

A REPORT ON VISITS MADE BY MEMBERS TO THE RNLI LIFEBOAT STATION AT LYMINGTON ON 7TH AND 8TH FEBRUARY 2011. REPORT BY MICHAEL MINTON - SPEAKER SECRETARY

On 7th & 8th February Members travelled in their own cars to the RNLI Lifeboat Station in Lymington on a visit following-up to an entertaining talk on the Institution given by Joe Blachford in November 2010. Joe had completed his talk with a history of the Lymington operation with its new boat station that had to be redesigned to take a larger boat and a tractor. It is fully equipped with a training centre and electronic support facilities. Crew members have to retire at 45 as the stress on people at sea is very high. However there is a good recruitment programme with young people and the training schedule is very extensive, much of it for the work at sea being done in a major training and pool facility in Poole. The cost for training a man is £1200 and existing crews help. Close liaison with the coastguard is essential.

At the Station, Joe first explained the operation room and the central control of incidents within an area from 3 miles south of the needles, across to Poole and up Southampton Water. There had to be close liaison with Yarmouth and Benbridge and the rescue party would depend on weather conditions and the size of the boat. Radio discipline was critical both with the coastguard and the vessel in trouble.

The training room had been furnished with the latest electronic aids by a benefactor and took crews through an extensive number of modules before and after they were fully qualified. There was training every week. Moving downstairs members were very surprised at the clothing gear that crews had to get into quickly both to keep them safe, dry and yet flexible to effect a rescue. It clearly demonstrated the fitness required to go out in any weather.

The main area housed the large tractor needed to launch the impressive rescue boat which had radio, camera, two powerful petrol outboard engines and an inflatable structure capable of 30 knots once the bow had sufficient ballast to keep it cutting through the waves. The helmsman sat in the centre with two crew on a bench behind. The back of the boat was an open platform to let the water pouring in go straight back out into the sea. The only way the crew stayed in was to hold on to a wheel, or bar with their feet in rings on the floor. Blankets and clothing were available for the rescued but no comfort zone. It was emphasised that a high degree of maintenance was needed to keep everything in immediate readiness and the cost of the operation was high as a launch was £2500 a time and this had to be done for training purposes as well as for an actual operation.

Members left the station with a much greater appreciation of the dedication, skill and professionalism required for those who freely give their time to keep sailors and people safe around our shores.