

The History of NCI Charlestown QAVS

In February 2001, Captain Peter Waters discovered a derelict Coastguard Auxiliary Station beneath years of undergrowth a short distance to the east of the old Cornish Clay port of Charlestown. Captain Waters, Regional Manager of the National Coastwatch Institution, identified the building as a possible location for the NCI. Although negotiations with the landlord were delayed by the outbreak of Foot and Mouth disease, a lease was finally signed for the Lookout in October 2001. Our lookout was originally a Coastguard Auxiliary Station for watch and rescue; it was classified as "C Aux S (WR)". HMCG would set watches according to the prevailing weather conditions and/or the potential casualty risk. No one is quite sure when the Lookout was last used by HMCG, although judging by the dense undergrowth, it was shortly after 1984 when it was mentioned in the 2nd Edition of the "Channel Pilot".



The derelict station at Charlestown

In early 2002 work began on clearing the dense undergrowth, which had accumulated over many years. It soon became apparent that the building had deteriorated significantly through neglect and vandalism. Following discussions with St Austell College, it was agreed that we would supply the materials and the college would provide the manpower from their related courses. With the students from the college and NCI volunteers, work started to fit new doors, floors and windows. The restoration was finally completed with the supply and fitting of an external galvanised steel stairway and landing from the local china clay company, Imerys S.A. By the end of the year the lookout was sufficiently equipped to allow in-house training to begin and NCI Charlestown became operational on Saturday 5th April 2003.

An official opening ceremony was held on 11th October 2003 performed by our Patron, the author EV Thompson, attended by Jon Gifford, Chairman of the NCI Board of Trustees, visitors from near-by stations and representatives from local businesses who had generously given their time and materials to our charity.

Unfortunately, it is not possible to accurately date the Lookout. We know that it was in existence in 1928 when the nearby Porth Avallen Hotel was built but it was not visible in a photograph taken in 1905. The building on top of the headland is the engine house of Appletree Mine.