

Introduction

Download the LearnEnglish Themes podcast. You'll find more information on this page:
<http://www.britishcouncil.org/learnenglish-podcasts-themes.htm>

This support pack contains the following materials:

- The article that you can listen to in the podcast
- An optional language activity based on the article
- Links to other activities on the LearnEnglish website on this theme (survival and rescue).

Read the article

Rescue at Sea – the RNLI

by John Russell

*Oh, hear us when we cry to Thee,
For those in peril on the sea!*

These words come from a famous hymn by William Whiting; Eternal Father Strong to Save. It is better known as the Naval Hymn and is popular with many navies and lifeboat services around the globe. One of the first national lifeboat organisations in the world was founded in the UK, in 1824. It was then called the National Institution for the Preservation of Life from Shipwreck, today it is better known as the RNLI – the Royal National Lifeboat institution.

What is the RNLI?

The RNLI is an organisation dedicated to the saving of people's lives at sea. If a boat is in difficulty less than 50 miles off the coast of Britain or the Republic of Ireland, the RNLI can send a lifeboat to rescue these people. It also provides lifeguard services in certain areas, making beaches safe for swimming.

There are over 230 RNLI stations and almost 8000 people were rescued in 2003 alone. Since its foundation in 1824 by Sir William Hillary, over 130,000 people have been rescued by the RNLI.

Who pays for it?

As a large fully equipped lifeboat costs almost two million pounds and it takes over £200,000 a day to keep the service running, money is very important. It is surprising to learn that although the organisation saves so many lives, it is a charity and receives no money from the government. It is paid for completely through

donations, legacies and fundraising events. The first time public collecting boxes were officially used in Britain was for the RNLI – back in 1891. Today boat-shaped collection boxes can be found all around the country.

Who runs it?

As well as being a charity, the RNLI is run by volunteers. Almost 4000 brave men and women risk their lives to help rescue others at sea. Most volunteers have normal jobs, which they must be ready to leave at a moment's notice if their lifeboat needs to be launched.

Volunteers come from all walks of life, there is even a lifeboat service in South Wales manned completely by students at a local college, Atlantic College. They are mainly 17 and 18 years of age, and over the last 30 years this service has saved over 100 lives.

Fateful Dates

1886 – The Mexico

The crew of a German boat; The Mexico, travelling off the North-West coast of England needed rescuing in a storm. Three RNLI lifeboats went to the rescue but the sea was so rough that only one reached The Mexico. One boat was hit by a large wave and the other was never seen again. Twenty-seven lifeboat-men died that day.

1979 – Fastnet Race

On August 11 1979, 303 yachts were competing in the biennial Fastnet race - a 608 mile yacht race off the South Coast of England. They were

caught unexpectedly in a very bad storm- the worst for many years. Winds of over 60 miles an hour struck the boats and many sank. 17 people drowned - it was the worst yachting disaster ever in the UK. Even more would have died without the help of the RNLI and other rescue boats.

Safety procedures have improved since then. Racing yachts are more difficult to sink and all must carry emergency radios. Accidents still happen though. At a recent sailing event near the Isle of Wight (the Cowes Regatta) the RNLI launched more than 70 times to help or rescue people at sea. The event only lasted one week! Happily, no lives were lost on this occasion.

Who is Captain Calamity?

In an attempt to sail round Britain in a 4 ½ metre boat, Mr Stuart Hill had to be rescued 5 times by RNLI Lifeboats, and twice by helicopters in the summer of 2001. The papers at the time called him 'Captain Calamity.' Similarly, in the year 2000, another sailor had to be rescued more than 5 times in the Irish Sea – he was using a road map for directions!

Whatever the situation, whatever the weather, the work of the RNLI volunteers continues, day and night, 365 days a year.

After reading

Exercise 1

In the first box are numbers and dates from the article. Can you match these to the correct information in the second box?

1979	Over £200,000	More than 100	1824	50 miles
Over 130 000	1886	Over 8000	Almost 4000	More than 230

1	RNLI founded	
2	The Mexico tragedy	
3	Fastnet race tragedy	
4	People rescued by the Atlantic College lifeboat	
5	Lifeboat stations in UK	
6	Distance from coast covered by RNLI	
7	People rescued in 2003	
8	Cost to run the service - per day	
9	Volunteer lifeboat crew	
10	People rescued in its history	

More activities on this topic

You'll find links to all the following activities connected to the theme of rescue at:

<http://www.britishcouncil.org/learnenglish-central-themes-rescue.htm>

- **Word game: Idioms with "Save"**. Do a jigsaw puzzle and learn different idiomatic expressions that include the word "save".
- **Story: River**. The river is never what it seems. The river changes. And so, of course, do people - especially after an experience on the river one day ...
- **Trivia**: Everything you (n)ever wanted to know about survival and rescue.
- There is also a survival and rescue-related cartoon, a poll and some carefully selected external links.

Answers to comprehension activity: 1. 1824; 2. 1886; 3. 1979; 4. More than 100; 5. More than 230; 6. 50 miles; 7. Over 8000; 8. Over £200,000; 9. Almost 4000; 10. Over 130 000