

BLYTH TOWN COUNCIL
Community Development Committee
Date of Meeting – 25 November 2025

Blue Plaque Scheme

Nomination of Blyth RNLI - Blyth Blue Plaque Scheme

Recommendation

The committee agree to recognise the legacy of 200 years with the award of the Blue Plaque status for Blyth RNLI Lifeboat Station.

Ward

Wensleydale.

Risk Management

A blue plaque and installation costs approx. £600, there is budget provision for this. Permission is pending from the landlords of the Lifeboat Station.

Crime Prevention

None.

Objective

To recognise and appreciate 200 years of continuous lifesaving service, and contribution to the town's maritime heritage.

Report

A nomination for a Blue Plaque for Blyth RNLI Lifeboat Station was submitted by Methodist Minister and Blyth RNLI Lifeboat Station Chaplain.

Background

The original lifeboat station is proposed for identification as a non-designated heritage asset within the draft Blyth Neighbourhood Plan. It is noted that the original station was established in 1826. In 1920 it was adapted for a motor lifeboat. The station has now relocated to the north of the site, but the former station is now used as a conference room. Blyth holds one of the longest lifeboat traditions on the Northeast coast. The first lifeboat, established by the Ridley Estate Trust in 1808, was lost in 1810, but the service was re-founded in 1826 by the Newcastle Shipwreck Association — the start of nearly two centuries of continuous lifesaving.

Blyth's crews have shown exceptional courage and sacrifice. In 1841, ten crewmen perished when their lifeboat capsized during a rescue; survivor

Henry Kinch received a Silver Medal for bravery. In total, Blyth crews have earned eleven RNLI gallantry medals — eight Silver and three Bronze — including two awarded to James Kearney White in 1852 for daring rescues in severe gales.

The RNLI assumed permanent control in 1866, ushering in continual innovation. Blyth launched a motor lifeboat and new boathouse in 1921 and later became an early adopter of fast inshore lifeboats. When its all-weather lifeboat was withdrawn in 2004, local volunteers sustained operations through The Spirit of Blyth and Wansbeck, before returning to RNLI service with modern equipment.

Blyth RNLI remains vital to coastal safety. Its volunteers continue to face significant risks, as seen in 2023 when three crew members were washed overboard and rescued by their colleagues.

As Blyth RNLI marks its 200th anniversary, its record of bravery, innovation, and community service exemplifies the town's maritime heritage. It is recommended that Blyth Town Council recognise this legacy with the award of a Blue Heritage Plaque.

The research in the report should be credited to Jessica Campbell and is attached as Appendix 1.

Suggested wording for the Blue Plaque:

Blyth Lifeboat Station, Est 1826

In recognition and appreciation of 200 years of continuous lifesaving service and contribution to the town's maritime heritage.

Elaine Brown
Deputy Town Clerk

17 November 2025

Appendix 1

Blue Plaque Application Research - Blyth RNLI

Author: J Campbell 25 September 2025

Blyth Lifeboat Established: 1826

- Presented with 16 awards for gallantry.
- First stationed here by the Ridley Estate Trust in 1808 (privately funded). Station was transferred to the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) in 1866.

Timeline:

1808: First lifeboat at Blyth (Ridley estate trust). Early services and loss of lifeboat in 1810 led to temporary withdrawal.

1826: New lifeboat funded by port of Newcastle Shipwreck Association/ early RNIPLS- era provision.

1841: Capsize with heavy loss of life (10 lifeboat men). Henry Kinch awarded RNLI silver medal for bravery.

1852-1854: Notable rescues (e.g., Russian barque Victoria in 1852) and establishment of a No.2 station at Cambois to handle launch difficulties.

1866: Station transferred to the RNLI (permanent RNLI management).

1921: First motor lifeboat placed at Blyth; new boathouse and slipway built.

1982: station allocated a fast afloat boat (end of slipway- only launches for AW lifeboats).

1995: 25 knot lifeboat Windsor Runner placed at Blyth (example of modernisation).

2004-2005: RNLI withdraws all-weather lifeboat (10 July 2004; local volunteers from Blyth Volunteer lifeboat service and operate Spirit of Blyth and Wansbeck from 2005 (later ceased operations by 2021).

2023: Station incidents where three crew were washed overboard and rescued an example of recent operational challenge and resilience.

MEDAL RECORD

Eleven Medals have been awarded - eight Silver and three Bronze, the last being voted in 1983.

Blyth Town Heritage Trail – Lifeboat Tradition

Blyth has one of the longest and proudest lifeboat traditions on the Northeast coast. Although a lifeboat was first placed here in 1808 by the Ridley Estate Trust, that boat was tragically lost in 1810
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and the service was temporarily withdrawn. In 1826, the Newcastle Shipwreck Association set up a new lifeboat at Blyth, and since then the town has maintained an operational station.¹

The station's history intertwines courage and sacrifice. In 1841, a rescue attempt ended in catastrophe: on 28 October the lifeboat capsized during a mission to a brig, and ten crewmen drowned while two survivors were rescued.² Among the survivors was Henry Kinch, who, for his perseverance and efforts during the disaster, was awarded a Silver Medal.³ Over subsequent decades, Blyth crews continued to be honoured for acts of gallantry, with eleven medals awarded in total – eight Silver and three Bronze – the last being in 1983.⁴

One notable case was in 1852. On 10 January, in a Force 9 gale, James Kearney White and a fishing-coble crew rescued four men stranded on the *William and Mary*, earning him a Silver Medal.⁵ Later that year, he also received a Second-Service Silver Clasp for saving 14 crew from the Russian barque *Victoria* in an easterly gale near Blyth Haven.⁵

By 1866, the service was taken under permanent RNLI control (having previously been managed by the local association).⁶ Blyth continued to pioneer: a motor lifeboat and new boathouse/slipway were introduced in 1921. Later, in the 1980s and 1990s, Blyth was among the first in the region to operate fast afloat inshore boats.⁷ Even when the RNLI withdrew its all-weather lifeboat in 2004, local volunteers kept the spirit alive through the independent *Spirit of Blyth and Wansbeck*.

Today, Blyth RNLI continues to operate modern inshore lifeboats in all sea conditions, facing as much danger as ever. For example, in 2023 three crew members were washed overboard, but were later rescued by the station's Atlantic 85 lifeboat.⁸

References

1. [Blyth's station history | RNLI](#)
2. [List of lifeboat disasters in Britain and Ireland - Wikipedia](#)
3. [Blyth's station history | RNLI](#)
4. [Blyth's station history | RNLI](#)
5. [Blyth's station history | RNLI](#)
6. [Blyth's station history | RNLI](#)
7. [Blyth's station history | RNLI](#)
8. [Flares fired after RNLI crew fall into water - Pains Wessex - Marine Signal & Rescue Products](#)