

## The History of NCI Rhoscolyn



The Rhoscolyn lookout is situated on an exposed headland on the small island of Ynys Cybi off the West coast of Anglesey. It is one of the most beautiful places in Wales when the weather is fine but also one of the wildest during a storm.

On a clear day visibility from the station can extend as far as the Wicklow Mountains in the south west and to the Isle of Man in the north. Our sister station at Porthdinllaen is due south on the Llyn Peninsula, and our visual range also includes the lighthouses of South Stack, Holyhead breakwater and Llandwyn Island. The seas in the area are always busy with commercial vessels, passenger ferries and fishing boats and, in the summer months, a variety of leisure craft.

The original lookout was put up by The Board of Trade in 1914 and was staffed by volunteer Auxiliary Coastguards. They would have had a bird's eye view of pilots in WW1 strafing the Rhoscolyn Beacon. The Beacon, half a nautical mile away, was formerly a refuge for shipwrecked sailors, floundering on the treacherous rocks before the entrance was blocked off.



Watches were kept continuously whenever the winds reached force 4 and above. There was no light in the station, which had to be kept dark at night. Messages were sent by runners and semaphore and volunteers were summoned to take over watches by pebbles being thrown at their windows. The local land owners, the Verneys of Plas, later agreed to a party

telephone line being installed on the understanding it was only used for emergencies and not for personal conversations, but the line was often blown down in bad weather.

Even after the station acquired VHF radios, communication was patchy until a radio mast was installed on Holyhead Mountain. Prior to that Rhoscolyn had a vital role in relaying radio traffic from shipping and the lifeboats to and from the main coastguard in Holyhead.

In 1941 an aircraft from RAF Valley crashed into the sea off nearby Cymyran beach. The station coastguard, Evan Jones from Rhoscolyn, was one of several local people tragically drowned that night attempting to rescue the two airmen. His body was washed ashore beneath the lookout over a month later, only recognisable from his fob watch. Another Rhoscolyn man, Evan Evans, took over from Evan Jones and was the auxiliary coastguard for nearly 50 years alongside his full-time job as a farmer. Evan Evans assisted in the rescue of the crew of the notorious *Bobara*, a steam ship on its way from Baltimore to Manchester, that ran aground in poor weather off Rhoscolyn in 1955. The captain, who was drunk, threw himself naked into the sea and swam ashore to get help and was taken in by a local farmer. The 33 crewmen were taken ashore with a breeches buoy attached to Evan Evan's tractor.

Evan Evan's daughter, Susan Hanbury, trained as a coastguard and at age 16 was the youngest coastguard in the UK as well as one of very few women. Together with another Rhoscolyn teenager, Aubrey Diggle, they kept watch for long hours in all weathers and throughout the year. The station was even busier in those days with fishing vessels and commercial vessels making passages closer to the shore.

After her father retired, Susan took over as Auxiliary Coastguard in charge and served for 14 years until the pressures of working as a teacher and bringing up two small children led her reluctantly to 'retire'. In 1979 Susan instigated the rescue of two people reported missing for over 24 hours in an inflatable boat, whereabouts unknown. Although the prospect of finding them seemed remote, Susan thoroughly scanned the whole area and spotted two 'black dots' far out to sea and, taking a bearing with the station pelorus, alerted the coastguard who tasked the helicopter to rescue two people who were still alive in the water without lifejackets or any means of calling for help.

An unusual rescue in the 1960s by Holyhead and Rhoscolyn coastguards led to a nest of young ravens being brought to safety from half way down the cliffs after their parents had been shot. They were taken to the Tower of London, where they were reared to adulthood and lived happily for many years among the famous ravens of the tower. Photographs of the Rhoscolyn ravens, Larry and George, can still be seen at the Tower.

The last Auxiliary Coastguard in charge was Barry Thomas, who still lives in Rhoscolyn. The original station had closed by the mid 1990s but Barry Thomas continued to operate vehicle patrols and the cliff rescue team based in Rhoscolyn for several years.

The station was reopened as an NCI station in 2011 by a committee of people who live in Rhoscolyn and the surrounding area, some of whom, including the station manager, John Wilson, are still active volunteers. There are now over 30 volunteers from Anglesey and beyond and watches are maintained every day throughout the year.

Rachel Darwazeh  
Rhoscolyn NCI Press Officer

With thanks to Caro Wilson and Susan Hanbury for the information they provided.