

# A HISTORY OF THE EXMOUTH LIFEBOATS

Alan Salisbury

For over two centuries the town of Exmouth has been served by a lifeboat. For over 150 years that service has been provided by the Royal National Lifeboat Institution. This highly illustrated book looks at the illustrious part Exmouth has played in lifesaving in South Devon, and provides the reader with a stirring pictorial history of the lifeboats of Exmouth and their crews.

From the launch of the first 'North Country' class purpose-built lifeboat at Exmouth in 1803, the book traces the history of the boats, crews and rescues of those who followed in her wake. The town received its first RNLI lifeboat, the *Victoria*, in 1859; the first motor-lifeboat, the *Catherine Harriet Eaton*, being placed on station in 1933. In 1996 came the introduction of the Trent Class lifeboat, *Forward Birmingham*.

The book concludes with the arrival of the Mersey Class *Margaret Jean* and the opening of the new ultra-modern Exmouth Lifeboat Station which now houses the *Margaret Jean* and the ILB, D669 *George Bearman*.

The RNLI is a registered charity, which exists to save lives at sea. Since its foundation in 1824, the RNLI has saved more than 137,000 lives. Royalties from the sale of this book will go towards the work of the RNLI.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alan Salisbury is a 'local' man having been born, raised and educated in Paignton. Living on the outskirts of Torbay he undertakes work as a 'volunteer speaker' for the RNLI and has previously written the histories of the Torbay and Plymouth lifeboats stations.

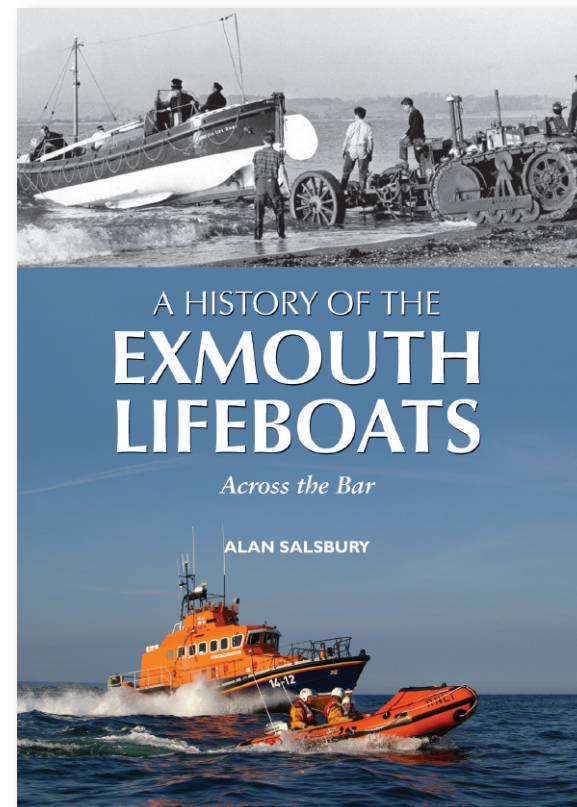
When asked why he has written books devoted to the men, women and boats of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, he said "I do it out of the pure respect and admiration I have for the members of lifeboat crews, past and present. The quiet and unassuming manner in which they carry out their duties, often risking their own lives to save others, should be acknowledged and remembered."

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# EXMOUTH LIFEBOATS



Above: Recovering the Joseph Somes ON41.

Left: The Waveney Class lifeboat Louis Marchesi of Round Table ON1045 on exercise with Search and Rescue helicopter. Shamus McCaffrey



A launch of the Catherine Harriet Eaton Sue Crellen

Below: Example of a double-page spread.

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The Maria Noble is brought from Caven to replace the Catherine Harriet Eaton ON767, October 1953. In boat: Joe Griffin, Signaller, Bill Mann, 2nd Mechanic, Standing: Brian Rowell, Deckhand, Cecil Hockings, 1st Mechanic, Harold (Dido) Bradford, 1st Coxswain, Bernard Bradford, 2nd Coxswain, and Jack Phillips, 2nd Coxswain.

THE ROYAL NATIONAL LIFEBOAT INSTITUTION  
ANNOUNCES THE NAMING OF THE  
EXMOUTH LIFEBOAT  
NAMED COXSWAIN OF THIS LIFEBOAT  
"MARIA NOBLE"

LIFEBOAT STATION, EXMOUTH  
WEDNESDAY, 1st SEPTEMBER, 1954, at 3 p.m.  
This ceremony will be held at 3 p.m. on Wednesday, 1st September, 1954, at the Lifeboat Station, Exmouth, Devon, D.D. 648, 1954.

Naming of the Maria Noble.

Programme for the Naming Ceremony of the Maria Noble 1st September 1954.

THE MARIA NOBLE

William F. Billy Mann, Mechanic.

Lifeboat Station, Lady Priests also presented Certificates of Service to two former crew members, Bowman Frank Hockings and Motor Mechanic William A. Mann. The Vellum was received by the Coxswain, Harry Bradford who also received Mr. Hockings Certificate in his absence. William Frederick Mann succeeded his father, William A. Mann as Motor Mechanic of the new lifeboat.

At the time of this ceremony the Exmouth Station lifeboats had made 69 service launches saving 17 lives.

The Service Reports, of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution's Exmouth Station, record the first service launch of the Maria Noble as having taken place on the evening of Sunday 19 September 1954 following the receipt of a message from the Exmouth Coastguard, at 21.40 hours, that cries for help, accompanied by flashes of a torch, were emanating from the vicinity of Maer Rocks. The Station Honorary Secretary telephoned the lifeboat Coxswain, Harold Bradford and, by car, they made their way to Maer Rocks where, in the headlights of their vehicle, they saw a 20-foot cabin cruiser, the Nicky, riding at anchor in heavy breaking seas. The occupants of the boat appeared to be bailing and pumping furiously. The two lifeboat men could clearly hear shouts and cries for help. As, having made an initial assessment of the scene, and given the state of the tide, it appeared utterly impossible to get any boat within 200 yards of the casualty, the Coastguard were requested to attempt a rescue by using Life Saving Apparatus. Attempts to fix a line to the casualty failed with the rocket falling 20-30 yards short. It appeared that any chance of rescue would depend upon the cabin cruiser remaining afloat until high water when, hopefully, a rescue attempt could be made by the lifeboat.

Maria Noble Leaving Exmouth. Courtesy of Geoff Hinton.

The Maria Noble was launched at 23.57 hours, reaching the casualty ten minutes later. The casualty was being severely buffeted by the very heavy swell and heavy rain squalls. Coxswain Bradford realised that the only hope of saving the five person aboard the Nicky was to take the lifeboat in over Maer Rocks at dead, slack, high water. Realising that there would be a grave risk of damaging the lifeboat, the Coxswain and crew agreed that it was a risk worth taking. As the Maria Noble descended into the wave troughs, on these occasions the keel of the lifeboat grounded out on the rocks. Showing great skill and first-class seamanship, Coxswain Bradford closed the



Cox'n and crew of 2007, (l-r): David Preece, Roy Stott, Lee Comley, Dr Colin May (Lifeboat Medical Advisor), Andrew Stott, Andy Smith and Tim Mock (Coxswain/Mechanic).