

# Cape Pembroke Lighthouse

By John Hellowell

*This article originally appeared in issue 92 of Lamp, the quarterly journal of the Association of Lighthouse Keepers. It is reprinted by permission. All photos are by the author.*



The Falkland Islands are situated 340 miles from the nearest coast of South America in the South Atlantic Ocean. The Falklands consist of some 200 islands of which only 20 are inhabited. The main two islands and the largest are East and West Falkland. The islands altogether cover a land area of 4,700 square miles and have a resident population of almost 3,000 people, excluding military personnel.

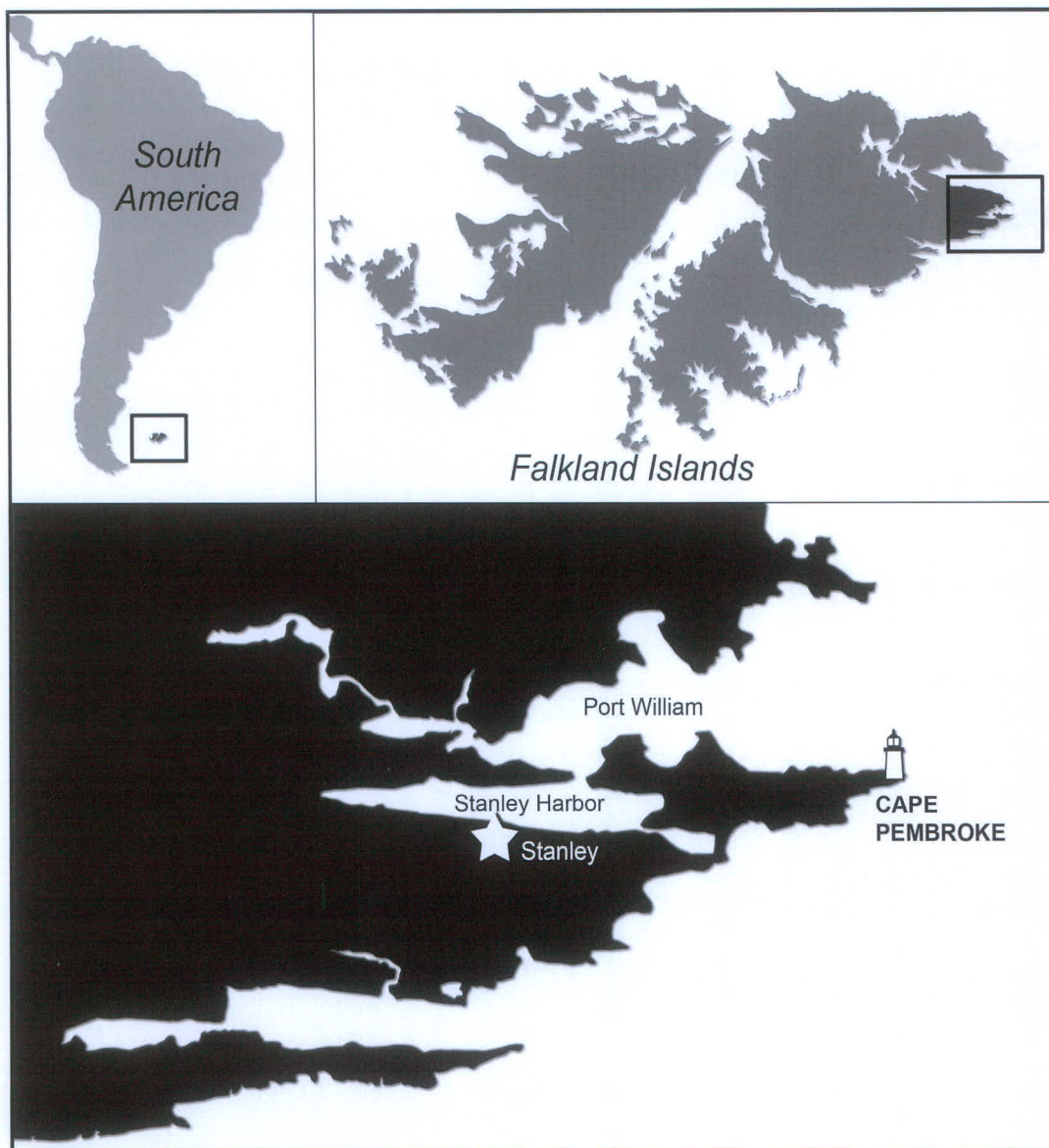
The Falklands are a British Overseas Territory but have their own modern government. The population is made up mainly of people of British, Chilean, or St. Helenian descent. The British originally came to the islands in 1765 and settled initially on a small island in the north of the Falklands called Saunders Island. About the same time, the French also occupied part of the islands but left after a few years. Many readers will remember the conflict of 1982 when Argentina attempted unsuccessfully to occupy the islands.

By 1843 the growing population of the Falkland Islands had developed the islands into farming, with sheep and wool being the mainstay of their income. The new capital, Stanley, was only beginning to develop. However, the geographical location of the Falkland Islands, so close to the tip of South America, made it a safe refuge for ships that found themselves in trouble after navigating Cape Horn. The Falkland Islands have many safe natural harbors, probably the most notable being Port William and Stanley Harbor around where the island's capital developed 170 years ago.

Stanley (not Port Stanley as it is often mistakenly called) is located on the north-eastern side of East Falkland and from the sea is approached from Port William, through the narrows into Stanley Harbor. The first landfall the mariner sees on his approach to Port William is Cape Pembroke, a low lying peninsula some seven miles east of Stanley. Although the approach is initially



The Cape Pembroke Lighthouse.



Cape Pembroke lies on the easternmost point of the Falkland islands, off the tip of South America. Map by Mary Borkowski.

a wide channel, there are dangerous low lying rocks, known as the Billy Rocks, lying close to shore, and skill must be taken to navigate around this hazard.

The hazardous Billy Rocks were first recognized early in the 1800s when Stanley was being developed as the island's capital. Since then some 15 ships have come to grief, when a safe haven was so close by.

Cape Pembroke is the most easterly point of the Falkland Islands and is thought to have been named after the 18th century Lord High Admiral, Thomas, Earl of Pembroke and Montgomery.

In the 1840s the first navigational aid was erected on the eastern tip of Cape Pembroke. This was nothing more than a wooden post painted red and white. This proved to be inadequate and was replaced in the years 1854-55 by a cast-iron lighthouse, prefabricated in London by William Wilkins of Long Acre.

The new tower was 60 feet in height and was painted with red and white bands. The lamp was illuminated using 18 burners using rapeseed oil and was first lit in December 1855. The apparatus was a first-order

catadioptric lens with a fixed light showing in every direction seaward. It was visible for 14 miles in clear conditions. The lighthouse came under the jurisdiction of Trinity House of London. Cape Pembroke had, at last, a navigational aid to guide the mariner around the Billy Rocks.

By 1899 it was decided to paint the tower all white as the strong Falkland Islands sunlight was causing the red bands to fade. In 1904 a survey was conducted regarding the condition of the lighthouse structure. The report, presented by Governor Alardyce to the Colonial Office in London, said that, on inspection, the original wooden foundation piles had become rotten.

As a consequence the brick and cement base had cracked and he considered the lighthouse to be unsafe. In view of the report, it was decided to rebuild the lighthouse on new foundations.

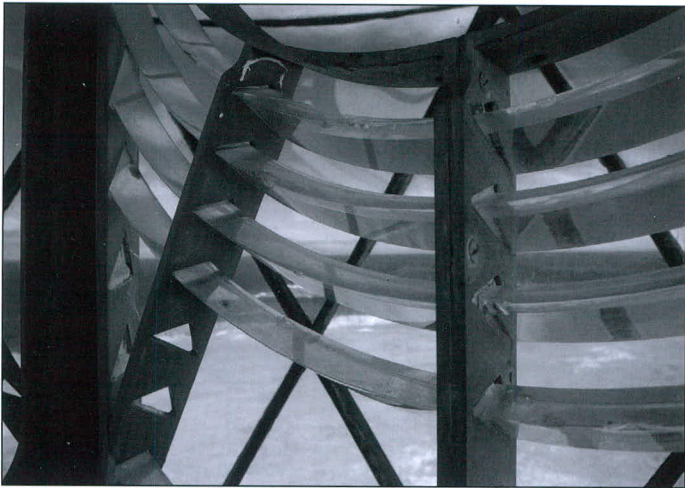
Work commenced on the new site in 1906 and was a major undertaking requiring some 700 tons of new materials. Four contractors from the UK were hired for the task, employing a team of local men. The work was

supervised by Trinity House engineers. The repositioned lighthouse was located some 200 yards to the west of the original site, and a new lantern was installed, making the new light some 70 feet high from base to weather vane.

During the construction, a lightship was positioned to the east of Cape Pembroke to guide shipping safely into Berkley Sound.

The new light was first lit in June 1907. The new apparatus was a third-order dioptric lens, illuminated by paraffin lamps. The equipment was mounted on a cast-iron stand which revolved by clockwork. For the first time the light was flashing, replacing the fixed light and was visible for 16 miles in good weather. The new light tower was painted black with a white band.

The lighthouse continued to give good continuous service, even through two world wars, until the Argentinian invasion of the Falkland Islands in April 1982 when it was put out of operation. After the conflict of 1982, this proved to be the turning point for the future of the lighthouse at Cape Pembroke. It was decided that the lighthouse



Above and below: Prisms are missing from the Fresnel lens, still in place in the tower.



had become redundant as a navigational aid, and it was replaced in 1987 by a solar-powered, ground-mounted light some 50 yards away on the seaward side of the tower. This work was undertaken by the Fisheries Department of the Falkland Islands government.

In 1990 proposals were put forward for the restoration of the redundant lighthouse, and restoration commenced soon after. Included in the restoration project was the stabilization of the tower and repairing the damage sustained during the 1980s, including replacement of some of the damaged lantern glass. All of the original keepers' accommodation has been demolished and only the concrete foundations remain today.

However, the tower has seen a sympathetic restoration, and today many of the original features of the working lighthouse remain. The remains of the lens casing, parts of the Fresnel lens, and the clockwork mechanism are still in place. The lighthouse is now in the care of the Falkland Islands Museum and National Trust and is a listed monument.

*References for this article came from research conducted by the late Jane Cameron, who championed the restoration of Cape Pembroke Lighthouse. My thanks also go to Joleen Morrison of FIMNT who kindly took me on a guided tour of the lighthouse.*

*Restoration Specialists ~ Houses of the Horizon®*

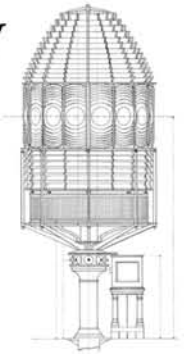
**Block Island North Light [1867]**  
WSA Lighthouse Project 13 of 17

**Award Winning Restorations**  
Preserve Rhode Island  
RI Preservation & Heritage Commission  
AIA Rhode Island

**Walter Sedovic Architects**  
Preservation, Planning & Sustainable Design  
www.ModernRuins.com



# Join the U.S. Lighthouse Society Today or Give the Gift of Membership!



## *Restoration & Preservation*



*Thomas Point Shoal Lighthouse, MD*

*The U.S. Lighthouse Society has donated to many lighthouse preservation projects throughout the U.S. Most recently we were honored by being presented with the Preserve America Stewardship Award from The White House for our restoration work at Thomas Point Shoal Lighthouse.*

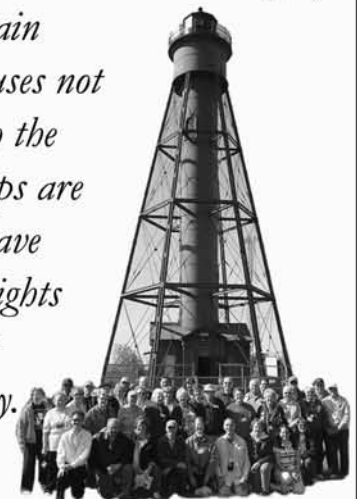
## Help Support Our Important Mission!

## *Education*



*The Keeper's Log magazine is the only one of its kind and has been published quarterly since 1984. Receive this award-winning publication as a benefit of membership.*

*The Society organizes domestic and international lighthouse tours. Many of our excursions gain access to lighthouses not normally open to the public. These trips are a great way to have fun, see lots of lights and learn about lighthouse history.*



*Tincum Lighthouse, NJ*

*To learn more visit  
**www.uslhs.org**  
or  
call Headquarters at  
415-362-7255*