

REMS visit to Harwich 12 May 2011

To see Trinity House, Buoy yard and Harwich Town

We were welcomed by the Town Crier on behalf of the mayor, townspeople and the Harwich Society.

We visited the headquarters of Trinity House (Tower Hill) on 7 February. Today, our visit was to Trinity House and Buoy Yard in Harwich, their operational base. Paul Howe, their communications officer, gave us a brief history of the organisation before we donned hi-vis jackets and helmets to look at the buoys. Their job is to provide navigational aids to shipping in English and Welsh waters. There is a similar organisation for Scotland and Ireland. The history goes back to 12th century and the first charter was given by Henry VIII in 1514. Today all the aids, lighthouses, ships and buoys are automated with no lighthouse keepers, etc. Every 5 years the buoys are returned to the yard for cleaning, repainting and updating. The lights, telemetry and controls are all powered by solar cells with diesel backup on the larger installations. These are remotely run-up once a week. If a ship collides with a buoy it often has to be replaced and repaired, and we saw some buoys with large patches welded in them. The large ones, type 1, are enormous, the heavy steel floats being about 12 feet high and the superstructure another 20 feet or so. These are the primary guidance buoys. Smaller ones are used to mark wrecks, etc.

To service these and the light ships & houses, they have two rapid intervention vehicles. THV Alert was alongside during our visit. If a wreck occurs or other hazard happens, they go to the site and put down marker buoys, often within 24 hours if necessary. The regular maintenance is done by a larger ship – the THV Patricia. The smaller boats cannot manage the type 1 buoys. This larger ship also has 6 double cabins that the public can use on cruises of 3 days to 2 weeks, watching the work.

We then went to the control room of the organisation where all the navigational aids are monitored, and their control and maintenance planned. They send out alerts via GPS when incidents occur. This can be as often as once a week. They also monitor the GPS positions of light houses and send out alerts if the accuracy is inadequate.

After a good lunch at the Crown Post Restaurant we met the Harwich Society guide, Tony Whitmarsh. He took us around the town and explained the history. Two notable places are the first electric cinema in the UK (1906) where the projectionist enters the building from the roof because the earlier acetylene projectors caused many fires. The cinema is still used for films and concerts and has an electric Conn organ of about 1910 (<http://www.dneal.force9.co.uk/conn73/models-t.htm>). The other remarkable building is a 4-man tread mill crane that was used in the Navyard wharf, one of two left in Europe – the other is in Gdansk. It was at the end of a pier so that goods could be transferred from a ship on one side to a boat on the other by the pivotable jib. The two original guidance lights (the high and low lights) are also there. These were used to guide ships into the harbour until the channel silted up. The town is small, pleasant and quiet, with many ancient houses remaining.

Photos by George Freeman unless stated.



The Town Crier with some of us. (*Harwich Society*)

Type 1 Buoy showing buoyancy tank and superstructure



A Marker buoy



An LED buoy light



Control Room of Trinity House



REMS in the control room



The Electric Cinema (*Neil Griffin*)



The 4-man Tread mill crane (*Neil Griffin*)



The Conn Organ

The Tread wheel (*Neil Griffin*) >>

