

The history of NCI Prawle Point

Prawle Point is Devon's southernmost extremity, projecting into the English Channel between Bolt Head to the west and Start Point to the east. Its lofty promontory has served as a vantage point since ancient times and, appropriately enough, 'Prawle' is the Old English word for 'lookout'. It is believed that in medieval times a chapel dedicated to St. Brendan stood on the site of the present lookout and much later, during the Napoleonic Wars, an Admiralty Signal Station was in operation nearby.

The present building is believed to have been erected by the Admiralty as a Coastguard Lookout in the 1860s. It became a Lloyd's Signal Station in 1882 and



from here signalmen telegraphed details of passing ships to Lloyd's of London for the benefit of anxious owners and underwriters. Between 1903 and 1951 the Lookout served as a Royal Naval Shore Signal Station with both Lloyd's and Admiralty signalling undertaken by Naval personnel who also carried out coastguard functions. (Lloyd's signalling continued until 1956).

In 1951 the Admiralty handed the Station over to HM Coastguard and by the early 1970s a constant 24-hour watch was being maintained by a team of five regular officers and six auxiliaries. However, the growing use of VHF radio for distress signalling led to a steady reduction in visual watchkeeping, and from 1982 the Lookout was only manned during bad weather by the local Auxiliary Coastguard company. HM Coastguard finally closed the station in 1994, although the Prawle Point Coastguard Rescue Team continue to operate from their station in East Prawle village.

In May 1997 retired sea Captains John Chapple and Christopher Trinick saw the potential in restoring the abandoned Lookout to form Devon's first National Coastwatch Institution station. Whilst it was closed the familiar landmark above the Point had become semi-derelict and open to the elements. However, with the help of generous funding from local people, companies and organisations it was transformed into a well-equipped and efficient working station. Regular watchkeeping was resumed in August 1997 and in April 1998 the Prawle Point lookout was formally re-opened as part of the NCI. In 2001, following a successful appeal that raised £50,000, the Lookout was partially rebuilt and completely refurbished.



NCI Prawle Point has grown in strength and now has a fully trained team of over 60 volunteers who turn out in all conditions to keep the station open 365 days a year. Between them they keep morning and afternoon watches between 9am and 5pm, with an additional evening watch between 5pm and 8pm during the summer months.

Prawle Point



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