

# **Bass Rock Lighthouse**

## **Light Established**

1903

## **Engineer**

David A Stevenson

## **Position**

Latitude 56° 04.6'N

Longitude 02° 38.3'W

An island lying 3 miles NE from North Berwick

## **Character**

Flashing (3) White every 20 Secs

## **Elevation**

46 metres

## **Nominal Range**

10 miles

## **Structure**

White tower 20 metres high. There are 48 steps to the top of tower

## **History**

In July 1897 the Commissioners decided that two lighthouses should be erected on the Haddingtonshire coast - on the Bass Rock and on a suitable place near Dunbar - as the unlighted condition of the area was causing concern.

Consequently, Barns Ness Lighthouse was established in 1901 and a light was first shown from the Bass Rock on the evening of 1 November 1902. The cost of the Bass Rock Lighthouse was £8,087:10:4.

The Bass Rock is a massive crag rising out of the sea to a height of 350 feet and it is about a mile in circumference. Through the Rock, from the East to West, runs a natural tunnel, but this is not accessible except at low tide.

Halfway up the Rock stands the ruins of a Pre-Reformation Chapel which was dedicated to Saint Baldfred, and was consecrated in the year 1542. Saint Baldfred was said to have his cell on the Bass Rock, dying there about the year 606. The Bass has a long and varied history. It is mentioned in writings dating back to the region of Malcolm Canmore and the first recorded owner was Sir Robert Lauder, who was granted a charter for it around 1316. This family (Lauder of Bass) retained ownership of the rock for hundreds of years and must have been connected with the erection of a Pre-Reformation Chapel which must

be dedicated to St Balfred in 1542, as well as being responsible for the building of the fortress.

Earlier, in 1671, Charles I claimed the Bass as Royal Property and it was sold to the crown for the sum of £4,000 sterling by the then owner, Sir Alexander Ramsay of Abbotshall, Provost of Edinburgh. The bloody pages of the Bass Rock's history now unfold when, under another Lauder (dale) known as the Captain of the Bass, the fortress was turned into a prison for Presbyterian ministers. Between 1672 and 1688 some 40 political/religious prisoners died in the dungeons of the rock. In 1691 during the reign of William and Mary, a party of four Jacobite prisoners escaped from their cells and captured the fortress when all the garrison was engaged in unloading coal. For the next three years they held the Bass for the Old Pretender and defied all attempts by Government forces to retake it. Aided by supply ships from France, this unique quartet even carried out raids on the Fife and Lothian coasts! In 1694 a more effective blockage finally starved them into submission, but they negotiated favourable terms and walked out free men! The fortress continued as a State Prison until demolished seven years later. In 1706, the Bass was sold to Sir Hugh Dalrymple, whose descendants still own it.

From then, up until the First World War, the rock was let out to tenants who earned money by fishing, grazing sheep (Bass Mutton was a famous 18th Century Edinburgh delicacy) and by killing young sea birds and collecting eggs. The last tenant of the Bass, a Mr Easton, was a North Berwick fishmonger.

But the true owners of the Bass Rock are, of course, the birds, for almost every available inch is occupied by razorbills, guillemots, cormorants, puffins, eider ducks and various gull species. But the bird of the Bass is the Gannet or "Solon Goose" with a breeding colony of 30-40,000 pairs, making the Bass a mecca for international ornithologists. It is thus only fitting that this superb sea bird's latin name "Sula Bassana" should be derived from the word Bass. Even as long ago as 1792, the gannets of the Bass Rock were famous both for their numbers and as food. Find out more about the birds of the Bass from the Scottish Sea Bird Centre at North Berwick.

Until 1988 when it was demanned, the Rock Lighthouse was lit by means of incandescent gas obtained from paraffin oil of a high flash point. There was an oil container in the Light Room to which there was connected an air container and the oil was driven from its container by the air at pressure to a vaporiser where it was converted into a bunsen gas for heating a mantle which it rendered incandescent.

The new light is Biform ML300 Synchronised electric with Bifilament 20 watt lamp.

The Light was automated in 1988 and is now remotely monitored from the Board's headquarters in Edinburgh.