

The History of NCI Mundesley

The National Coastwatch Institution (NCI) was founded by Captain Starling-Lark after two fishermen drowned near a closed-down Coastguard lookout in Cornwall. In response, Captain Starling-Lark established the first National Coastwatch Institution Station at Bass Point near the site of the tragedy. He then contacted Master Mariner Richard May of Sidestrand with a view to identifying a second site for a National Coastwatch station.

Richard May rose to the challenge and on 19th May 1995 he launched the country's second NCI station at Mundesley. The station had a humble beginning with just a few volunteers and very basic equipment, but despite the sparse resources available to them, Mundesley Coastwatch volunteers were on watch 365 days a year. Today the station boasts over 50 volunteers and is equipped with radios, computer, automatic identification system and radar. This of course is underpinned by that most valuable tool of all - the eyes of a trained watchkeeper!

Mundesley may have been the second National Coastwatch Institution station to open but in 2009 it was the first NCI station to receive the Queens Award for Voluntary Service, a very proud moment in its history.

Mundesley Coastwatch has also held Declared Facility Status (DFS) since 1999, signifying that it is officially recognised as part of the Maritime Search and Rescue emergency service. Colin Neason, who has served at NCI Mundesley since 1998 reflected on that first DFS assessment: *"When NCI Mundesley gained DFS in July 1999, myself and Mark Danson Hatcher were the two volunteers who took part in the assessment conducted by Mario Siano, the Watch Manager from Yarmouth HMCG Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC). The assessment involved a local fishing boat displaying the code flag for "man overboard" and then us tracking the position of the casualty via telephone to the coastguard who then guided the inshore lifeboat to the 'casualty'. The problem was the coastguard had underestimated the tidal flow and the 'casualty' got beyond Trimingham before he got picked up! It was at a subsequent meeting at Yarmouth MRC when discussing the assessment with Mario he told me that in essence the Coastguard required Coastwatch Stations to "spot, plot and report"! so it could be argued that our DFS assessment was also the catalyst for NCI's DFS strapline - spot, plot and report".*

Colin also explained that in 2002 NCI Mundesley was approached by Anatec Ltd to assist in a marine traffic survey for a planned windfarm off Cromer as they understood that we could help with traffic movements in the area. Anatec borrowed four of the Mundesley logbooks to help them construct a report which was later incorporated into an exhibition informing Cromer residents of the proposal. In 2003 Anatec, on the advice of NCI Mundesley mounted a radar at Trimingham in order to provide a more detailed report. Whilst the windfarm proposals eventually failed, the relationship between NCI Mundesley Coastwatch and Anatec continues to this day through the AIS* used by watchkeepers.

Richard May retired from watchkeeping in 2015 along with four other watchkeepers all of whom had served for 20 years at Mundesley. Richard does, however, continue to serve as NCI Mundesley's life president.

Although part of the National Coastwatch Institution, NCI Mundesley relies on donations and fundraising and the generosity of supporters in order to continue to provide its service. It is therefore important for the station, where possible, to give something back to the community. One such example is the provision of a defibrillator on Mundesley sea front that is funded and monitored by NCI Mundesley. This was officially opened in January 2017 by our then MP, Norman Lamb.

On the 25th Birthday of NCI Mundesley, Station Manager Duncan Mackenzie, said *"Today is a very proud day. Serving Mundesley for 25 years has been an honour for National Coastwatch. Our volunteers have been on duty for 365 days a year forming part of the Search and Rescue emergency service. From our basic beginnings to what we are today they have been there supporting our community. I am humbled by everything that our volunteers, supporters, partners and our local people give to National Coastwatch and for that I thank you all. The service could not be delivered effectively without you.*

Sadly, as you are aware, for the first time in our history we are closed due to the Covid 19 outbreak but we hope to return to service as soon as possible. This means that we are unable to hold any 25th birthday celebrations at this time. I therefore ask you to join me in a virtual toast. Happy 25th birthday NCI Mundesley and thank you to all volunteers, supporters and partners of 25 years".

**Automatic Identification System*