



U.S. Lighthouse Society ~ Lighthouses of the United Kingdom

Souter Point Lighthouse

(Marsden in South Tyneside, Tyne and Wear)



History

The lighthouse is located on Lizard Point at Marsden, but takes its name from Souter Point, which is located a mile to the south. This was the intended site for the lighthouse, but it was felt that Lizard Point offered better visibility, as the cliffs there are higher, so the lighthouse was built there instead. The Souter Lighthouse name was retained in order to avoid confusion with the then recently built Lizard Lighthouse in Cornwall.

Designed by James Douglass and opened in 1871, the lighthouse was built due to the dangerous reefs directly under the water in the surrounding area. In one year alone - 1860 - there were 20 shipwrecks. This contributed to making this coastline the most dangerous in the country with an average of around 44 shipwrecks per every mile of coastline.

A NON-PROFIT HISTORICAL & EDUCATIONAL SOCIETY



U.S. Lighthouse Society ~ Lighthouses of the United Kingdom

Souter Lighthouse was the first to use alternating electric current, the most advanced lighthouse technology of its day. Douglass also designed the fourth incarnation of the Eddystone Lighthouse off the coast of Plymouth.

The 800,000 candle power light was generated using carbon arcs and not a standard filament bulb and could be seen for up to 26 miles. The electricity was generated using a steam engine located in the engine house.

Today owned by the National Trust and open to the public, the lighthouse's engine room, light tower and keeper's living quarters are all on view. There is also an outdoor play area, Trusty Club and indoor activities to accommodate young visitors. Two of the former lighthouse keepers' cottages are used as National Trust holiday cottages.

The lighthouse was decommissioned in 1988, but continued to serve as a radio navigation beacon up until 1999 when it was finally closed.

The lighthouse is said to be haunted and has even featured on British TV's Most Haunted ghost hunting program.

The foghorn has seen many changes over the years. When the lighthouse was first built, a single horn of a clay and iron pipe design was provided. This was replaced after a few years by twin horns to the same design, angled so as to spread the noise up and down the coast. By World War II, these had been superseded by twin Rayleigh trumpets. Finally, in the early 1960s, these in turn were replaced by the present-day diaphone fog horns. A reminder of their predecessors can be seen at the seaward corners of the foghorn station.

The horn produced a five-second blast every 30 seconds in poor weather up until 1988, when the lighthouse and foghorn were taken out of service by Trinity House.

The foghorn remains in working order and is sounded on special occasions throughout the year, most notably during the monthly Engine Room Day, which is held at the lighthouse during the summer months.

Location

