WATERVILLE COAST GUARD

A BRIEF HISTORY BY HERITAGE IVERAGH/OIDHREACHT UÍBH RÁTHAIGH

Coast watching goes back to 400 A.D., when Roman Britain paid civilians to watch for Saxon raids. Watch was later kept for Spanish and French fleets.

Protecting the revenue of the state also became a problem after the introduction of duties led to smuggling. By the end of the 17th century the Customs and Excise had a few cruisers out at sea. The Preventive service, The Riding Officers, was formed in 1698 to prevent smuggled goods which evaded the cruisers and the Customs officers from being moved inland. They were armed, and patrolled on horses up to ten miles inland. Bribery and corruption were rife among them. The Preventive Water Guard, operating in coastal waters, was set up in 1809 to catch those who evaded the larger Revenue cruisers further out to sea and they also did surveillance on shore when sea conditions were bad. It was effective against smuggling. Ireland had a separate Preventive Water Guard. They were armed and had four-oared gigs or six-oared galleys. They were initially based in Watch Houses and their boats patrolled the coast at night. They also helped at shipwrecks and had "Manby's Mortars' to fire a shot with a line attached to the wrecked ship. These mortars saved many lives and were later used by the Coast Guard. In January 1822 the Preventive Water Guard, the Cruisers and the Riding Officers were amalgamated and became the Coast Guard (spelt in two separate words until 1925) under the Board of Customs, but the Admiralty appointed the officers. This arrangement lasted for 100 years. In 1824 the Irish Preventive Water Guard was added to H.M. Coast Guard with 200 men.

Because locals were reluctant to house their men the Coast Guard built comfortable quarters for them. The Chief Officer's house was the Watch House. Arms were stored there along with blue lights used to muster his men. Discipline was strict and the work was often tedious – in some cases those on watch had to sit on a 'one-legged donkey' (a stool with a single leg) to ensure they quickly woke if they nodded off to sleep. The officer's uniform was a double-breasted frock coat with nine buttons on each side. The men had a flat naval type leather hat with a ribbon and the words 'Coast Guard'.

In 1831 H.M. Coast Guard became a reserve of the Royal Navy and the men had to undergo naval training. In Ireland the Coast Guard had ten cruisers and helped

to put down a rebellion in 1832. They also searched for illicit stills. Ireland had 28 districts under an Inspecting Officer (generally Naval) and was divided into Stations under a Chief Officer – generally a Navy Lieutenant. In 1856 control of the Coast Guard passed to the Admiralty.

Waterville had a coast watch service before H.M. Coast Guard. In 1738 Theobald Butler, a son of the 2nd Lord Dunboyne, leased the valuable Lough Currane salmon fishery and weir in *An Coireán* (the Weir), which had earlier been owned by a branch of the Mac Carthy family, lords of the sunken castle in Lough Currane. The lease included the site of present day Waterville. In 1775 his son Whitwell began building Waterville House, from which the village took its new name.

Whitwell was Revenue Officer of Iveragh with an armed cutter, *The Winder*. In 1782 in Derrynane Harbour he caught Maurice ('Hunting Cap') O'Connell and his brother Morgan (father of the Liberator) unloading smuggled cargo. Hunting Cap de-fused the situation by offering a sumptuous breakfast to Whitwell, but locals attacked Whitwell on his way home. Hunting Cap was charged and was lucky to escape with his life by using influence to have his trial changed from Dublin to Kerry, where he could control the juries. Hunting Cap and Whitwell later became great friends.

In Butlers field on the cliff top between Waterville House and the end of the present promenade Griffith's Valuation of 1852 shows a 'Watch and Boat House' and a 'Flagstaff'. The 1st Edition (1840s) O/S map shows 'Watch House' and 'Flagstaff'. Eddie Quinlan says that a family named Cotter were the last residents of the Watch House, which was perched on the cliff edge and no longer exists. A slipway, which extended from the shore near the Watch House and slipway has also fallen victim to the elements and only a small section of it is now visible. A public right-of-way, shown on O/S maps, extended from the Watch House to the public road. The Watch House even figured in local weather lore. Jackie Moran remembers the saying – 'if you can hear the roar of the sea at the Ferry [Inny River Estuary], it is a sign of good weather, and if you can hear it roaring at the Watch House, it is a sign of bad weather.'

Griffith's Valuation and the 1st edition O/S maps also show a 'Coast Guard Station' about mid-way alongside the promenade. This consisted of two semi-detached and one detached single-storey houses. It seems likely that the station was built

around 1828/29 when the Waterville Constabulary Barracks was built. Only the two semi-detached houses now remain - one is now a store, formerly the home of the Courtney family, and the other is the *Tigín* Craft Shop, formerly the home and workshop of Denis Donnelly, tailor and father of Tony Donnelly, Officer in Charge of the Waterville Coast Guard Unit until his retirement On 31st March 2017. The other coastguard house and two adjacent two-storey private houses have been demolished, mainly because of severe coastal erosion – Mick O'Dwyer says that his family occupied one of the private houses and that they woke one morning in 1945 after a fierce storm to find that their back garden and a shed with two beagles in it had disappeared, leaving a cliff immediately outside their back door. The Dwyers abandoned the house. Further research is needed to ascertain the exact dates of the building and occupation of the Waterville village Coast Guard houses and Butlers' Watch buildings.

Maybe because of the erosion, a new Coast Guard Building was built by The Board of Works near the Commercial Cable Co. Station in Spunkane, along with a 'Boathouse and slipway' [either those then on the shore below the Butler Arms Hotel or those shown as 'Boat House and Slip' near Waterville House on the 1896 O/S map]. The contract with the builder, M. Johnson, was signed in 1894. The estimated cost was £2,845 and William John Haslam supervised the construction. The station is shown on the 1896 O/S map.

No housing was needed for the new local voluntary Coast Guards – an equipment building was adequate for their needs. World War 1 began in August 1914. In 1916 and 1917 there are reports of wreckage, boats and ships being washed ashore at Waterville, including the Danish ship Eliezer, which was washed ashore on 24th Nov. 1916 at the Inny estuary, Waterville, with the loss of all 5 crew members. On 13th August 1916 four Iveragh men were drowned when their small boat overturned in rough seas in the bay just off Waterville Village. No Coast Guards were available to deal with these tragedies. A Cork Examiner report of 27th Nov. 1916 noted that 'all the local Coast Guards being away on war service', flotsam and jetsam from the Eliezer were 'picked up by Sergeant Dolan and the Constabulary at Waterville and stored for the present in the Coast Guard boathouse at Waterville'. As Naval Reservists, the Coast Guards could be drafted at short notice into the Navy. This caused disruption, and full-time paid local civilian coast watchers were appointed at some stations to help the regular Coast Guard. The Coast Guards were often unpopular in Southern Ireland because of sympathy for smuggling and illegal distilling, as well as for political reasons. During the 1867 Fenian Rising, the Coast Guard station in Kells, Co. Kerry was attacked and guns were seized, and during the War of Independence some stations were attacked and some were burnt down.

In March 1922 the 109 Coast Guard and Life-Saving and Rocket Apparatus Stations in Southern Ireland were transferred to the Irish Government from the Admiralty. During the 1922/23 Civil War some stations were damaged by Republican forces. The Irish Coast Lifesaving Service (C.L.S.S.) began in January 1923. Tom Casement, sea-faring brother of Sir Roger Casement, played a vital role in this, and became its first director, with the title of 'Inspector'. By 1924 he had recruited 758 volunteers for the new service and surveyed the former Coast Guard stations. Archive material of Thady O'Malley (1903 – 1990) of Spunkane, Waterville, a member of the first Waterville Unit, notes that 'down in Kerry where the coastline was treacherous and rocky, there were no coastguards. The rocket houses were there. Fishermen and others took up with Tom Casement and so the 5 Kerry stations were manned in 1924. Mr. Tom Casement, first Inspector, visited each and in the first – Waterville- formerly in charge of British Coast Guards, he got 15 volunteers – a No.1 Man and 14 volunteers. He was skilful in his selection and so he got a former volunteer to act as No. 1 Man – B. Huggard accepted. An IRA signalman T. O'Malley also and ex-IRA Volunteer Tom Fitzpatrick – those three together with Denis Falvey, Crohan O'Malley, Maurice Kelly, who served under British Coastguards in old rocket brigade – and other volunteers formed the first Kerry C.L.S.S.' Records show the 'date of re-establishment' of Waterville station as 13th October 1924, with four of those who joined in 1924, Albert Huggard, Denis Falvey, Abraham T. Huggard and Rev. Charles Loftus Haines having previously served under the Board of Trade Coast Guard Service. Thady O'Malley's collection of artefacts includes two jackets. One jacket has brass buttons with the British Coast Guard symbols of a crown encircling an anchor, while the other has buttons with the C.L.S.S. anchor symbols. The annual remuneration of Albert (Bertie)Huggard, No. 1 Man, was £15 and that of Martin Huggard, No.2 Man, was £6. Waterville station was numbered 37- in 1942 it was re-numbered 40. Superintendents were appointed for West and South Coast Districts, with Casement himself seemingly supervising the East Coast District.

Other possible uses may have been considered for the building – a reply to a Dáil question on 16th May 1928 in relation to 'Military Barracks Accommodation' listed buildings under the control of the Dept. of Defence and noted the number of troops they could accommodate. Waterville Coastguard Station could house '2 officers and 53 of other ranks'. Some work, possibly military related, was apparently underway in the station in 1926 – on a plank uncovered in the recent renovations the following had been written: 'I.R.A. 1916 – Free State 1921-1926 John J. Butler, 1 Lord Edward St., Kilkenny, Ireland. Engineer Corps. 1926'. Part of the building is now the Waterville Garda barracks and the rest of the building, where Gardai had resided at one stage, has been renovated by the O.P.W., and in 2017 it became the headquarters of Iveragh Coast Guard.

On 3rd Feb. 1928 Thady O'Malley became No.2 Man. His archives, from which much of the information about his era in the C.L.S.S. is extracted, show that in the 1930s training at Waterville was as often as three nights weekly, with regular inspections by the Superintendent on Morse Code, semaphore, rocket breeches buoy, hawser, whip and life-line, cliff ladder scaling, etc. Their equipment was transported by a horse-drawn four-wheeled wagon inherited from H.M. Coastguard. It is traditionally called the 'Rocket Cart' – though, by definition, a cart refers to a two-wheeled vehicle.

Some members found time for other nautical interests - Crohan O'Malley (Thady's father) made a fine model fishing smack in 1933, for which he won a prize at a Dublin model-making exhibition in 1942.

On 12th July 1934 Thady was appointed No.1 Man 'under pay at the rate of £15 (Fifteen Pounds) per annum' and received a naval type uniform. Tom Casement retired as Inspector on 26th February 1933 and was replaced by Capt. H. Freyne. On 30th June, 1936 the Hindenburg airship was observed passing over Waterville. A Dept. letter of 15th Sept 1936 suggests the use of lorries rather than horses for exercises. A 16th July 1937 minute to stations says that in times of bad weather 'Athlone wireless broadcasting station will be used for sending out messages relating to vessels in distress at times when communication by telephone is impossible'. Thady responded with a list of local people owning wireless sets who were willing to monitor the radio broadcasts. The 'Removable Exercise Post' was

transferred from its previous location. In 1938 there was cooperation with Valentia Observatory, Cahersiveen in carrying out a Thunderstorm survey.

On the night of the 11th/12 June 1939 three members of the Waterville unit – Thady O'Malley, Edward Falvey and Michael 'Sonny' O'Donoghue and local Garda, James Griffin, carried out a hazardous rescue in Ballinskelligs Bay of Charles McCarthy and Michael O'Shea, who were clinging to their upturned fishing boat – a third man, John Larkin drowned while trying to swim ashore. World War 2 began in September 1939. The unit carried out watches and reported on air and sea activities.

Tom Casement died on 6thMarch 1939 and lies in Dean's Grange Cemetery, Dublin.

The crew of 1940 are listed as: Tim Malley No. 1; Edward Falvey, No.2; D. Falvey; Patrick McGillicuddy; Thomas Fenton; Maurice Kelly Snr.; Michael O'Donoghue; Tim Curran; Crohan Malley; John O'Shea; Patrick Fogarty; Maurice Kelly Jnr.; John Malley; Thomas Fitzpatrick; Cornelius Curran.

The first half of the 1940s was a busy time. Co-operation with the Marine and Coast Watching Service, established in April 1939, meant extra work. The new service had 83 look-out-posts (L.O.P.s) with four in the Iveragh area – Lambs Head, Bolus Head, Bray Head, and Foileye (near Kells). There was regular liaison of Waterville C.L.S.S. with the local L.O.P.s, the Gardaí and the Lifeboat service. There are reports of sightings of ships, planes, mines, wreckage, etc. and of search and rescue operations. A memo. of April 1943 advised of the establishment of 'Auxiliary Rescue Stations' by the R.N.L.I., including stations at Valentia, Dingle and Ballinskelligs. William Main was the Ballinskelligs Station Honorary Agent.

Waterville, the L.O.P.s and Skellig lightkeepers reported that an American warplane had struck the pinnacle of the Great Skellig on 27thFebruary 1944 at 0107, killing its crew of 11. Waterville was involved in the search operation.

Crohan O'Malley died on 23rd January 1947.

On 13 Oct. 1949 Inspector H. Freyne authorised the attendance of Waterville C.L.S.S. and the firing of three Maroons at the ceremonies for the opening of the restored Derrynane House. Thady had been a fund-raiser for the renovation work.

From the end of World War 2 in 1945 the Waterville unit's workload decreased. The group began a joint campaign with local fishermen and others to have the C.L.S.S. re-organised. One suggestion was that Waterville and Valentia C.L.S.S. be transferred from the Western to the Southern District, because the Western District was too long and difficult to manage. They also began a long, though fruitless, campaign to have the WW2 Look-Out-Posts and the 1805 'Napoleonic' Signal Stations re-opened and manned so that a better watch could be kept for vessels in distress and to help prevent poaching. A 1954 request for a radiotelephone was refused.

Thady asked the Government to buy the 'Asgard', the yacht Erskine Childers used in the 1914 Howth gun-running operation. A 24thApril 1961 letter from the Minister for Transport and Power, Erskine Childers, son of the gun-runner, said that it was 'not a matter which I myself would care to press, for obvious reasons'.

A Dept. letter of 23rd October 1961 which advised that— 'the establishment of a full-time coast watching service is not considered necessary in present circumstances', probably spelt the end of the campaign by Thady and others for changes to the Irish Coast Guard.

Waterville House changed hands in the 1960s. A 1962 letter from Bobby Meldon on behalf of the new owners says that 'the arrangement with Major Butler for the use of the Rocket Field can continue'. Michael Fitzgerald of Lower Waterville remembers the 'Rocket Cart' pulled by Butler's horse on its way with its crew and equipment to the 'Rocket Field' - a field more recently used as a golf practice area, just south of Waterville House, with the Fionnglass River at its northern boundary.

Thady led a national campaign of C.L.S.S. members for better working conditions. In 1964 the annual pay of the No. 1 Man was only £36 and the hourly call-out expense paid to the volunteers was only 3/3 (three shillings and 3 pence).

Because of his friendship with Tom Casement, for whose headstone he fundraised, Thady also fundraised for a monument in Banna Strand, Co. Kerry to Sir Roger Casement who landed there in 1916 from a submarine as part of a failed operation to land guns for the Irish rebels from the German ship *AUD*. During the 1966 commemoration of the event at Banna, Thady met former *AUD* crew member Fred Schmitz, who later gave him three paintings of the AUD on its last voyage painted by Karl Spindler, captain of the ship. These historic paintings were not found in Thady's material and efforts to date to trace them have failed. However, snapshots of them and a video interview of Thady, showing the pictures and talking about them, remain. The video interview was made by Seán Counihan of Killarney in 1986 or 1987 and passed to the compiler of this history by Tony Donnelly, who had received it from Seán McGillycuddy of Killarney, who has Waterville connections and who knew Thady. Seán Counihan has kindly permitted the use of the video.

Thady noted in 1968 that the Flag Post had been removed from Ballinskelligs to Waterville, where it was erected on 27th July 1882. It was erected at the present station when it was built. It was sent to Galway in 1962 for Coast Life Saving use.

A request for a Land Rover for the Waterville unit was turned down in a Dept. letter of 5 Nov. 1969 because of the cost and the fact that a 'number of minibuses are available for the unit at any time of the day or night'.

Early 1970s reports include alerts about a missing Oranmore lifeboat, two missing fishermen, oil pollution on West Cork and Kerry beaches and dangerous objects washed ashore at Waterville. By 1972 Thady was trying to get the Dept. to commemorate the founding of the C.L.S.S. by Tom Casement. An article in the January 1973 issue of *EOLAS*, the Govt. Information Bureau magazine, mentions celebrations planned for January and tells the Service's story and Tom's role in it.

On 25th May 1973 Thady O'Malley, having already received a five-year extension, retired on reaching his 70th birthday after almost 50 years of service. A special certificate was later presented to him.

Thady's interest in all maritime matters was extensive. He took a great interest in the *Muirchú/Helga* gun-boat. As *Helga*, it shelled the Dublin insurgents in 1916. Renamed *Muirchú*, it was often used by the new Irish state on naval duties from 1922 onwards, until in 1947 it was the first ship commissioned for the new naval service, though it never saw operational use in that role. It sank without loss of life off the Saltee Islands on 8th May 1947 when it was not suitable after all for its newly commissioned naval or any other maritime role. It had been a regular visitor over the years to Valentia Harbour and Ballinskelligs Bay. Thady managed to obtain a transom of a small boat with the name *Muirchú* on it. He may have got

this from a relative, Capt. Hamilton, who had served on *Muirchú*, from which the transom may have come during a refit of the ship in one of its regular ports of call, like Valentia.

Thady's non-maritime interests and activities included farming, radio sales, bicycle sales and repairs, acting as an IRA Scout, membership of the LDF, archaeology, national and local history, genealogy, etc. His main passion though was his Waterville C.L.S.S. unit and its role in maritime safety. He died on 24th April 1990. His cottage and its remaining contents were bought by Anne and the late Tim Maher of Tullamore, Co. Offaly and Waterville. The contents, which included many important papers, photographs and artefacts of Thady's relating, inter alia, to the Waterville C.L.S.S., were kindly donated by the Mahers to Tom Horgan of Heritage Iveragh/Oidhreacht Uíbh Ráthaigh. The apparent scarcity of Irish C.L.S.S. records in Government archives increases their importance. Without Thady's archives this brief history could not have been written. It is hoped to lodge the originals of his material for safe keeping and for wider access to the interested public with a suitable repository of such material.

On the retirement of Thady O'Malley, John Murphy, Shoemaker, of Lower Waterville, who had joined the unit in 1966, took charge of Waterville C.L.S.S. as No.1 Man. Along with his crew he carried out a full programme of exercises and search and rescue operations as required. There was little change in operating procedures or equipment during his term as No. 1 Man. A tractor had now taken over from horses for drawing the Rocket Cart. John died suddenly in December 1984.

In 1985 Tony Donnelly of St.Finian's Terrace, Waterville, who joined the unit in 1982, was appointed No.1 Man. During his term in charge there have been many changes in the equipment and methods of operation of the Coast Guard. The name of the State's search and rescue organisation, which had changed a number of times over the years, became The Irish Coast Guard in 2000. The Waterville Rocket Cart was in use up to 1990, when new systems were introduced. The last time rocket apparatus was used in an Irish rescue was in March 1982 when the *Ranga* was washed ashore at Slea Head, Co. Kerry. The Waterville unit was delighted in 2014 to have located and recovered its Rocket Cart, which had been missing for several years. Damien Duff of the Waterville Inn played a major role in

its location and recovery. It has now been refurbished and the Unit is very proud of it. Rescue helicopters, fast rescue boats and modern radio equipment, bleepers, lighting, transport, etc. are now available. Training has become more sophisticated, modern and frequent. The unit also incorporates a Cliff Rescue section. Coordination and cooperation between the various search and rescue agencies and groups has been streamlined. Valentia Coast Guard Radio Station Marine Rescue Sub-Centre (M.R.S.C.) co-ordinates the following Search and Rescue (S.A.R.) units in the area: Iveragh Coast Guard; Community Inshore Rescue boats at Derrynane and Ballinskelligs; Valentia Lifeboat; S.A.R. Helicopters; SARDA Ireland – Search and Rescue Dog team. This has resulted in increased efficiency in overall search and rescue operations in the Iveragh area.

Tony Donnelly had spearheaded a campaign to have the old Coast Guard building at Spunkane renovated as a H.Q. (particularly in the event of a major operation) for the Iveragh Coast Guard Unit, which has seen the amalgamation of the Waterville and Knightstown Units, with the Knightstown Unit still having a base on Valentia. On Monday 27thMarch 2017 the newly re-furbished building was officially opened by An Taoiseach Enda Kenny. Declan Geoghegan, Search and Rescue Operations Manager, acted as MC for the event. He welcomed everyone, including those who spoke - An Taoiseach, Enda Kenny; Kerry Mayor, Michael O'Shea; Eugene Clonan, IRCG and John Draper, Divisional Controller Valentia Radio MRSC. He also welcomed members, serving and retired, of the Iveragh Coast Guard and their families and friends; OPW and building contractor and workers; representatives of the Gardaí, RNLI, HSE, Navy, Fire Service; members of other Coast Guard Units, clergy and politicians, and others. An Taoiseach and the other speakers thanked Tony and the Unit for their years of dedicated service and extended good wishes to Tony on his pending retirement as Officer in Charge of the Unit and to John Dowd of Tarmons, Waterville, who is taking over as OiC. They also commended Tony and all involved in securing their new home and base.

All speakers also spoke of the tragedy of the 14th March 2017 Rescue Helicopter R116 crash off Mayo, where crew members Dara Fitzpatrick and Mark Duffy died, with Paul Ormsby and Ciarán Smith still missing, and the 20thSeptember 2016 Doolin Coast Guard tragedy, where volunteer Catriona Lucas died on a search and rescue mission. The nation was still trying to come to terms with these shocks. The prayers and thoughts of everyone present were extended to the relatives and friends of the five. A minute's silence was observed, a book of condolences was opened and flags were flown at half-mast.

Mr. Kenny, after his speech, having earlier inspected a Guard of Honour of the Unit under the command of Danny Breen, officially declared the newly re-furbished building open and unveiled a plaque.

Tony responded on behalf of himself and the Unit by welcoming An Taoiseach, the representatives of the various public bodies and interests, present and former members of the Unit, and his family and friends who attended. He thanked everyone for their kind remarks and good wishes and all who played a part in the provision of the fine new headquarters for the Unit and everyone who helped to make the day's event so successful. He thanked his family, colleagues and friends for their support over the years.

Tasteful music was played during the event by Miriam Courtney and Richard Paddy.

The Coast Guard Prayer was recited and the building was blessed by Fr. Martin Sheehan and Rev. Brian Cooper. To conclude the ceremony Clare Horgan led the large crowd in the singing of Amhrán na bhFiann.

A tour of the new headquarters building followed. The Rocket Cart and Rocket Apparatus were displayed outside. Current and historic photographs, documents and artefacts, assembled by the Unit, along with some of the Thady O'Malley collection assembled by Heritage Iveragh/Oidhreacht Uíbh Ráthaigh, were on display in the building. Refreshments were served by Fiona of the Corcán Restaurant and her staff.

Tony Donnelly, after 35 years of dedicated service to the Irish Coast Guard, retired on 31ST March 2017. A pleasant function in the Sea Lodge Hotel, Waterville on 1st April, attended by his family, colleagues, Coast Guard officials and friends, marked the occasion.

John Dowd of Tarmons, Waterville, took over, with the good wishes of everyone, the position of Officer in Charge of Iveragh Coast Guard.

This brief history of Waterville Coast Guard by Heritage Iveragh/Oidhreacht Uíbh Ráthaigh is very much a work in progress. All additional information, corrections, suggestions, etc. are very welcome - contact Tom Horgan at 087-2229840; <u>thomasfhorgan@gmail.com</u>

SOURCES AND THANKS

The important papers, photographs and artefacts of the late Thady O'Malley, C.L.S.S., Waterville, which were kindly donated by Anne and the late Tim Maher of Tullamore, Co. Offaly and Waterville to Tom Horgan of Heritage Iveragh/Oidhreacht Uíbh Ráthaigh.

Tony Donnelly and other members of Waterville C.L.S.S. for much useful information and assistance.

Éamon Ó Tuathail of Dún Laoghaire, Co. Dublin, for very useful information on Tom Casement and the Irish Coast Guard. Eamon's forthcoming article on this almost forgotten man will make a significant contribution to the history of the Irish Coast Guard.

George 'Xander' Clayton, author of *AUD*, the definitive book on the story of the *AUD*, who first brought my attention to the missing *AUD* paintings during his research for the book. A chapter in the now out-of-print book tells the story of the paintings.

Diarmuid O'Keefe of Waterville for valuable research

Seán Counihan, Killarney, for his kind permission to use the video recording he made of Thady in 1986 or 1987, in which Thady speaks of his career in the C.L.S.S. and other matters like the missing *AUD* paintings, which he shows in the video. Seán Mc Gillycuddy of Killarney for bringing the video to our attention.

Albert Walsh and Alan McGuirk for information on the Butler family.

www.dttas.ie/maritime/english/about-irish-coast-guard-O

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On the history of the Butlers of Waterville – R.McMorran, 2012 "*The Butlers of Waterville From Salmon Weir to Grand Opera*", Kerry Arch. & Hist. Soc. Magazine

Those who shared their memories or knowledge of the times, work and personalities of Waterville Coast Guard.

Barbara Cassidy, Kerry Images, for informative photographs.

Webb, William, 1976, *Coastguard! An Official History of HM Coastguard,* Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

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