and a couple walked out on to East Scar and sat enjoying the sunshine but forgot about the tide coming in. I alerted the Beach Patrol who walked out to speak to the, by now, stranded couple, they were persuaded to pass the beach patrol their mobile phones and swim the very short distance across the gap. They went home wet but safe and will no doubt check tide tables in future.

A youth and two friends would go on a boating trip. They launched a little craft opposite Granville Terrace. It had two out board motors, one a small back up. Once they were a few hundred yards off shore the main outboard packed up, so the "Skipper" would jump in and fix it, he couldn't. So he climbed out and tried to start the spare. It wouldn't. So, he jumped in and tried again. No joy. He then decided to swim back towing the boat. That's when I called the Coastguard who turned out the lifeboat. All well but I hope they learned.

A misty afternoon, visibility pretty poor. A group would try to launch a craft opposite Granville Terrace. It took them $\frac{3}{4}$ of an hour to get it in the water, it had a very small outboard engine for the size of the craft and it was obvious they were not "experts". When it was eventually in the water, one of the five crew thought it would be great to sit on the railing at the fore end with a can in hand. Not if but when. Sure enough he fell off. Radio call to the Coastguard who called out the lifeboat, by which time there were two of them in the water. It seems that the outboard had broken and they were trying to push the boat ashore. Five people aboard, one life jacket, which had been left in the car, no communications and no idea. I've not seen that boat again.

As a child, Father often took me to Redcar, he was friends with the Thompson brothers, particularly Jacky, it was he who first took me up to the lookout when I was about 10 years old. Father was a Lieutenant Commander in the RNVR so I had things maritime throughout my childhood. Although he would not let me join the Royal Navy, insisting that I finished serving my apprenticeship first. He was right (Fathers always are) my time in the Merchant Service gave me more experience and sea time than the Andrew ever could. I had served an apprenticeship as a fitter & in the meantime I had joined the TA, after which I went to sea as an Engineer. Eventually I came ashore and joined the Police Force until retirement.

I became involved with Coastwatch when I was becoming a licensed boatman on the River Tees. I went to Redcar to see Captain Jim Elliot who then told me about Coastwatch. I had spent some years at sea and my wife, who became the first lady Helmsman on the Tees, was also interested in things maritime. So, we joined up.