

## The History of NCI Exmouth



NCI Exmouth



### Tower above the Harbour View Café

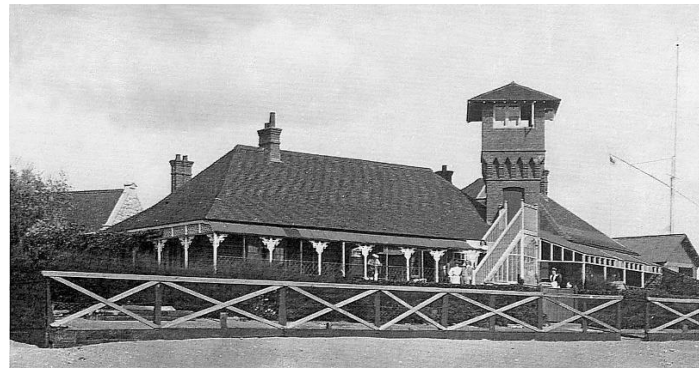
Many people are probably unaware that the tower above the Harbour View Café on Exmouth seafront is a National Coastwatch Institution (NCI) lookout tower.

The Harbour View Café building and tower were designed and built for the old Exmouth Yacht Club over the winters of 1895 and 1896 to replace a corrugated iron clubhouse on the pier. It was opened in June 1896 on a site leased from Lord Rolle. The veranda and tower were provided specifically to give members a good view of the racing. As built, the tower did not have glazed windows, which were fitted by subsequent owners.

There were problems with sea defences and the cost of maintenance, so it was sold in July 1901 to a local business man, Mr H S Robinson. He established it as a private sea-water bathing facility with sea water pumped in via an underground pipe from the beach. This enterprise was short lived and closed with the building being vacated in 1904. It was sold to a Mr Hurdell in 1905 and used as a private residence until 1934.

In 1935 it became a convalescent home as an annexe to the Princess Elizabeth Orthopaedic Hospital in Exeter, (which in later years was incorporated as part of Royal Devon and Exeter (RD&E) Wonford Hospital).

It was requisitioned for military use in about 1941 and later as a canteen for American GIs. After the war it was opened as the Harbour View cafe and ice cream parlour by the Forte family in July 1946. Sometime in the late 1970's or early 1980's it passed to Bernard Hughes, trading as Shoreway Catering. It has been trading as a cafe now for over 70 years.



In 1994 when two fishermen lost their lives off the Cornish coast near a recently closed HM Coastguard lookout, local people decided to open and restore the visual watch. This was the first NCI Station, opened at Bass Point on the Lizard. NCI is a registered charity and was founded in 1994 to help protect life along the UK coastline by restoring voluntary watches: 'Eyes Along the Coast'. NCI stations now operate along the coast from Fleetwood in the North West, around Wales, along the Cornwall and Devon coasts, Southern and Eastern England to Hornsea in the North East.

NCI Exmouth's station is part of the National Coastwatch Institution and was established in 1998 as the thirteenth station of (in 2021) 56 similar stations. Each station is manned by volunteer watchkeepers, who, following training including VHF radio and chartwork, obtain qualification to use their eyes, ears and voices to support the UK Search & Rescue services, primarily the Maritime & Coastguard Agency (MCA) and HM Coastguard. NCI Exmouth is a 'Declared Facility' which means that the station is assessed annually to ensure it operates to the high standards required by HMCG and so play its part in the UK Search & Rescue services.

In 2018 Exmouth was the third busiest National Coastwatch station in the country with 40 incidents occurring. These incidents are spread all over the Exe estuary and west end of Lyme Bay which experiences extreme tidal flows and currents, particularly during higher tides, when the speed of the falling tide may reach five or six knots. This together with the Pole Sands, which are covered at high tide, make the water dangerous for all manner of boat users be they yachtsmen, motor launches, rigid inflatable boats (RIBS) jet skis, wind and kite surfers, fishing vessels both commercial and private, or simply swimmers who may be using untethered inflatable dinghies or rubber rings - in fact anyone or anything using our waters and beaches. NCI Exmouth therefore plays a very important part in the local community when on watch.

We are a voluntary service with over 70 watchkeepers, both male (72%) and female (28%), who are on watch seven days a week from the start of BST until the end of BST, from 09.00 to 18.00 hrs. with enhanced hours from 15 June to 30 September from 08.30 to 19.00 hrs. Throughout GMT, watch hours are over extended weekends. This translates to approximately 5,189 hours of voluntary watchkeeping per annum.

During each watch, vessels are logged in and out of the estuary, noting the time and where possible the name and type of vessel, together with the number of persons on board. Such vessel movements

are recorded in a formal log book which may be used by the authorities in the event of an incident and where such information is important. All watchkeepers make direct contact with HM Coastguard on witnessing a water user in distress. This may require the launching of a lifeboat - most of these launches are carried out by Exmouth RNLI inshore lifeboat. The Coastguard may also contact NCI Exmouth if they have been made aware of an incident in our area and require us to monitor the situation.

Our role is a vital community service not only to residents but to our many visitors who are attracted to Exmouth in the summer months and increasingly all the year round. Public awareness of our work is now much greater and our website [www.exmouthcoastwatch.co.uk](http://www.exmouthcoastwatch.co.uk) provides much needed information for local residents, all waterborne users and people around the country who want to know what is happening

- Keep informed of the incidents Exmouth Coastwatch are involved in as part of the UK Search & Rescue by visiting their website [www.exmouthcoastwatch.co.uk](http://www.exmouthcoastwatch.co.uk) and click on "Incidents"
- Radio checks on VHF Channel 65 Call Sign "Exmouth NCI"

**New volunteers are always welcome.**

**See our web page at: - [www.exmouthcoastwatch.co.uk](http://www.exmouthcoastwatch.co.uk)**



**Panorama from the tower**