

# DART TALES

Lifeboats

## NEWS FROM THE RNLI LIFEBOAT TEAM IN DARTMOUTH

**L**ockdown has resulted in an incredibly low call out level for Dart RNLI. Whilst this is good in one way, it is not so good in that we are not 'out in the public eye' as it were. So, for this month, I thought I would take you back behind the scenes of the Dart RNLI station.

Most people will just think that the crew are the guys who go out in the lifeboats to effect whatever rescue is required. But before this happens the coastguard must ask permission from the RNLI to deploy their assets. This happens through the Local Operations Manager (LOM), Mark Strudwick or one of his four Deputy Launch Authorities (DLAs). Each DLA gets up to six 24 hour shifts a month where they will respond to the pager. Their duty is to call the Coastguard when the pager goes off, find out what the 'shout' is, then decide whether to deploy the station's assets. Meanwhile the helms and crew will be in readiness to go.

The decision on what assets to deploy is essentially based on several factors: Where is the shout and what is it? If it is right up the river near Totnes, then tide plays a big factor. Low tide means it is quite a tricky run for the boats, but around and at high tide, both boats can get upriver easily. If the casualty is 10 miles off the coast and the wind is above a force 5 (Beaufort Wind Scale), then we would probably ask our flank stations of Salcombe or Torbay to send their larger offshore all-



*Tractor driver and shore crew deploy the D-Class it from its home in Coronation Park.*

weather lifeboats rather than our smaller inshore boats. We also need to have a qualified helm to drive each boat and enough crew to go out with them – so sometimes we can only send one boat.

If we want to send the D-Class (the smaller of the two), then we need a tractor driver and shore crew to deploy it from its home

**“Anyone interested in joining the team as shore crew or DLA please get in touch with us”**

in Coronation Park down to the Higher Ferry slip. After the DLA has called the Coastguard and made the decision on what assets to deploy, they then initiate the 'shout' via the crews' pagers. The DLA will then make their way down to the Lifeboat Station, switch on the VHF radio, be in attendance to answer the phone, liaise with the shore crew and start the 'paperwork'. This is all now done electronically and involves putting in as much about

the 'shout' as possible. Who, what, where, when, tide, wind, weather, crew deployed, timings and when it is all over he or she will phone the coastguard to let them know that they are back on service and ready for another 'shout'. The DLA team are all on WhatsApp and can arrange cover between each other if the need arises. They have a choice of which days they prefer to do so that they can work it around their jobs. It is a post that just needs a little common sense and a knowledge of the river and the local coast. We are always looking for more DLAs to share the workload.

Shore crew are vital to the operation. As already mentioned, the D-Class must be towed to the slipway for launching and this requires a tractor driver to drive Thomas, our ridiculously cute tractor, to launch and recover the lifeboat. A couple of other crew members are also required to act as 'Banksmen' to stop the traffic and guide the trailer from Coronation Park onto the slip. On very rare

occasions the D class has to be towed to the Lower Ferry slip if the usual slip is unavailable. So, if you fancy driving our tractor then let us know that you are interested.

The station has two Lifeboat Press Officers (LPO's). Their job is to keep the public informed of what is going on. The B-Class has an in-built camera on the A Frame and there is also a crew helmet cam. The LPO's will sort through any video footage and use it if they can (and they have permission from the casualty). They will write up the launches and publish onto our website and facebook page. The station has featured three times on the BBC Saving Lives at Sea programme; once when we freed a humpback whale from a scallop line off Blackpool sands, when we worked with the local RNLI Lifeguards to help a boy who had injured his back whilst swimming and again when we saved the life of



a sailor who fell into the water as he tried to board his boat at night.

I mentioned the LOM at the start. He is basically in charge of all of us at Dart RNLI. He is good at multitasking as currently he is acting as a shore crew and as the tractor driver if required. The LOM is the liaison between the RNLI HQ and the station.

We also have a Boathouse Manager, Mechanic, Community Life-Saving Officer and Treasurer. All are working hard behind the

scenes to support the station. For more information visit [www.dartlifeboat.org.uk](http://www.dartlifeboat.org.uk) and the biographies of all the crew are listed under 'Our Station' and 'Operations team'. Anyone interested in joining the team as shore crew or DLA please get in touch with us – we will be taking on new members once lockdown is over and we are given the go-ahead from RNLI HQ.

*Sophie Rennie and John Fenton  
Dart RNLI Joint LPO's*

News, details of launches, photographs and videos can be found on the Dart station website. [www.dartlifeboat.org.uk](http://www.dartlifeboat.org.uk) or the station Facebook page [www.facebook.com/dartnllifeboat](https://www.facebook.com/dartnllifeboat)