Gunfleet Lighthouse
(Six Miles Off the Coast of Frinton on Sea, Essex)

History

Gunfleet lighthouse is situated six miles off the coast of Frinton on Sea on a horseshoe shaped bay in the northern part of Gunfleet sands. It is equally on the north-east limit of the Port of London and therefore just inside territorial waters.

It was constructed in 1850 as a screw pile lighthouse designed by Mr. Walker of Trinity House but based on the invention of an Irish man called Alexander Mitchell.

The submerged end of each pile has a broad bladed screw on it. The screw is twisted into a sand or coral bottom in the same manner that a screw is twisted into wood. A platform is then constructed upon the embedded screw piles and the living accommodation and lighthouse erected on top.

A lighthouse of this kind is easily adapted for any area where the light does not require to been seen at a great distance. The piles offer no resistance to the waves which pass through the open spaces without rising any higher than out at sea.

Gunfleet lighthouse is an iron lattice structure built on seven screw piles driven into the unstable sands. Six form an outer hexagon and the seventh a centre support on which is placed hexagonal shaped living accommodation consisting of a living room, bedroom, kitchen/washroom and storeroom. A light tower was fixed on top the living quarters. The whole structure was painted red and stood 74 feet high.
It showed one revolving light every 30 seconds and was visible for 10 miles. It was decommissioned in the 1920s when I assume the fog-warning bell was removed.

The 1891 Census showed Gunfleet lighthouse as the registered address for Richard Turner Ayeis of Great Yarmouth (assistant keeper), and Keeper, John Francis Ellis of Joleland.

In 1974 there was an attempt to board the lighthouse and set up the pirate ‘Radio Atlantis’ station inside but this was thwarted in December of that year when the Royal Marine Commandos, Essex Constabulary, Home Office and Trinity House officials prevented access to the would-be pirates.

Today the tower is in remarkably good order considering its age and lack of attention and is currently in use as a weather station. It stands as a beacon with the treacherous sands marked by a series of buoys with bells.

Location