

Salcombe Lifeboats: 150 Years of Saving Lives at Sea

150TH
Anniversary

SALCOMBE
LIFEBOAT STATION



The first Salcombe lifeboat



The current Salcombe lifeboat

Photo: Nick Philbedge

This year Salcombe Lifeboat Station proudly celebrates its 150th Anniversary. Since it opened in 1869, its brave volunteers have carried out over 1 600 services, saved nearly 500 lives and rescued a further 1 350 people.

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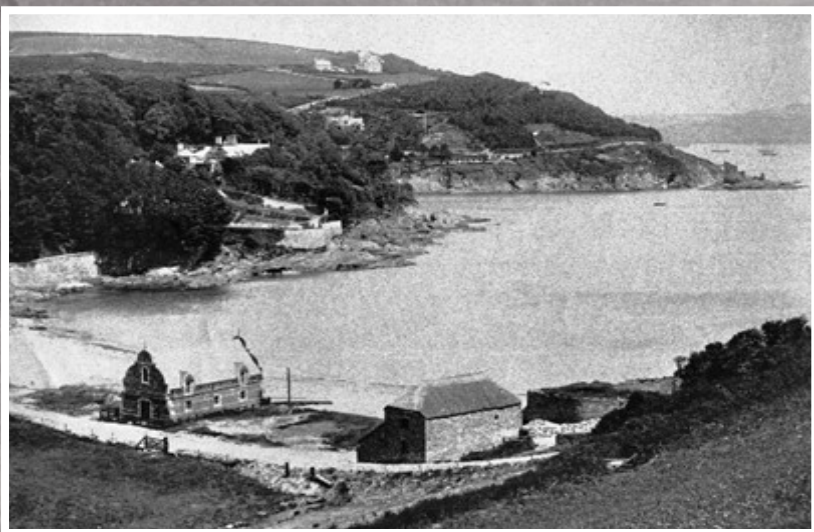
2. Salcombe's Pulling and Sailing Lifeboats 1869-1925



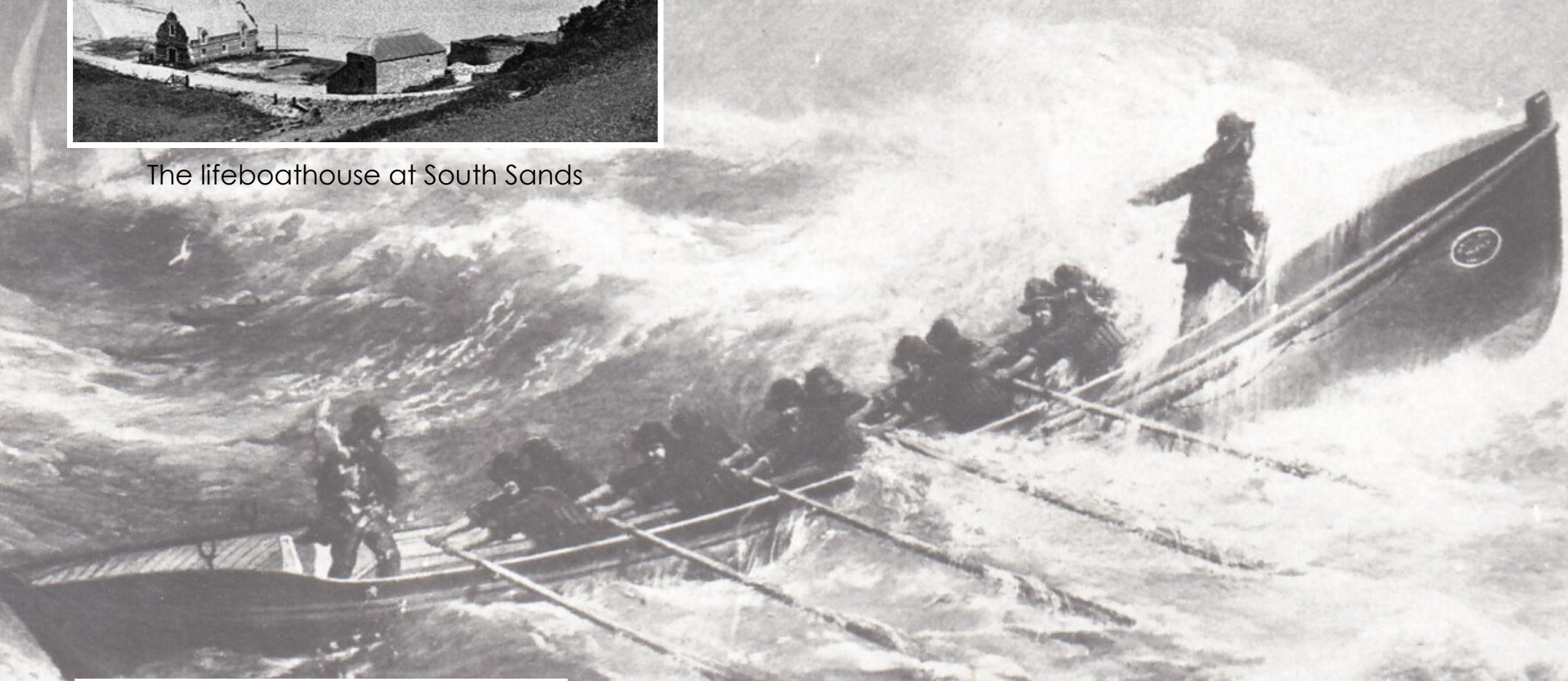
The Rescue (1869-87)
Model by Malcolm Darch

The station's first lifeboat, the *Rescue*, was launched at Kingsbridge on 21 September 1869. She was the first of four pulling and sailing lifeboats which were on station at Salcombe until 1925, all kept in the lifeboat-house at South Sands. Open to the elements, these heavy craft required strong arms to propel them over the Bar at the entrance to the harbour in a storm.

Most of the crew were fishermen used to harsh conditions at sea but even so they must have been 'ironmen' to ride out the storm on a winter's night.



The lifeboathouse at South Sands



The Lesty (1887-1904)
on the lifeboathouse slipway



The William & Emma (1904-16)
Model by Malcolm Darch



The Sarah Anne Holden
(1917-25)

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3. The 1916 Salcombe Lifeboat Disaster



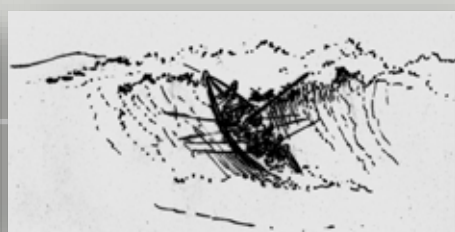
The Salcombe Lifeboat Disaster. Painting by Paul Deacon. Inset: The Crew (A E Fairweather)

On the morning of 27 October 1916, in the middle of the Great War, the small community of Salcombe suffered a terrible loss when the lifeboat *William and Emma* capsized on Salcombe Bar after returning from an abortive mission. Thirteen of the fifteen-man crew were drowned.

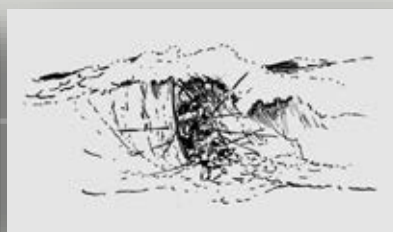
The lifeboat had been called out to assist the *Western Lass*, wrecked near Prawle Point. In spite of the furious gale that was raging and the huge waves breaking on Salcombe Bar, the crew succeeded in getting out to sea, but on reaching the wrecked schooner, found that her crew had already been rescued by the rocket apparatus team at Prawle. Battling against near hurricane force winds the crew returned for home, but on attempting to re-cross the Bar their little craft capsized, and all but two of their number were drowned.



The lifeboat begins the run in



A mountainous wave strikes her port quarter



The lifeboat capsizes and the men are hurled forward



One by one they succumb to the waves until only two remain

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4. Hope Cove Lifeboats 1878-1930



An engraving of Hope Cove lifeboathouse



The second Hope Cove lifeboat *Alexandra*
(1887-1900)



The crew of the second Hope Cove Lifeboat.

In 1887 the tea clipper *Halloween* came ashore in thick fog off Soar Mill Cove. After enduring a bitterly cold night clinging to the rigging 19 crew members were rescued by the first Hope Cove lifeboat. In 1896 the second *Alexandra* took off 43 men from the Russian tanker *Blesk* - an incident notable for the first oil spillage on the UK coast.

The fourth *Alexandra* was on station between 1903 and 1930, and took part in a number of notable rescues including to the passenger steamer *Jebba* in 1907 and the Italian steamer *Liberta* in 1926.



Halloween wrecked at Soar Mill Cove on 17 January 1887



Blesk aground near Bolt Tail on 1 December 1896



Jebba ashore near Bolt Tail on 18 March 1907



The wreck of the *Liberta* off Bolt Head in 1926

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5. Eddie Distin and the First Motor Lifeboats



After surviving the 1916 lifeboat disaster Eddie Distin went on to become the coxswain of Salcombe's next three lifeboats. From 1930 these were motor lifeboats kept on open moorings near the town. In December 1939, Eddie Distin was awarded the RNLI's Silver Medal for Gallantry, for rescuing 62 people from the Belgian steamer *Louis Sheid*. His seven crew members received Bronze Medals. Four years later, Eddie was also awarded a Bronze Medal for rescuing 11 people from an Admiralty salvage craft in trouble off Start Point.



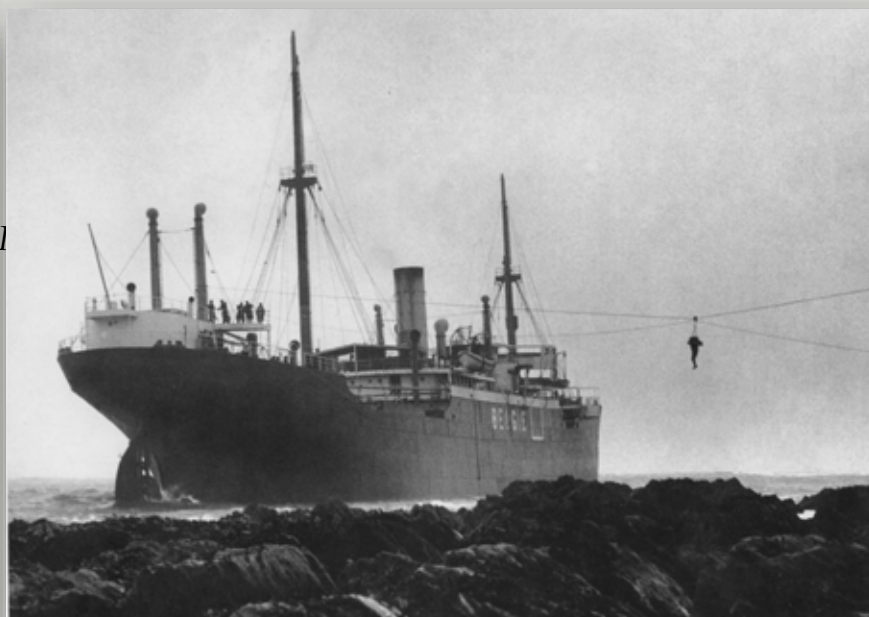
Salcombe's first motor lifeboat, the 40ft *Alfred and Clara Heath* (1930-8). She was driven by a single 45hp petrol engine giving a top speed of 7 knots.



The 46ft Watson lifeboat *Samuel and Marie Parkhouse* (1938-1962). She had twin 40hp diesel engines and a top speed of 8 knots



The famous Finnish windjammer *Herzogin Cecilie* aground off Soar Mill Cove in April 1936.
The *Alfred and Clara Heath* took off 23 of the people on-board



The Belgian steamer *Louis Sheid* aground off Thurlestone in December 1939. Eddie Distin and the crew of the *Samuel & Marie Parkhouse* saved 62 lives in treacherous conditions

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6. The Baltic Exchange Lifeboat 1962-88



The Baltic Exchange (1962-88)
on trials at Cowes

In June 1962 the *Samuel and Marie Parkhouse* was replaced by the *Baltic Exchange*, a 47ft, 23 ton Watson class boat. She was driven by two 60hp diesel engines, which gave her a top speed of 8¾ knots. The cost of £42,000 was paid for out of funds raised by members of the Baltic Exchange in the City of London.



Coxswain Hubert 'Bubbles' Distin (front centre) - the son of Eddie Distin - and the 1965 Salcombe Lifeboat crew.



The German coaster *Heye P* on the rocks below Prawle Point, 16 December 1979. The *Baltic Exchange* lifeboat assisted in the rescue of her crew in atrocious conditions.



In April 1983, *The Baltic Exchange* lifeboat capsized in mountainous seas in Start Bay. Fortunately, the crew of seven survived the ordeal unharmed. Left: The lifeboat after it had self-righted. Right: the survivors, Coxswain Graham 'Griff' Griffiths and his crew.

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7. The Baltic Exchange II 1988-2008



The *Janet C* rescue, 8 January 1992. Painting by Christopher Southcombe. Inset: Coxswain Frank Smith



The Tyne Class *The Baltic Exchange II*
1988-2008



The *Ice Prince*, 13 January 2008

The *Baltic Exchange II* was a 47ft steel constructed Tyne Class lifeboat weighing 25 tons. With twin 425hp engines and a top speed of 18 knots, she was more than twice as fast as her wooden-hulled predecessor.

In 1992 her Coxswain Frank Smith was awarded the RNLI Bronze Medal for Gallantry, for carrying out a daring rescue to the 1,200 ton coaster *Janet C* – towing her clear of Start Point in gale force 8 winds and violent seas. In 2002 Frank was awarded the MBE for services to marine safety.

In her ten years on station *The Baltic Exchange II* performed 478 services and rescued 665 people. One notable rescue was on 13 January 2008 when she assisted in taking off the 20 crew of the 6,395 ton cargo vessel *Ice Prince*, before it sank in mid-Channel.

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8. The Baltic Exchange III from 2008



The Tamar class *The Baltic Exchange III* off Start Point Lighthouse

In March 2008, *The Baltic Exchange II* was replaced by the current Tamar class lifeboat: *The Baltic Exchange III*. Powered by two 1000hp engines, she has a top speed of 25 knots.

With a range of 250 nautical miles, the Tamar is ideal for offshore searches and rescues in the English Channel, which south of Salcombe is about 80 nautical miles wide. She is powerful enough to tow most boats and is able to prevent larger vessels from running aground.

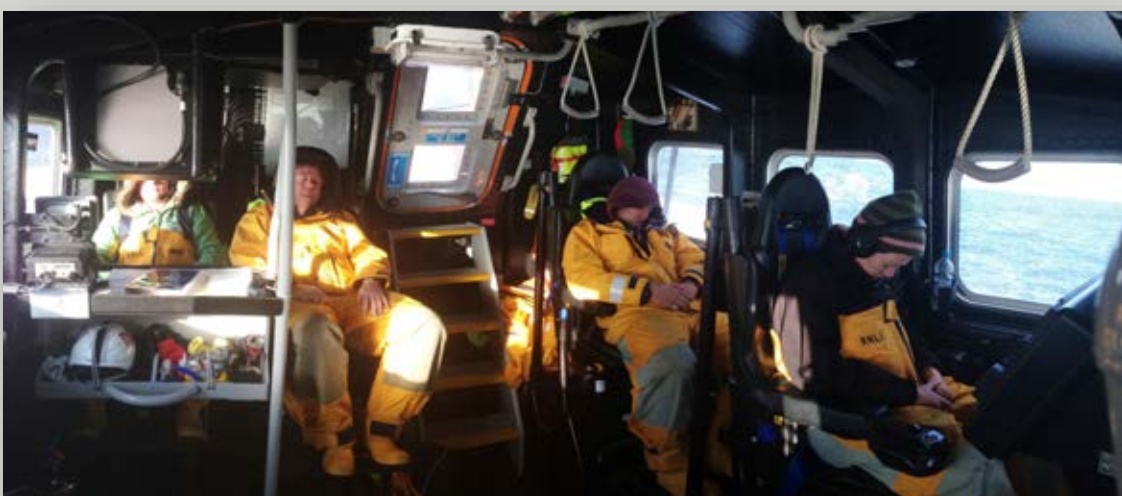
About a third of shouts are to commercial vessels, a third to leisure craft and the remainder are a mixture of medical shouts and searches. Since she has been on station *The Baltic Exchange III* has performed 224 services and rescued 412 people.



Preparing for a casualty transfer



The motorboat *Thalassa* about to be taken in tow on 5 June 2013



Some of the all-weather lifeboat crew members resting after a long and fruitless cross-channel search



FV *Admiral Blake* after a collision in 2011

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9. The Inshore Lifeboats from 2003

A landmark in the history of the Salcombe station was the arrival in June 2003 of its first inshore lifeboat, the Atlantic 75 B class *Joan Bate*. Inshore lifeboats (ILBs) are designed to operate in shallower water than the all-weather lifeboats and are ideal for rescues close to the shore or cliffs and among rocks. After 14 years service, during which she launched 309 times and rescued 342 people, the *Joan Bate* was replaced in 2018 by the Atlantic 85 *Gladys Hilda Mustoe*.



The Atlantic 75 ILB *Joan Bate*, 2003-18



The current ILB, the Atlantic 85
Gladys Hilda Mustoe



The Inshore Lifeboat on its launching slipway



The Soar Mill surfer rescue, 17 August 2012, with the inshore lifeboat thrown upwards in the breaking surf

The Atlantic 85 and her 4 crew are launched on a carriage down the ramp from the boathouse at the lifeboat station. The two Mark III, 115hp Yamaha 4-stroke outboard engines give a top speed of 35 knots – 3 knots faster than the Atlantic 75.

Whilst there is no weather limitation on the launch of the all-weather *Baltic Exchange III* lifeboat, the ILB will generally operate inshore in sea conditions associated with up to force 6/7 winds during daylight (force 5/6 at night).

A particularly daring and dangerous rescue was made by the crew of Salcombe's inshore lifeboat in August 2012 when they saved the life of a surfer after he had got into difficulties in challenging seas in Soar Mill Cove, 4 miles west of Salcombe.

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10. Meet the Crew



The Lifeboat Crew

Salcombe RNLI has a team of 25 volunteer seagoing crew, with only Chris Winzar, the Coxswain, and Sam Viles, the Mechanic, being full-time employees. All other team members and crew are volunteers, including the shore crew. All the crew bring different skills to the station. Many are employed in the marine industry – including a marine engineer, an oceanographer, a fisherman, a ferryman and harbour staff – but there is also a web designer and a pub landlord. Whatever their background, they are all rigorously trained to RNLI standards and all have to be available to go to sea at the drop of a hat or, more precisely, whenever their pager sounds.



The Shore Crew

Quietly working behind the scenes to keep the Salcombe lifeboats afloat are the RNLI's unsung heroes – the shore-based volunteers. Generously giving up their time while juggling other commitments are the lifeboat operations manager (LOM) and his team of seven launching authorities, four shore crew who help launch and maintain the two lifeboats, the press officer, and the lifeboat medical advisor.

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11. Keeping the lifeboats afloat: The Fundraisers



Salcombe Lifeboat Day collectors
August 1922



Fundraising outside the lifeboat store
on Lifeboat Day, 15 August 1975



Salcombe Lifeboat Fundraisers stall
at a local event in 2018

The RNLI is a charity that relies on generous supporters to keep the lifesaving service going and, over the years, an army of local volunteers from all walks of life have given up their time to raise funds for the Salcombe and Hope Cove Lifeboats.

Today the volunteers of the 'Salcombe Lifeboat Fundraisers' are especially active, raising large sums in the lifeboat shop and at a range of local events.



Visitors getting a close-up view of *The Baltic Exchange III* on Lifeboat Open Day, May 2018



The lifeboat shop staffed by volunteers

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12. Counting on your Support!

**SALCOMBE
AT A GLANCE**

SINCE 1869

11
LIFEBOATS

CURRENT LIFEBOATS

- The Baltic Exchange III (Tamar class all-weather lifeboat)
- Gladys Hilda Mustoe (Atlantic 85 inshore lifeboat)

The first boat was a ten-oared, self-righter named *Rescue* (1869-1887)

**LAUNCHED
1,619 TIMES**

**... AND
ASSISTED
1,475 PEOPLE**

**THEY SAVED
526 LIVES**



Our community has been counting on the lifeboat crews for 150 years. Can they count on you to ensure Salcombe's lifesaving future?

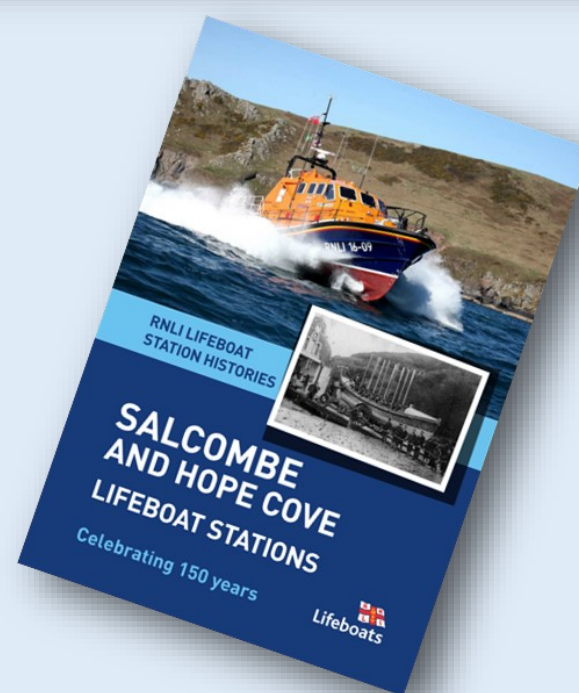
YOUR SUPPORT IS VITAL!

The RNLI is a charity, independent of government, and our volunteer lifesavers rely on public support to provide them with the best equipment, training and protection. You can help by donating to the RNLI, by organising fundraising activities or by joining our team of volunteers.

For more information please contact:

Salcombe Lifeboat Operations Manager,
Andrew Arthur

Email: salcombe@rnli.org.uk



Read more about the fascinating history of the Salcombe and Hope Cove lifeboats in a new book on sale here and in the **Lifeboat Shop & Museum in Union Street**. You'll find out lots more about Salcombe lifeboats there, so be sure to pay a visit!

THANK YOU

Salcombe lifeboat couldn't survive without the support of people like you. Let's celebrate 150 years of lifesaving and work together to secure the future of RNLI Salcombe for generations to come.