Portland Bill Lighthouse

(On the Isle of Portland in the English Channel, Dorset)

History

Portland Bill and Chesil Beach are the graveyards of many vessels that failed to reach Weymouth or Portland Roads. The Portland Race is caused by the meeting of the tides between the Bill and the Shambles sandbank about 3 miles SE. Strong currents break the sea so fiercely that from the shore a continuous disturbance can be seen. Portland Bill Lighthouse guides vessels heading for Portland and Weymouth through these hazardous waters as well as acting as a waymark for ships navigating the English Channel. The Shambles sandbank is marked by a red sector light.

As early as 1669 Sir John Clayton was granted a patent to erect a lighthouse, but his scheme fell through and it was not until early in the eighteenth century that Captain William Holman,
supported by the ship owners and Corporation of Weymouth, put a petition to Trinity House for the building of a lighthouse at Portland Bill. Trinity House opposed it suggesting that lights at this point were needless and ship owners could not bear the burden of their upkeep. The people of Weymouth continued their petition and on 26th May, 1716 Trinity House obtained a patent from George I. They in turn issued a lease for 61 years to a private consortium who built two lighthouses with enclosed lanterns and coal fires. The lights were badly kept, sometimes not lit at all, and in 1752 an inspection was made by two members of the Board of Trinity House who approached by sea to find "it was nigh two hours after sunset before any light appeared in either of the lighthouses”. With the termination of the lease the lights reverted to Trinity House. In 1789 William Johns, a builder of Weymouth under contract to Trinity House, took down one of the towers and erected a new one at a cost of £2,000. It was sited so that it served as a mark by day or night to direct ships moving up and down Channel or into Portland Roads clear of the Race and Shambles. Over the doorway on a marble tablet was the following inscription:-

**Anno 1789.**

In August 1788 Argand lamps were installed, Portland being the first lighthouse in England to be fitted with them. In the upper or old house there were two rows, seven in each row, lighted with oil and furnished with highly-polished reflectors. Low light tests were made by Thomas Rogers with his new lens light, and six Argand lamps were installed, their lights increased by lenses.

In 1798, when Napoleon threatened invasion, two 18lb cannons were installed at the lighthouse.

A 7 meter tall white stone obelisk was built in 1844 at the Southern tip of Portland Bill as a warning of a low shelf of rock extending 30 metres South into the sea, which still stands near the current lighthouse.

New high and low lighthouses were built in 1869, but early last century Trinity House announced its intention of replacing them with a single tower - the present lighthouse. The old towers can still be seen from the outside - the low light, which is now a bird observatory and field centre, has retained its original appearance but the high light lantern has been removed.

The present optic at Portland Bill is very unusual as due to the arrangement of the panels the character gradually changes from one flash to four flashes between the bearings 221° and 224° and from four flashes to one flash between bearings 117° and 141°.

Portland Bill Lighthouse was demanned on 18th March 1996 when monitoring and control of the station was transferred to the Trinity House Operations & Planning Centre at Harwich.
## Specifications

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<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Established</td>
<td>1716</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Height Of Tower</td>
<td>41 Metres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Height Of Light Above Mean High Water</td>
<td>43 Metres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Automated</td>
<td>1996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lamp</td>
<td>1 Kw Mbi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optic</td>
<td>4 Panel 1St Order Catadioptric Fixed Lens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character</td>
<td>White Group Flashing 4 Times Every 20 Seconds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intensity</td>
<td>635,000 Candela</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range Of Light</td>
<td>25 nautical miles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fog Signal Character</td>
<td>3.5 Second Blast Every 30 Seconds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fog Signal Range</td>
<td>2 nautical miles</td>
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Location

Portland Bill Lighthouse is located on the Southerly tip of the Isle of Portland, 1.2 miles south of the village of Easton.

Parking
There are a number of car parks very close to the lighthouse.

Public Transport
Frequent bus service from Weymouth - Route 1A

Visitor Centre

For nearly 300 years a lighthouse has stood on Portland Bill to guide vessels heading for Portland and Weymouth and acting as a way mark for vessels navigating in the English Channel. A red sector light warns mariners of the hazardous Shambles Bank lying three miles offshore.

The ‘Lighthouse Visitor centre’ at Portland Bill is owned and operated independently from the actual tower lighthouse therefore there are occasions that the tower lighthouse would be closed to the public, whereas the ‘Lighthouse Visitor Centre’ would remain open.

Tours of Portland Bill Lighthouse are organised by The Crown Estate under license from the Corporation of Trinity House.

Last Tour at 16.30. Tour lasts approximately 45 minutes.
Opening subject to weather conditions and Trinity House's operational requirements.
PORTLAND BILL
Dorset

Visit this iconic and famous Lighthouse and find out about life as a Lighthouse Keeper, why this Lighthouse is so important for the area and take in the breathtaking views of the Portland Race at the top of the tower.

Tour duration: approx 45 minutes
Visits to the Lighthouse are managed by Crown Estate Commissioners, under licence from Trinity House.
Tel: 01255 245156

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Position: 50° 30.848 N, 02° 27.384 W