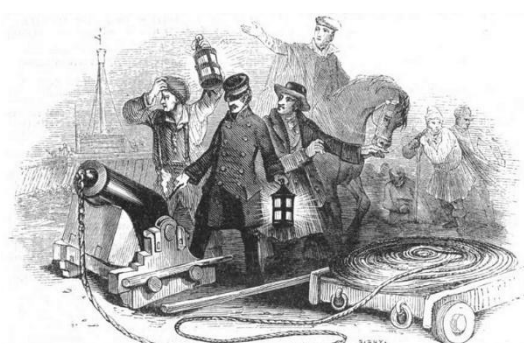


Isle of Wight Life Saving Rockets Timeline

September 25th 1780 John Dennett born. He came from a well-established family in Carisbrooke.

February 18th 1808 The first recorded rescue using the Manby apparatus. It is a mortar that can fire a rope from the land to a ship in difficulties. The crew of seven were safely taken off the *Elizabeth* which was stranded off the shore at Great Yarmouth. It is estimated that by the time of Manby's death in 1854 nearly 1000 people had been rescued from stranded ships using his apparatus.



By Johann Jacob Weber (Hrsg.), 1803–1880 - *Illustrierte Zeitung*, Nr. 10 vom 2. September 1843, J. J. Weber, Leipzig 1843. MDZ München, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=35152334>

February 3rd 1822 Feb Edward Mounier Boxer was born in Dover and lived in Ryde on the Isle of Wight.

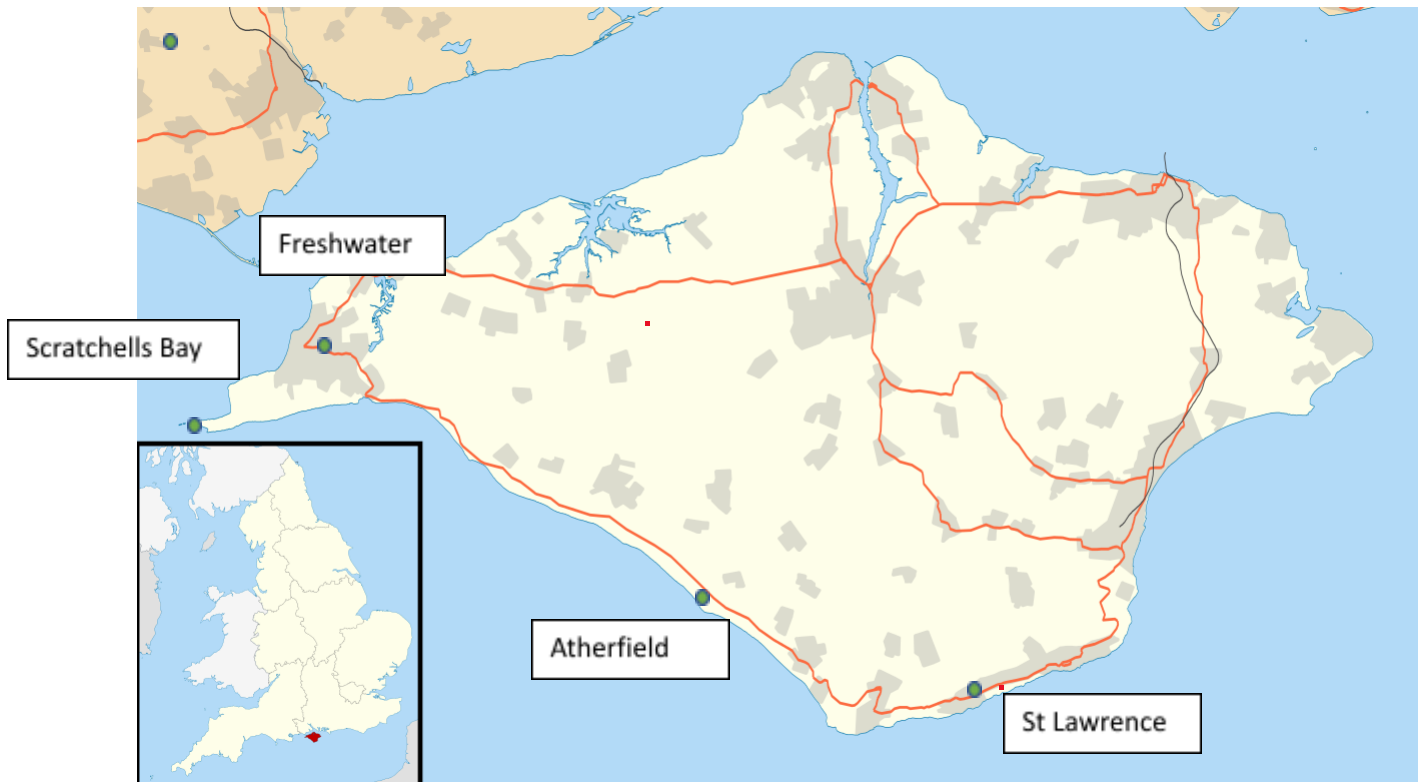
Late 1820s Dennett creates a similar but more powerful rope-firing device using a rocket. Dennett's rocket looked like a big firework but instead of the paper case it had an iron case that could withstand all weathers and a pole rather than a thin stick.

Weights varied, but one weighing 23lb including 9lb of solid fuel (at total of 15 kg) would have a range of 230m. This meant they were lighter than a mortar and could easily be carried by two men over rocks and beaches to be closer to the wreck.

January 1826 Captain Clavell reported on experiments made with rockets. "... we have been present at experiments made with Mr John Dennett's Rockets; and we are fully of the opinion that they will answer every intended purpose in case of shipwreck. Those of twelve pounds weight, will convey a large line against the utmost power of the wind, more than three hundred yards; a distance much greater than shipwrecks generally happen in any part of the coast of England. And their small weight in transporting from place to place, amongst the cliffs, and their peculiar efficacy in a dark night, renders them far preferable to any apparatus we have ever seen for that purpose".

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October 3rd 1832 This report led to three rocket stations at Freshwater, Atherfield and St Lawrence. That year at Atherfield, a Dennett rocket was launched with the rope reaching the wreck in Bainbridge the first time after four Manby mortars had been launched unsuccessfully. 19 people were rescued and the story made national news resulting in £300 contract for coastguards to be used by coastguards (worth about £43,000 today).



By Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=11604524>

Aug 26 1833 The Hampshire Telegraph reported that Dennett's rocket was demonstrated to Princess Victoria (who become Queen in 1837) and the Duchess of Kent at St Lawrence. They watched from a yacht anchored in Mill Bay.

By 1834 the Board of Customs adopted Dennett's Rocket and four were stationed on the Island.

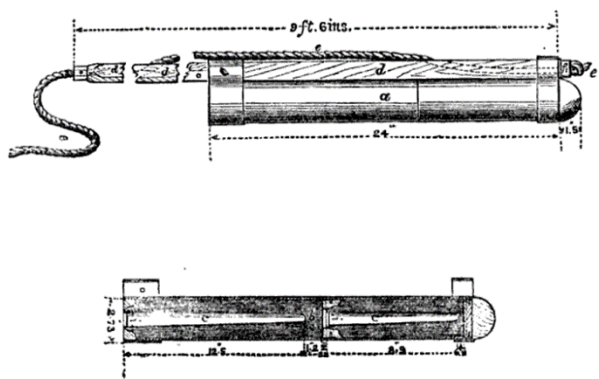
July 10th 1852 John Dennett dies. His invention had saved thousands of lives.

1853 Many coastguard stations kept both Dennett's rockets and Manby's mortars depending on which one they preferred. 120 held rockets by 1853

1854 Merchant Shipping Act states:

Expenses of Life Boats, &c. may be charged on Mercantile Marino Fund.

The Board of Trade may, out of the Mercantile Marine Fund, direct Payment to be made of such Expenses for establishing and maintaining on the Coasts of the United Kingdom proper Life Boats, with the necessary Crews and Equipments, and for affording Assistance towards the Preservation of Life and Property in Cases of Shipwreck and Distress at Sea, and for the granting Rewards for the Preservation of Life in such Cases, as it thinks fit; and this Section shall come into operation immediately after the passing of this Act.



1865 Edward Mourier Boxer's rocket was invented by 1865 but the Dennett rocket continued to be used for firing rescue lines to ships until at least 1890 when one was used to rescue people from the Irex. The Irex was driven ashore in Scratchells Bay and 36 of the crew were hauled up one by one up the 120m cliff with the help of the apparatus

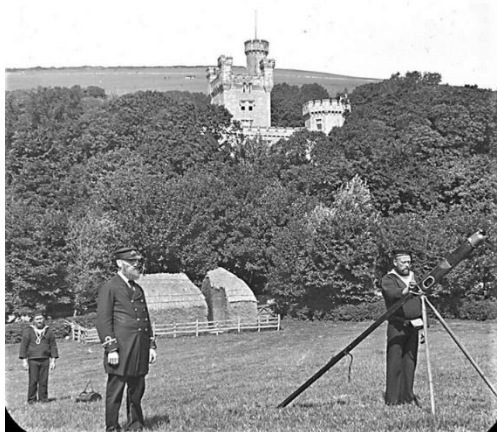
Unknown - Book: "Treatise on ammunition", 1874, War Office, page 240



A Boxer rocket held in the Carisbrooke castle Museum Collections

NETCC 1985.5428 –

Coastguards practicing with rocket life saving apparatus (1890 – 1914)

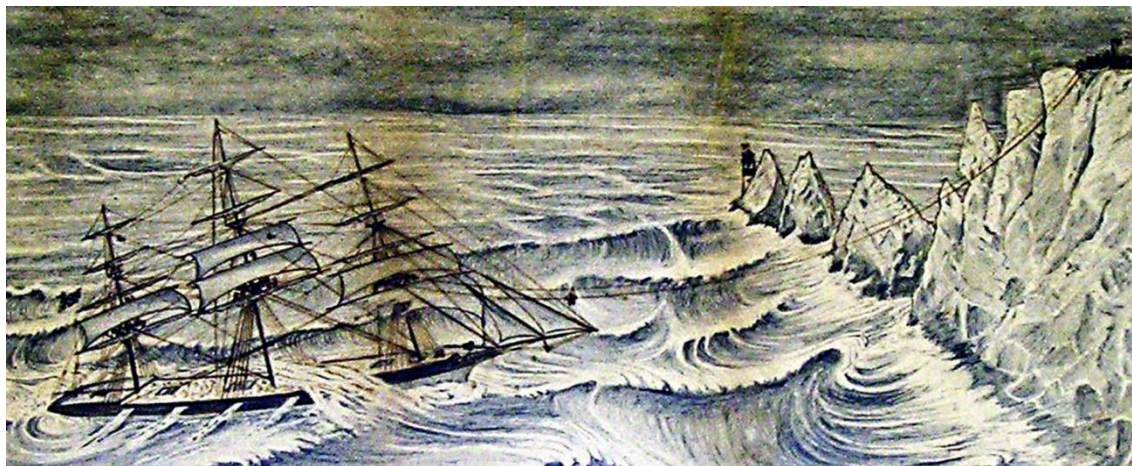


IW Heritage Service IWCMS.2012.350



IW Heritage Service IWCMS.1995.586

1890 On the 25th January 1890 the *Irex* was grounded at Scratchell's Bay, close to the Needles.



IW Heritage Service COZMM.1993.61

The fully rigged, steel hulled *Irex* was on her maiden voyage with a crew of 36. She was carrying a cargo of iron and earthenware pipes. Heading from Glasgow to Rio de Janeiro, the *Irex* was battered by storms for around 20 days. The Captain Hutton and crew were exhausted and two of the crew had broken limbs. The ship was thrown off course by the storm. The Captain mistook the warning light from the Needles Lighthouse for that of a pilot boat and he guided his ship towards it. By the time the ship was sighted from the cliffs of Scratchells Bay it was too late and she had run aground near the lighthouse and started to sink.

Captain Hutton and the First Mate, Irvine were both washed away trying to launch the lifeboats and four other crewmembers also drowned, including the Boatswain who was attempting to rescue the ship's log. Eventually 29 out of 36 people are rescued using a Dennett's Rocket and life saving apparatus.

1898 Boxer lived at Upton House, Ryde, until his death in January 1898.

Sources:

http://www.vectisarchaeology.org.uk/pdfs/irex_wrecked_at_the_needles.pdf

[John Dennett: Isle of Wight Rocket Man \(iwhistory.org.uk\)](http://www.iwhistory.org.uk)

[Black Arrow History – Wight Aviation Museum](#)

John Fletcher IWHS

[Manby mortar - Wikipedia](#)

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