



St. Catherine's Oratory Lighthouse (St. Catherine's Hill, Isle of Wight)



St Catherine's Oratory, which commands sweeping views along the coastline of the Isle of Wight
© English Heritage

HISTORY

St. Catherine's Oratory, which is situated on St Catherine's Hill, Isle of Wight, overlooking Chale Bay, is the site of a prehistoric burial mound and a small medieval oratory, or chapel, the west tower of which is thought to have been used as a lighthouse.

It is likely that the oratory, completed in 1328, was erected by Walter de Godeton, a local landowner who was condemned by the Church for stealing casks of wine from a shipwreck which had occurred in 1314 off Chale Bay.

The ship was one of a fleet carrying a cargo of white wine for the monastery of Livers in Picardy. The Church threatened de Godeton with excommunication unless he built a lighthouse above the scene of the shipwreck, together with an adjoining oratory.

The oratory was to be endowed to maintain a priest to tend the light and to say masses for souls lost at sea. The duties were apparently carried out until the Reformation in the 16th century.



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DESCRIPTION OF THE 'PEPPERPOT' LIGHTHOUSE

The lighthouse tower, known as the Pepperpot, is a four-storey octagonal structure of greensand stone, with a pitched roof of stone tiles on a domed brick vault. Eight windows on the third floor form a lantern. The tower's arched door-heads suggest that it was substantially repaired in the mid-16th century, possibly when anxiety about the threat from the Spanish Armada would have given the building an important role as a lookout tower and beacon site.

The lighthouse, which formed the western tower of St Catherine's Oratory, is all that still stands of the original building.

The remains of the walls can still be seen, however, as grass-covered banks forming three sides of a square, with the lighthouse on the west side. The banks are approximately 12 meters (39 feet) apart and in places stand to 1 meter (3 feet) in height. An earth bank 0.5 meters (1.5 feet) high, the turf wall of the churchyard, encloses the oratory site on its north, west and south sides.

BRONZE AGE BARROW

At a distance of 15 meters (49 feet) to the south-east of the tower is a much earlier monument, a Bronze Age bowl barrow, or burial mound, which was constructed on this hilltop site about 4,000 years ago.

Bowl barrows consisted of a mound of turf, soil or rock, covering one or more burials, and usually surrounded by a circular ditch from which the mound material may have been quarried.

This barrow, which is 20 meters (66 feet) in diameter and 2 meters (6 feet) high, was partially excavated in 1925, when human and animal bones and flint tools were discovered.

At some time during the medieval period, possibly during the construction of the oratory, a lime kiln was built into the side of the barrow. To the south are pits and mounds which may have resulted from mining chalk to provide lime for the kiln.

REFERENCES

1. Hockey, S F 1982. 'Insula Vecta: The Isle of Wight in the Middle Ages', Phillimore: Chichester
2. English Heritage (<http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/>)
3. Sustrans (<http://www.sustrans.org.uk/about-sustrans>)

CONTACT

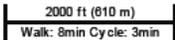
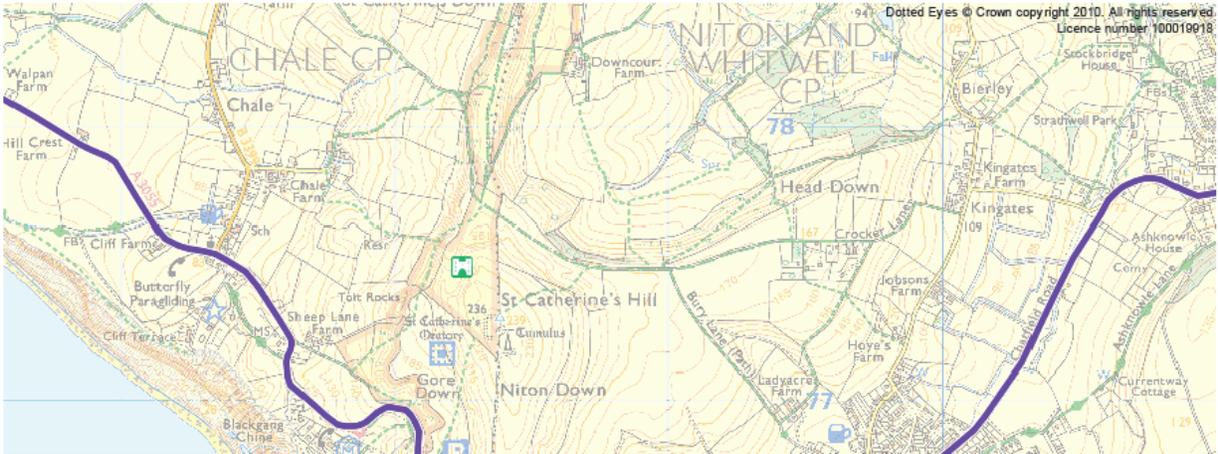
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VISITOR INFORMATION

LOCATION

St. Catherine's Hill on the Isle of Wight

OPENING TIMES

Any reasonable time.

TICKETS

Adults: Free

Children: Free

DIRECTIONS

Location: St Catherine's Hill on the Isle of Wight

Bus Access: Southern Vectis 6 Ventnor - Newport, to within 1 mile from historic site

Road Access: East of Blackgang roundabout, off A3055.



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Train Access: Shanklin Station: 9 miles from historic site

Ferry Access: West Cowes 14 miles, East Cowes 14 miles (both are Red Funnel Ferries - Telephone: 0044 (0)870 444 8898); Yarmouth 15 miles (Wightlink: Telephone: 0044 (0)870 582 7744).

NEARBY HISTORIC PROPERTIES OF INTEREST

Carisbrooke Castle (<http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/daysout/properties/carisbrooke-castle/>) 6 Miles

Osborne House (<http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/daysout/properties/osborne-house/>) 10 Miles

(Source: English Heritage)