

## Coastal Notes

It took a lot of hard work by a lot of people, but MRI's building and new rescue boat were both ready last week to welcome the first contingent of lifeboat crews from abroad. This group came from Holland, Germany, and Belgium. As is always the case, they represented a number of lifeboat stations: it is never possible, for obvious reason, to take an entire crew out of service.

Helgoland was the most northerly station, lying off the German coast guarding the shipping lanes serving the North German and Danish ports. Their lifeboat at 52m is the largest in the German fleet and is specially designed to deal with major events. She carries on board a 10m rescue vessel which can be launched and recovered at sea.

Further down the coast lie the islands of Texel and Terschelling, part of the Frisian Islands chain, which runs all the way from Holland to northern Germany. Their crews face many challenges because of the constantly shifting channels and shallow waters. The coastline is littered with wrecks, the most famous of which may be 'HMS La Lutine' that sank in 1799 carrying a load of bullion. There were no survivors and only her bell was recovered. This bell now hangs in Lloyds of London and is always rung before the announcement of a ship being lost or missing at sea.

The other Dutch crew came from Urk. Urk was an island in the Zuider Zee until the creation of the polders and building a bridge linked them to mainland Holland. You may wonder why an inland sea requires a lifeboat, but the Dutch are great watersports enthusiasts, and there are always those who need assistance, whether through weather, breakdown or accident. Since the creation of the polders, Urk's fishing fleet has operated from the North Sea ports, although their expertise has spread much further afield. During one of the Ethiopian famines, 3 fishermen went out with nets and taught the spear fishermen of the River Balo more effective methods, so that they were able, not only to feed themselves, but create a local industry.

The most southerly station was Blankenberg, in Belgium. Blankenberg is a holiday resort, close to the port of Zeebrugge. Here they have to attend to recreational incidents as well as the commercial traffic using their coast. Their lifeboat was involved with the rescue effort at the 'Herald of Free Enterprise' disaster.

Members of the Stonehaven Search and Rescue team were involved during the week, creating opportunities to exchange ideas and to learn from each other's experiences. As has happened in the past, some delegates are keen to come back to Stonehaven on holiday with their families and we look forward to that.

These training courses will continue throughout the year and help fund the local SAR station.

For further information, or to find out how you can support the work of Maritime Rescue Institute, please contact 01569 765768.