

The History of NCI Needles

In February 2010 I was approached by then NCI Chairman Jon Gifford OBE (who knew me from NCI Southend) to look into the prospect of opening an NCI station on the Isle of Wight. During 2010 my wife and I walked the coast looking for suitable sights and seriously considered Brighstone and Colwell Bay.

We decided Brighstone had insufficient coastal traffic and at Colwell we could not get agreement from the IoW council, which proved fortunate given a recent landslip. We also looked at Ryde, Sandown, Shanklin and Ventnor but all fell through for different reasons.



The NCI at national level had been pursuing the MCA with regard to occupying the Needles Coast Guard station for several years. At the beginning of 2012 the offer to use the station was made to us. Several meetings were held at Southampton regarding limitations of use and responsibility for rent and utilities etc.

We have a licence to operate, not a lease on the premises, with the MCA retaining primacy of occupation.

Eventually on the 6th of July I picked up the keys for NCI Needles from the MCA sector officer at Bembridge. The next month was spent cleaning, painting and basically equipping the station. We had table-top sales on a Saturday at Totland with the aim of raising funds and showing the flag. These ran for several weeks in July and August 2012 and resulted in several new recruits.

We opened the station on Saturday the 12th of August 2012, weekends only.

I believe our Trainee and Watchkeeper membership was about ten and often I would spend the whole day there. On the 28th of November we had an official opening of the station by Dave Kennet MBE, ex-coxswain of the Yarmouth lifeboat. By this time Trainee and Watchkeeper numbers had grown to about twenty and we had added Friday to our opening days.

On 13th of August 2013, we had a small celebration at the station for our first anniversary. This was attended by the Island High Sheriff Mary Case, who made presentations to newly promoted Watchkeepers and in return was presented with a book about the NCI. By this time our membership had reached 32.

By the end of 2013 we were open for six days each week having started the year at three days. We went to seven-day working in March 2014 but struggled during the summer months. One evening in June 2014 we were visited by the local MP Andrew Turner and it coincided with a police search of the surrounding cliffs for a missing person so there was plenty of activity.

Looking back, you tend to forget how much effort was put in by our volunteers in the early days in preparing the station. Our optics and radios are now so much better, we have air-conditioning, hot water, an AIS display etc.

Our membership now is 60 plus and from humble beginnings I believe we are now as complete as we can be.

Jim Scott