

Why not climb to the top?

Why not climb to the top of the lighthouse? Tours of the lighthouse are organised through the North Ronaldsay Trust and are available on Sundays, May to September, 12 noon - 5.30pm (approx) to coincide with the ferry timetable and at other times by arrangement.
Tel: Mr W Muir 01857 633257.

There is a small charge to help maintain this facility. On days when essential maintenance is taking place the lighthouse will be closed to visitors.

The opening of the North Ronaldsay Lighthouse is a joint venture between the Northern Lighthouse Board and the North Ronaldsay Trust.

How to get there

Return flights to North Ronaldsay from Kirkwall Airport cost £12 if staying overnight, contact Loganair (01856 872494) for details. For Sunday sailings May-September contact Orkney Ferries (01856 872044).



North Ronaldsay

North Ronaldsay is the most northerly island in Orkney and only measures around three miles by one. A unique feature of the island is the drystone sheep dyke that surrounds it. The dyke was built to keep North Ronaldsay's unique seaweed-eating sheep on the narrow strip of beach and foreshore and off the agricultural land. Some of the buildings by the lighthouse have been converted to provide a workshop to process the wool of the unique breed of sheep.

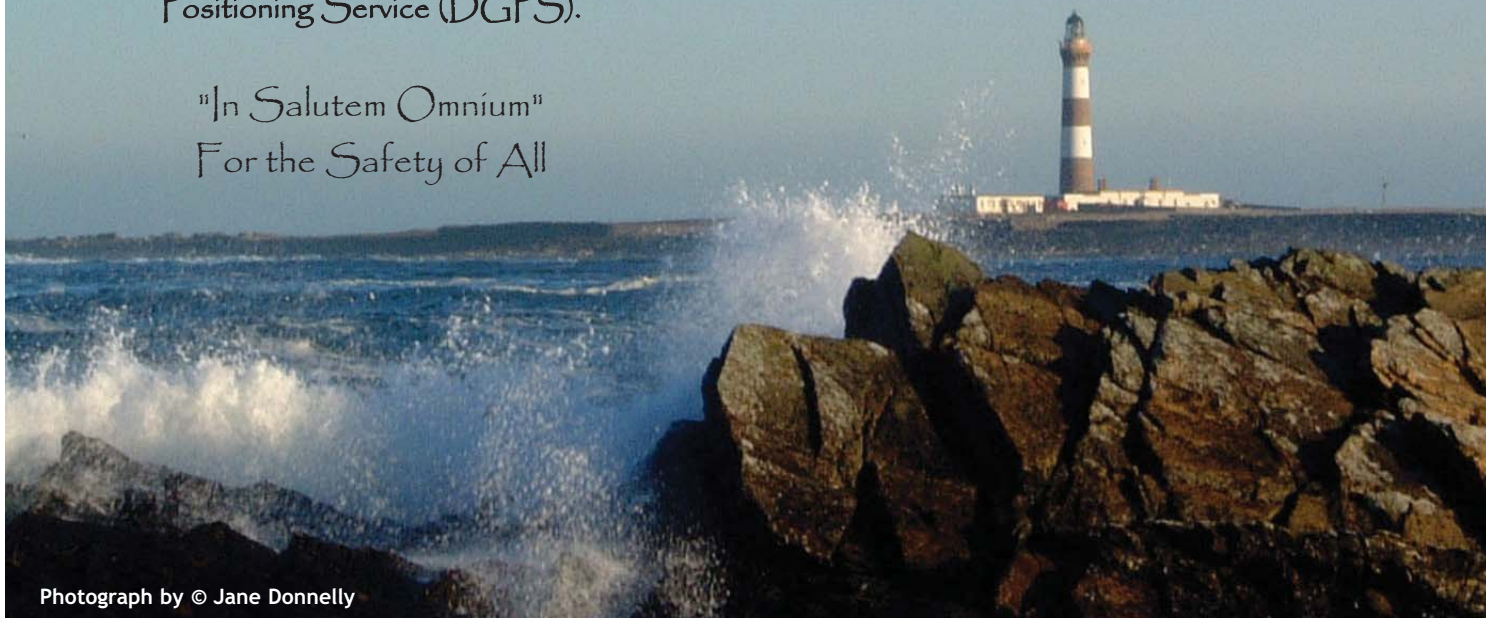


North Ronaldsay

LIGHTHOUSE

The Northern Lighthouse Board has been in existence since 1786. Today their head office in Edinburgh monitors and maintains Scottish and Isle of Man lighthouses, buoys & beacons and provides a marine Differential Global Positioning Service (DGPS).

"In Salutem Omnium"
For the Safety of All



Photograph by © Jane Donnelly

More than Lighthouses
www.nlb.org.uk

The life of the Light-keeper,
Held on high in the blackness
In the burning kernel of the night,
The seaman sees and blesses him...

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Extract from poem "The Lightkeeper" by Robert Louis Stevenson

BEACONS OF THE SEA

North Ronaldsay lighthouse is one of over 200 located around Scotland's wild coastline operated and maintained by the Northern Lighthouse Board.

One of the First

The original beacon on North Ronaldsay was the third lighthouse built in Scotland by the Northern Lighthouse Board. It was constructed by stonemasons from Leith, Edinburgh and was first lit on 10 October 1789. Thomas Smith, an Edinburgh Lamplighter, was the engineer for the light, his stepson Robert Stevenson, who later founded the famous Stevenson family dynasty, assisted him.

When a new lighthouse was built at Start Point on the neighbouring island of Sanday in 1806 the old lighthouse beacon at North Ronaldsay became redundant. However, as years passed it became obvious that North Ronaldsay required its own light and Alan Stevenson, son of Robert, set about the task of building Britain's tallest land-based lighthouse. The new light was first lit on 1 September 1854. The new light cost £6,181 to build, some £6.2 million in today's terms.

Standing Tall

Soaring to 139ft (42m), the new lighthouse is the tallest (land-based) in the British Isles. Shining over seas littered with dangerous shoals and reefs, the light's extreme height gives ships an early warning of the approaches to Orkney. In 1889 the red brick tower was painted with 2 white bands to help it be seen during the day.



Brick Built

Planning the construction of North Ronaldsay lighthouse was not an easy task. There was no local stone and all construction materials had to be brought in by boat. A dangerous anchorage, difficult landing conditions and a need to haul all material up a long, steep path made matters even worse.

Estimates began to exceed the budget so Alan Stevenson consequently chose to build the tower from bricks, which were much easier to transport than large blocks of stone. Even then a new stone built landing jetty had to be built before any material could be landed.

The Sensational Stevensons

For over one hundred and fifty years Robert Stevenson and his descendants designed most of Scotland's Lighthouses. Battling against the odds and the elements - the Stevensons constructed wonders of engineering that have withstood the test of time, an amazing historical achievement. The Stevensons also helped design lighthouses in India and New Zealand and engineered bridges, harbours and roads throughout Scotland. Robert Stevenson's talented family also included the famous writer Robert Louis Stevenson (his grandson). Visits with his family to remote lighthouses are thought to have inspired his books *Kidnapped* and *Treasure Island*.



Alan Stevenson



French Crystal

North Ronaldsay still has its magnificent original lens, which is a Fresnel lens, so named after its French inventor, Augustin Fresnel. The lens is made from a series of perfectly polished crystal glass lenses set into a brass structure.

Lightkeeping ~ end of an era

All Scottish lighthouses now operate automatically. The last Scottish lighthouse to be automated was Fair Isle South in 1998. Now, when daylight falls and rises between set levels, a light sensor switches the light on and off. The status of the light and all its associated equipment is relayed back to the Northern Lighthouse Board's head office in Edinburgh by phone link, radio signal or satellite.



Prior to the automation of North Ronaldsay in 1998 a Principal Lightkeeper and two Assistants, with their families, lived at the light. As the Station had a fog signal a Local Assistant Keeper was also appointed to assist with extra duties. The families were almost self sufficient and would have grown their own vegetables and kept some livestock at the Station.

Lightkeeping was a remote, lonely and hard existence. At night each keeper was required to keep a watch in the lightroom to ensure that the light flashed correctly to character, during daytime keepers were engaged in cleaning, painting if necessary, and generally keeping the premises clean and tidy. At the time of building the lighthouse, in 1854, the Principal Lightkeeper was paid £45 per year!

Today the old beacon is still standing and you can imagine its primitive light shining across surging seas.

Facts

Light established: 1854
Engineer: Alan Stevenson
Position: Latitude 59° 23.4'N
Longitude 02° 22.8'W
Character: Flashing white every 10 seconds
Range of light: 24 nautical miles
Elevation: 43 metres (above sea level)
Height of tower: 42 metres

