

Kinnaird Head Lighthouse

Light Established

1787

Engineer

Thomas Smith

Position

Latitude 57° 41.9'N

Longitude 02° 00.1'W

Character

Flashing White every 5 secs

Elevation

25 metres

Candlepower

690,000

Nominal Range

22 miles

Structure

White tower, 10 metres high

History

The original lighthouse tower is listed as a building of Architectural/Historical interest. According to records, the original light at Kinnaird Head was established on 1 December 1787. It was installed by Mr Thomas Smith of Edinburgh, who was the father-in-law of Robert Stevenson who succeeded him as Engineer to the Northern Lighthouse Board (Robert Stevenson was grandfather of Robert Louis Stevenson). A lantern was set at a height of 120 feet above the sea on a corner of a tower of an old castle in Fraserburgh owned by Lord Saltoun.

Fixed lights only were shown at this stage, produced by arrays of lamps burning whale oil, each of them backed by its own parabolic reflector made up of a multitude of facets of silvered mirror-glass set on a plaster mould. Kinnaird Head was the most powerful light of its time, and contained 17 reflectors arranged in 3 horizontal tiers. In clear weather according to Murdoch Downie's New Pilot of 1791, the light could be seen 12 or 14 miles off.

It operated in that position until 1824 when internal alternations were made to the tower to accommodate a new lantern and additional buildings were constructed

for the Lightkeepers. In 1906 the light was converted to incandescent operation. The present light stands within the framework of the original tower.

Two 'firsts' for Kinnaird Head were (a) the first Lighthouse built in Scotland by the Commissioners of Northern Lights (founded in 1786) and (b) the first Radio Beacon in Scotland was introduced in 1929 at Kinnaird Head.

A point of interest regarding the original light is that in 1787 a Mr James Park, Ship Master, was appointed "Keeper of the light" at 1/- per night, with the benefit of some ground, on condition that he had another person with him every night, who he was to instruct in the manner of cleaning the lantern and cleaning and lighting the lamps.

During the war, Kinnaird Head Lighthouse received only one near miss by enemy bombers, which was rather surprising for the town of Fraserburgh was known as "Little London" because of the heavy bombing and machine-gunning attacks on the town due to the ammunitions work, also work carried out on Rolls Royce aircrafts engines and part for Bofors guns etc. The near miss happened on 19 February 1941 when two bombs from an aircraft exploded 50 yards from the Lighthouse Buildings. No one, fortunately was injured and the material damaged due to blast was as follows:-

"3 Lantern panes destroyed, the Radio Beacon aerial cut and several insulators broke, 41 panes of glass in the dwelling houses broken and frames damaged, 1 sliding bolt of balcony door broken. The Supernumerary Keeper's room ceiling was cracked and the ceiling of the first assistant's Kitchen was also cracked."

What possibly saved the Lighthouse from further attacks was the tall, solitary chimneys of a fish processing factory behind the lighthouse promontory from which the enemy raiders took their bearings in the black out.

A legend connected with Kinnaird Head and the adjoining Wine Tower situated on the edge of the cliff, tells a "Romeo and Juliet" type of story. The daughter of the owner there had the piper imprisoned in the cave beneath the tower onto the rocks below. To this day, visitors to the Lighthouse and the Tower can see the place where she fell, marked on the rocks in red paint. The story goes that, in the Piper's cave as it is known, the ghost of the piper can be heard playing for his lost love.

A further item of interest regarding Kinnaird Head is the following quotation from "General History (Early)":

"The bluff upon which the Castle of Kinnaird is built is held to be the Promontorium Taixalium referred to by Ptolemy, who was an ancient Egyptian who lived in Alexandria in 140 AD. Kinnaird Head was geographically known

nearly 1,500 years before the present town of Fraserburgh was founded by Sir Alexander Fraser towards the close of the 16th Century."

The identification of the place is further confirmed by the ancient geographer in question saying that the eminence stood at the entrance of the "Aestrutum Varariae" which means, Moray Firth.

Kinnaird Head must have been an important landmark in ancient days, when mariners had no compass or other nautical instruments to guide them on their watery way. Trade by sea was confined to Europe and the African and Asian coasts abutting the mediterranean, and it is possible that comparatively speaking, Kinnaird Head was a more important shipping landmark 1,750 years ago than it is today. Whether Ptolemy ever stood on the Castle Green and admired the Moray Firth on a beautiful summer day, there is no means of knowing. He wrote very familiarly on the subject.

The Fog Signal was discontinued in 1987.

The original lighthouse at Kinnaird Head is now home to The Museum of Scottish Lighthouses. A new automatic light was established beside the original light in 1991.