

THE LIFE OF CROMER COXSWAIN

HENRY BLOGG

1876–1954



No other lifeboat crew member has been awarded as many medals as Henry Blogg. He was awarded three RNLI Gold Medals and four RNLI Silver Medals for Gallantry. Among his other awards were the George Cross and the British Empire Medal.

Henry joined the crew of Cromer lifeboat in 1894 at the age of 18. At 33, he became Coxswain, and he continued in this role for 38 years. He retired in 1947 at the age of 71. During his 53 years' service, the Cromer lifeboat launched 387 times and saved 873 lives.

Henry the boy

Henry lived all of his 78 years in Cromer. He was born on 6 February 1876 in a cottage in New Street on the cliff top opposite the pier.

Young Henry spent several years in the care of his grandmother before moving to the home of his stepfather, John Davies, in Chapel Street, to be raised in a fishing family. John was Second Coxswain under his own father, James Davies, who was in charge of Cromer's second RNLI lifeboat.

Henry was educated at the Goldsmith's school in Cromer. He was a good scholar and learned quickly, but never took part in games.

Henry joins the crew

At the age of 11, Henry had little reason to remain at school. He was top of his class and his stepfather needed him to help in the family crab boat. So young Henry swapped his school of reading, writing and arithmetic for his stepfather's school of baiting, hauling, rowing and seamanship.

He learned how to use an oar and handle a sail, and about tides, currents, rocks and shoals. This knowledge was later put to such good use in his rescue work that it was said of him: 'He knew what his boat could do and, as nearly as a man may, what the sea could do.' In 1894, when Henry was 18, he joined the lifeboat crew.



Although he joined in January, it was not until 28 December that he climbed aboard the lifeboat *Benjamin Bond-Cabbell* for his first service, to the *Fair City of Gloucester*.

He had to endure some of the worst weather with snow, sleet and hail and a long, gruelling row, battling against angry seas. It is one thing to row out to a vessel in these conditions but the crew had to make the return journey as well, in this case about 30 miles back from Yarmouth.



Henry G. Blogg
RNLI MUSEUM CROMER

RNLI
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Trust

Family life

Henry was 25 when he married Ann Brackenbury, a local girl who was 2 years younger than him. They married in Cromer parish church on 16 October 1901 and began a partnership that lasted until Ann died in 1950.

On 26 September 1902, their first child, Henry, was born. Unfortunately, he died before his second birthday.

On 5 December 1907, they had their second child, Annie, nicknamed Queenie. Annie was more fortunate than her brother but sadly she too died early in life on 8 August 1935, aged just 28.

Promotion

In 1902, Henry was voted in by the crew as Second Coxswain, as his stepfather was forced to retire due to poor health. This was an impressive achievement at the age of 26 after only 8 years of service.

Seven years later, in November 1909, Henry was unanimously elected by the crew as Coxswain, after acting as temporary Coxswain since the beginning of that year.

The medals

Gold Medal service 1917

On 9 January 1917, one of the bravest and most spectacular services ever undertaken saw 11 crewmen rescued from the shattered hull of the *SS Fernebo*.

Despite having already carried out one launch that day, Henry and his crew, whose average age was over 50, battled through a gale to reach the stricken wreck 350m offshore. The service was performed in an open boat, powered only by oars and the raw strength of the crew.

By the time they pulled alongside *Fernebo*, the crew had been fighting the elements for nearly 14 hours. Henry was awarded a Gold Medal for this service.

Gold Medal service 1927

On 22 November 1927, in circumstances of extreme peril, Henry rescued 15 crew from the Dutch tanker *SS Georgia*, which had broken in two on Haisborough Sands. The lifeboat had been on duty for 28 hours. This service brought Henry his second Gold Medal.

Silver Medal service 1932

From 14–16 October 1932, Henry and his crew rescued 29 crew from the Italian vessel, *Monte Nevoso*, which was stranded on Haisborough Sands. The lifeboat made numerous launches to the vessel, while the *Monte Nevoso's* captain and three other crew refused to leave the ship. The four men eventually left in their own motor boat when the vessel broke up and the lifeboat returned home, some 52 hours after the original launch.

Henry received his first RNLI Silver Medal, a Silver Medal and a diploma from the Italian Government and a Canine Defence League medal for saving the life of a Tyrolean sheepdog that had been on the ship. Henry liked dogs, and the captain gave him this one, which he named Monte.

Silver Medal service 1933

On 13 December 1933, Henry and his crew were called out to the 65-tonne barge *Sepoy*. Henry described this as the worst journey in his then 24 years as Coxswain.

Henry had made several attempts to go alongside the barge but it was impossible to hold the lifeboat in position because of the wind and tide. He then ran the lifeboat's bow onto the deck of the *Sepoy*. One of the casualties was seized by the crew and, when Henry repeated the manoeuvre, the other man was rescued. The two men and the lifeboat crew had all suffered terribly from exposure.

Silver Medal service 1939

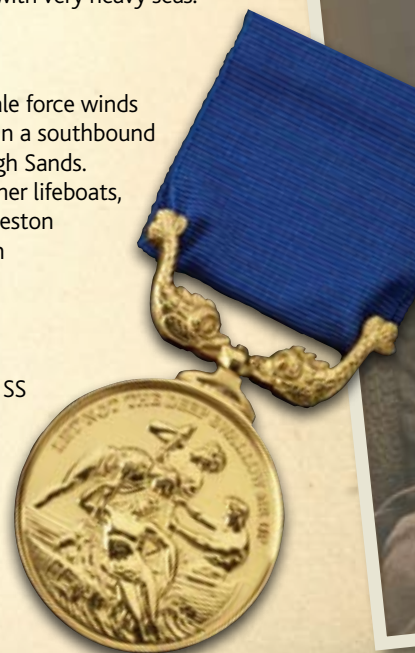
On 9 October 1939, Henry took part in the rescue of the 29 crew of the Greek-registered vessel *SS Mount Ida*, which was wrecked on the Ower Bank in a gale with very heavy seas.

Gold Medal service 1941

On the night of 5 August 1941, in gale force winds and heavy breaking seas, six vessels in a southbound convoy were wrecked on Haisborough Sands. The following morning the two Cromer lifeboats, along with the Sheringham and Gorleston lifeboats, were launched and 88 men were saved.

Silver Medal service 1941

On 26 October of the same year, the *SS English Trader* of London ran aground on a sandbank on the other side of Haisborough Sands. A full gale was blowing with a very heavy sea. After gallant efforts that afternoon, 44 of the crew were rescued by Henry and his crew the following morning.





Henry retires

In March 1946, the committee of the Cromer branch of the RNLI discussed the question of Henry's retirement. Although he was 70 years old, 10 years over the retiring age, Henry felt he would like to continue for another year. In view of his unrivalled record of service to humanity it was agreed that he should do so. It was in 1947, therefore, that he took off his lifejacket marked 'Cox' for the last time, after 53 years of service as a volunteer in the RNLI.



RNLB *Henry Blogg*

Named after the great Coxswain, the lifeboat called *Henry Blogg* was the first of a new type of Watson class lifeboat. She arrived at Cromer on 20 December 1945 and was made the station boat on 18 June 1946.

On the day the new lifeboat was officially named, Henry also received his retirement gifts including a cheque and an illuminated address that read: 'In the 72 years that you have lived in Cromer, and particularly during the 53 years that you have served the RNLI, you have by your deeds and example brought great credit upon the town, which is proud to call you citizen, and upon the lifeboat service.'



There are reminders all around the town of Blogg's great deeds and heroism. The RNLI Henry Blogg museum stands near the spot where he went out on his first rescue. Overlooking the sea on a nearby clifftop is a bust of Henry, a later gift from a supporter and admirer.



Henry G. Blogg



RNLI Gallantry awards

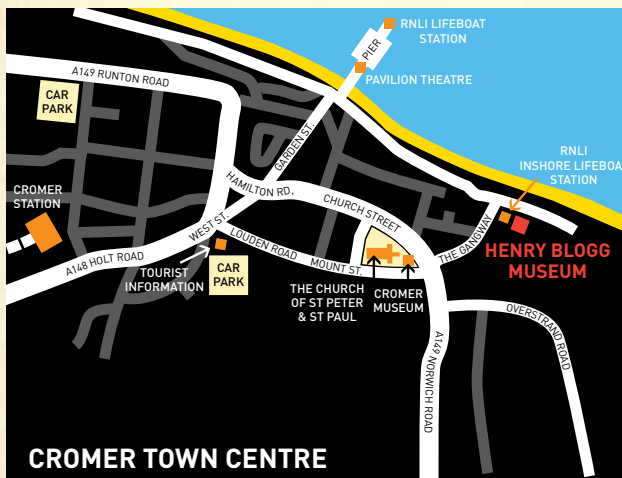
The Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) awards Medals for Gallantry not just to lifeboat crew or lifeguards but to anyone who saves life at sea. The highest award is the Gold Medal, which is awarded for an 'act in which outstanding courage, skill and initiative has been shown'. It may also be recommended when a life has not been saved, if 'altogether exceptional courage has been shown'. Silver and Bronze Medals are also awarded, for acts of gallantry that fall just short of the higher standards.

All Gallantry awards are carefully considered by the Trustees, who take into account weather conditions, leadership, courage, skill, determination and length of callout. A consistently high standard is maintained, and only 119 Gold Medals for Gallantry have been awarded since the RNLI's foundation in 1824.



The RNLI Henry Blogg Museum

The RNLI Henry Blogg Museum tells the story of Cromer's lifeboats and of Henry Blogg's most famous rescues. Its centrepiece is the *HF Bailey*, which was the lifeboat he commanded from 1935–45.



Opening times

Tuesday–Sunday

February–March 10am–4pm

April–September 10am–5pm

October–November 10am–4pm

December–January open for advertised special events only

Also open for some bank holidays.
Please call to check opening times.

School and other group bookings are welcome by appointment. Our education and community room is available for research and private hire.

RNLI Henry Blogg Museum

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The RNLI

The RNLI is the charity that saves lives at sea. It provides, on call, a 24-hour search and rescue service to 100 nautical miles out from the coasts of the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland. Since its formation in 1824 its volunteer crews have saved more than 137,000 lives.

rnli.org.uk

