Dungeness New and Old Lighthouses

(Dungeness, Kent)

History

Dungeness lies at the southernmost point of Kent and is an enormous flat of sand and shingle which has been a hazard to shipping for hundreds of years. Dungeness Lighthouse marks the end of the peninsula and is also an important way mark and reference for vessels navigating the Dover Straits.

Early Lights

A lighthouse at Dungeness was first mentioned around 1600 when Trinity House reported against a proposal for a light at Dungeness Point and declined an invitation of the King’s Privy Council to erect one. However persistence by the petitioner, a Sir Edward Howard or Hayman, who held a Court appointment, met with success. Trinity House withdrew its opposition and Howard received a patent in August 1615 from King James I. He marked the spot by an open coal fire and was empowered to levy tolls of one penny per ton from all ships passing it during the next 40 years.

Owing to the great difficulty of collecting the dues, Sir Edward made over his rights to William
Lamplough, Clerk of the Royal Kitchen, who enlisted the help of Customs officials to collect the money at ports. This roused the indignation of ship owners who could no longer avoid paying the charges and they joined forces eagerly with Trinity House in 1621 in promoting a Bill to suppress the lighthouse as "a nuisance to navigation" because of its poor light. Candles had replaced the original coal fire, doubtless from the difficulty in transporting coal to such an out-of-the-way spot. Parliament, however, would not interfere with the King's grantee, but warned Lamplough that a better light must be shown.

Opposition to the lighthouse did not stop with the improvement in the light and the Corporation of Rye, remembering that the original idea of a lighthouse at Dungeness emanated from a townsman of Rye, attempted to acquire the lighthouse for itself. It attempted to get an Act passed which would vest the interest in the venture in the Mayor and jurats of Rye, so that the surplus profits could go towards the reparation of their harbor. The Bill, however, was never enacted, and Lamplough's patent continued in force.

**Lamplough's Tower 1635**

Time, though, had taken its toll and, as the sea receded further, seamen complained of the distance of the lighthouse from the water's edge, so in 1635 the patentee pulled down the existing tower and built a more substantial tower with a coal fire nearer to the Point.

From 1647 to 1660, during the short-lived Commonwealth, a Commission took over the lighthouse work of Trinity House, because of its Royalist sympathies, and about 1655, for the same reason, the patentee of Dungeness lost ownership of the lighthouse, which caused great difficulties afterwards as to ownership. The new patentee was threatened by the Earl of Thanet, then the ground-landlord, with pulling down the structure because of non-payment of rent. The patentee did not pay, but instead appealed to England's Protectorate who considered that it was not a fitting state of affairs that "the safety of many lives and the State's should be left to the will of the Earl of Thanet" and he granted the owner protection.

After the restoration confusion arose over the title to Dungeness Light. The former owner had forfeited his right to it for adhering to the Crown, and now with the Crown once more in power the "Commonwealth" owner would not leave, alleging a title by purchase.

The quality of the light once again came under review and in 1668 Trinity House summoned the patentee to appear before it and insisted that he must provide better illumination.

A coal fire continued to light Dungeness in 1746, but the position of the lighthouse was complained of as being misleading as the sea had again receded, leaving the tower far from the water's edge.

**Samuel Wyatt's Tower 1792**

In 1792 Samuel Wyatt built a tower about 35 metres high, of the same design as Smeaton's lighthouse on Eddystone, which lasted for over 100 years. Eighteen sperm-oil lamps took the place of the coal fire. Robert Stevenson, when inspecting the lighthouse in 1818, found parabolic reflectors.
in use which had been obtained from Howard, in Old Street, London, in 1802 - a rival firm to George Robinson, then chief suppliers of parabolic reflectors to Trinity House.

In 1862, Dungeness Lighthouse became one of the first lighthouses to be illuminated by electric light. However this was form of power was superseded by a more efficient means, given the technology available at that time, a huge oil lamp of 850 candle power surrounded by glass prisms which increased the illuminating power by a hundredfold. At this time the outer wall of the tower was painted black with a white band to render it more conspicuous in daylight.

Quarters for the lighthouse keepers were built in a circular form around the base of Wyatt’s tower. Although the tower was taken down in 1904 these quarters are still in existence.

The High Light Tower 1904

By the turn of the nineteenth century it was apparent that due to the recession of the sea a new lighthouse was needed. In 1901, Messrs. Patrick & Co. of London, began to build a new lighthouse. This circular brick structure, known as the High Light Tower, some 41 metres high and 11 metres in diameter at ground level, was completed early in 1904, and was first lighted on the 31st March in that year. The tower was painted externally in black and white bands so that it formed a beacon recognizable by mariners during daylight. Although no longer owned by Trinity House, this tower still remains at Dungeness.

The 1904 lighthouse now stands more than 500 metres from High Water Mark. Its navigational light was obscured by the nuclear Power Station erected approximately a quarter of a mile to the west of the lighthouse. This necessitated the placing of another light in a cylindrical tower 450 metres to the east incorporating an electric fog signal.

The Present Lighthouse 1961

The new lighthouse which was officially opened by H.R.H. The Duke of Gloucester, the former Master of Trinity House, was brought into operation on 20th November, 1961. The tower which rises from a white concrete base in the form of a spiral ramp, is capable of automatic operation and was the first one of its kind to incorporate the Xenon electric arc lamp as a source of illumination. It is constructed of precast concrete rings 1.5 metres high, 15 cm thick and 3.6 metres in diameter, fitted one above the other, and has black and white bands which are impregnated into the concrete.

An additional point of interest is that since May 1962 the whole tower has been floodlit to assist identification from seaward. This floodlighting has reduced the bird mortality rate at this lighthouse during the migration season.

The station was re-engineered/modernized in 2000. The sealed beam light was replaced with a Pharos PRB20 optic transferred from Lundy South Lighthouse, reducing the light range from 27 to 21 nautical miles.
Dungeness Lighthouse was converted to automatic operation in 1991 and is monitored and controlled from the Trinity House Operations and Planning Centre at Harwich.

Specifications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Established</th>
<th>1792</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Height Of Tower</td>
<td>43 Metres</td>
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<tr>
<td>Height Of Light Above Mean High Water</td>
<td>40 Metres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Automated</td>
<td>1991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lamp</td>
<td>35W CDMT Metal Halide</td>
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<tr>
<td>Optic</td>
<td>Pharos PRB20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Character</td>
<td>White Group Flashing 5 Every 30 Seconds</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intensity</td>
<td>452,000 Candela</td>
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<tr>
<td>Range Of Light</td>
<td>21 nautical miles</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fog Signal Character</td>
<td>Triple frequency sounding 3 times every minute</td>
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</tbody>
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Location

[Map Image]
Opening for 2012 March 17-18 Weekend.

The Old Lighthouse at Dungeness is closed during February 2012 Re-Opening for the Season Week-End 17-18 March Times 10.30 am to last entry at 4.00pm times may vary due... read full post

Closed for Half Term due Cold Weather

The Old Lighthouse is closed during February 2012 We had planned to open for the Schools Half Term but due to the extreme cold weather….and icy access road. This has… read full post

Visiting Us

The Lighthouse may close in bad weather in rare occasion.

Please note that 4.30 is the last entrance into the Lighthouse
For groups and schools please Contact Us

We respectfully remind our visitors that commercial photography / filming is not permitted except with prior arrangement with the owners (See the Venue Hire page for further details).

Please also be aware that no dogs or live animals are permitted on the premises.

Group / School bookings - please contact us for prices.
Admission costs

Adult: £3.50  
Child: £2.50  
Student: £2.50  
OAP: £3.00  
Family (2 Adults + 4 Children max): £10.00

Where to find us

The address and contact details for the Old Lighthouse are as follows:

The Old Lighthouse  
Dungeness  
Romney Marsh  
Kent TN29 9NB  
Tel: 01797 321300  
Fax: 01303 258691  
email: info@dungenesslighthouse.com

Directions (Click here to view a map)

From M20: Take Jct 10 onto the A2070 towards Brenzett & Lydd airport. After 12 miles, turn left at the roundabout & join the A259. After 4 miles turn right onto the B2075 sign posted for Lydd. Immediately after bridge, take left hand fork. Turn left at roundabout onto Dungeness Rd. Continue for 4 miles. Turn right into Dungeness and the Old Lighthouse is at the end of the road.

From Folkestone: Follow the A259 and turn left at New Romney traffic lights onto the B2071 (Station Rd). At the T jct turn right. Follow the road for 5 miles, past the Pilot Inn. Turn left into Dungeness and the Old Lighthouse is at the end of the road.

From Hastings & Rye: Take the A259 towards New Romney. At the roundabout turn right. After 4 miles turn right onto the B2075 sign posted for Lydd. Immediately after the bridge take left hand fork. Turn left at roundabout onto Dungeness Rd. Continue for 4 miles, turn right into Dungeness and the Old Lighthouse is at the end of the road.