

The History of NCI Porthcawl



Situated in the South Wales coastal resort of Porthcawl at the eastern end of the Esplanade, NCI Porthcawl is located in the old Grade 2 listed Victorian Pilot Lookout Tower built in 1870, adjacent to the RNLI Station. The lookout was in use during both the First and Second World Wars and was used for various activities between those conflicts until the 1960's.

With the completion of the refurbishment of the old Victorian Pilot Lookout during the Spring of 2015, plus the redevelopment of the harbour area by Bridgend County and Borough Council (BCBC) and the full support of Porthcawl Town Council, the Station was able to commence operational training in the lookout on 21st April 2015 after a lengthy delay due to issues with damp following the complete refurbishment of the building. By July the station had 22 qualified watchkeepers helped by the recruitment of 5 retired Coastguard and lifeboat personnel.

The station was officially opened on Friday 20th May 2015, with a ceremony held in the Crew room of Porthcawl RNLI, attended by Carwyn Jones, the First Minister of Wales, Madeleine Moon MP, NCI Chairman Lesley Suddes along with Alan Richards (Ex-NCI Chairman) and the Mayors of both Bridgend and Porthcawl. Colleagues from the NCI stations at Nells Point and Worms Head took part. Many of the groups, organisations and individuals who had helped in the setting up and equipping of the lookout also attended.

The station overlooks the Bristol Channel almost opposite Lynton and Lynmouth in North Devon, some fifteen miles away. The station has a field of view that stretches east to Nash Point on the Welsh side of the Channel, over to Minehead and down to Ilfracombe in the west. The Bristol Channel has the second highest tidal range in the world, second only to the Bay of Fundy in Canada, and at Burncoat Head the range

reaches nearly 16 metres (around 52 feet). The average tidal range in the Bristol Channel can be in excess of 15 metres (around 49 feet) and can be much higher depending on weather conditions such as temperature, air pressure and wind direction. The volume of water moving up and down the Bristol Channel during these tidal flows is huge and tidal speeds in excess of 5 knots can be experienced at times.

All commercial traffic bound for the upper Bristol Channel Ports of Bristol, Sharpness, Cardiff, Newport and Barry pass the lookout at a distance of 6 to 10 miles and traffic bound for Swansea, is some 10 miles distant.

Porthcawl is a popular destination all year round, with visitors from all over the world coming for the surfing and the 'Elvis' Festival. The harbour has recently been refurbished with lock gates and moorings for some 70 boats, ensuring an increase in marine traffic. There are also several beaches within view of the lookout. On the North side of the Channel there are several beaches from Ogmore in the East right through to the notable Town Beach featured in the television programme 'Coast' in the West.

The lookout building itself has featured regularly on local, national and even international weather and news programmes from as far afield as Australia, as a backdrop showing some spectacular storm scenes. The increase in coastal leisure users from swimmers, surfers and kite surfers to walkers and fishermen, plus the high tidal ranges in the Bristol Channel, means that the maritime rescue and emergency services in the Porthcawl area are kept busy.