

# Spotlight

Issue 16

Our keyword is 'Lighthouse'

September 2009



Scarborough, the Pierhead 1890 23471t

Lighthouses around the coast of Britain have long held a fascination for the general public, and these iconic structures, standing lonely sentinel on craggy headland or razor-sharp rocks, have captured the imaginations of many writers and poets. Virginia Woolf, a frequent visitor to Cornwall, used the Godrevy Lighthouse near St Ives (opposite) as the inspiration for her novel 'To the Lighthouse', where a small boy is intrigued by the structure and longs to visit it. In fact there was nothing less romantic than the reality of living as a lighthouse keeper, when we consider the harsh way of life, the loneliness and isolation that a keeper had to endure. If these special people were asked what they did for a job, all they would say was 'We kept the light lit'.

This month we bring you a selection of images of lighthouses from The Francis Frith Collection, with some of the information about them which we have in our archive.



Beachy Head, 1912 64979p



St Ives, Godrevy Lighthouse 1890 24195

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## Spotlight on 'Lighthouse'



Plymouth, the Hoe and Smeaton's Tower 1913 65978t Full-coloured example

One of Britain's most famous lighthouses warns shipping away from the treacherous Eddystone Reef, approximately 14 nautical miles off the south coast, near Plymouth, Devon. This reef has claimed the lives of thousands of people and numerous ships. Its deadly location has caused the building of a succession of lighthouses.

The third Eddystone Lighthouse, which went into action in 1759, was built in masonry by John Smeaton (the previous two had been wooden); its light shone for 120 years. Smeaton dovetailed blocks of

Portland stone to produce a structure which could withstand the worst storms, which revolutionised lighthouse design. Work began in 1756, when a group of Cornish quarrymen and tin miners began the difficult and dangerous task of carving the Eddystone rock into its dovetail formation; at times the sea washed the men off the

rock, but they were all anchored to the rock by a rope, and although they were bruised and battered, no one was lost. However, a more serious problem arose when the lighthouse workers went to a tavern in Plymouth and were all arrested by a press gang. John Smeaton sent an urgent message to Trinity House, a formal complaint was made to the Admiralty Board, and permission was granted for the workers to be given exemption medals. The men pressed into naval service were then released, and exemption medals cast in brass were worn by the workers until the end of the contract.

Smeaton's lighthouse was replaced by the present Eddystone lighthouse in 1882 (see 86243A) because its foundations were being eroded. As a tribute to John Smeaton his lighthouse was dismantled and the top section was brought back to Plymouth and reassembled on the Hoe, where it still stands – now known as Smeaton's Tower (see 65978t and 22365).



*Special feature – the Eddystone Lighthouse*

### Can you answer this old riddle?

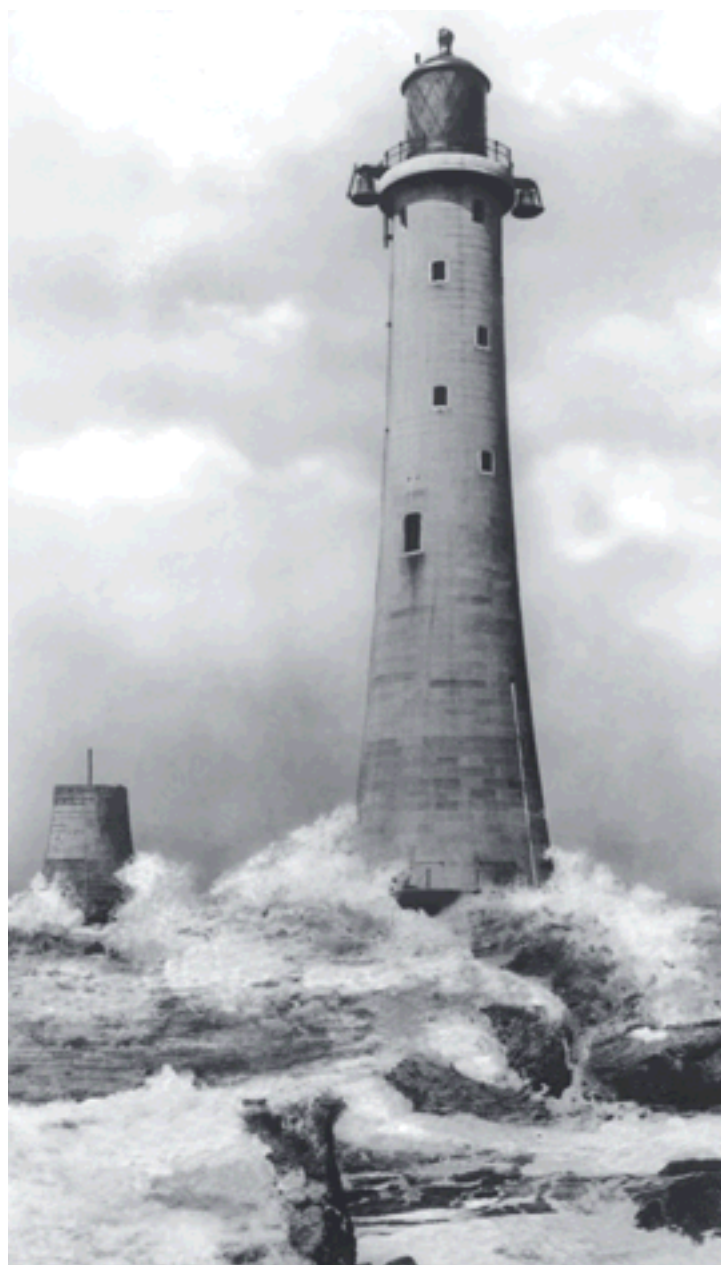


*'Woman on a wheel,  
ship on the sea,  
Eddystone Lighthouse,  
What can it be?'*

The answer is: the obverse of an old-fashioned one penny piece. The woman on a ship's wheel was Britannia, ruling the waves, with the Eddystone Lighthouse to the left and a ship to the right. In 1859 the Royal Mint commissioned Leonard Charles Wyon to design new coinage, and the farthing, halfpenny and one penny coins featured the third Eddystone Lighthouse, commemorating the centenary of its building by John Smeaton. A new design, showing the new 1882 Eddystone Lighthouse designed by James Nicholas Douglas but without the ship to the right, was introduced in 1937 on one penny coins; this remained on the penny until British coinage was decimalised in 1971.



Plymouth, Smeaton Tower 1890 22365



Plymouth, the Eddystone Lighthouse 1934 86243a

Photograph 86232A shows the fourth lighthouse to be erected at the Eddystone Reef, replacing the structure designed and built by John Smeaton in the 1750s. This new tower was designed by James Nicholas Douglas and constructed over three years, between 1879 and 1881, in atrocious weather conditions. In 1980 the Eddystone lighthouse had a helicopter pad erected above its lantern. In 1982, exactly 100 years after its coming into service on 18th May 1882, the Eddystone lighthouse was automated and the lighthouse keepers left for the last time – but the Eddystone light still winks unceasingly, a beacon for mariners heading for one of Britain's great ports.

New Brighton, the Lighthouse 1892 30413



New Brighton, the Lighthouse 1895 36680



The foundation stone of the New Brighton lighthouse was laid on 8th June 1827. It was known as Perch Rock Lighthouse because the reef of rock on which it stands once had a post or 'perch' placed on it to warn shipping of its location. The Perch Light, which had stood here since 1683, was often washed away by heavy seas, so in the 1820s Liverpool Corporation ordered a more substantial lighthouse to be erected. It was built from

granite 90ft high, a masterpiece of engineering skill. Its revolving light was claimed to be the first of its kind in England. These two photos show the Perch Light at low and high tide – in 36680 the dangerous reef is virtually submerged. The light was powered by sperm whale oil. It shone for the last time in 1973, when it was sold to a local businessman who installed mains electricity and converted the building into a holiday retreat.

Padstow, Trevose Head Lighthouse 1894 33573a



Dover, the Pharos c1965 D50103



Newlyn, the Lighthouse 1920 69751b



Withernsea, the Lighthouse 1955 W177010



Look out for our monthly Spotlight newsletter.

Each month Spotlight showcases selected vintage Frith images based on a particular keyword.

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